Emerging Lesbian Voices from Japan

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Emerging Lesbian Voices from Japan

Lesbian sexuality has remained largely ignored in Japan despite increasing exposure of disadvantaged minority groups, including gay men. This book is the first comprehensive academic exploration of contemporary lesbian sexuality in Japanese society.

Misinformation and erroneous portrayals of lesbians and lesbian sexuality have resulted in those who self-identify as lesbian living overwhelmingly invisible lives. Based on a series of long-term thematic discussions with Japanese lesbians living in the Tokyo area, this work opens up a more inclusive representation of cultural and sexual diversity across gender studies and Japanese studies. Chalmers addresses a wide variety of themes, including the issue of compulsory heterosexuality and the invisibility of Japanese lesbians as socio-economic and political subjects. Along with Chalmers the narrators explore the apparent monolithic notions associated with representations of the 'Japanese family', and the sex/gender distinction in relation to how lesbian bodies fit into ideas of 'Japanese womanhood'.

Sharon Chalmers provides a new lens onto Japanese society from which it is possible to critique several fundamental concepts that are so often taken as unproblematic in Japan, in particular notions of 'inside–outside', 'family' and 'community'. The author employs an interdisciplinary approach and this book will be of great value to those working or interested in the areas of Japanese, lesbian, queer and gender studies as well as Japanese history, anthropology and cultural studies.

Sharon Chalmers is a postdoctoral research fellow at the Centre for Cultural Research, University of Western Sydney.

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Acknowledgements

All Japanese personal names are placed in Japanese order, surname first.

1 A moment in time

Introduction

> Traditionally, the way of thinking in Japanese society concerning minorities, and unusual people, strange people, was not to exclude them. They were allowed into society, but society would act as if they weren't there, by ignoring them, and if that didn't work, telling them to keep quiet. So to that extent, Japanese society is not very aggressive toward minorities. Most lesbians at the moment haven't come out so they can't be seen. And because they can't be seen, society doesn't attack them, and is prepared to let them be. So for the lesbian too, that's okay. There are some unpleasant aspects, but if some one is prepared to put up with them a bit, there's not really a problem.
>
> (Kakefuda)

Kakefuda Hiroko made the decision to come out publicly, through the publication of her book, *Rezubian de aru to iu koto* (Being a Lesbian) in 1992. Over the following five years both television and the print media generally called on her for comments and appearances whenever a 'lesbian point of view' was required. Kakefuda consistently asserted that one of the most difficult areas for lesbians in Japan to deal with is the overall social approval of knowing when to keep silent as an instrument of both containment and oppression. She argues that containment of marginal groups has been historically constructed in terms of 'tolerance', which has also been long described in the language of consensus and harmony. However this appearance of tolerance can only be maintained as long as minority or marginal groups are prepared to accept that the dominant form(s) or hierarchical relationships will allow only for their partial inclusion.

Over the last twenty years, however, there has been an increasing number of visible interest groups – a multiplicity of publics – who, with varied success in reforming social policies, have worked to voice their concerns from alternative subject positions. These groups, including pacifist, anti-war, environmental, feminist, Burakumin, Ainu and Korean groups, have attempted to challenge in various ways the representation of Japan as a homogeneous and mono-racial society.

These shifts notwithstanding, within this new inclusiveness there is one overarching assumption that still remains firmly in place and overwhelmingly unchallenged in academic and popular discourse.[1] That is, that all Japanese are heterosexual, or, at the very least require a heterosexual guise in which to operate

as full members (*ichininmae*) of Japanese society. Hence, few cracks have hitherto appeared in the hegemony of these heterocentric discourses in Japan. Thus, despite the increasing political exposure and academic documentation of the issues of disadvantaged minority groups in Japan, lesbian sexuality has remained inconsequential. The result has been portrayals of lesbian sexuality which perpetuate and sustain the myth of lesbian invisibility in Japan.

This invisibility, Kakefuda contends, is not generally manifested in the form of direct discrimination but rather as systematic cultural dis-ease which results in either objectification or omission of their daily experiences as embodied social subjects. This is the issue that to a large extent precipitated her decision to come out. Kakefuda maintains that in Japan the fear of one's parents' and family's reactions to finding out that one is lesbian is what prevents many women from taking this step.

> [But] the idea of telling their parents is enough to make most people panic … . It comes down to who is going to suffer! And of course within Japanese society, it is not the individual who is the most important. Putting yourself above others is simply not the acceptable way to think in Japanese society
>
> (Kakefuda; also see Hara, M. 1995: 72)

Kakefuda's view is premised on the assumption that Japanese social relations encompass a worldview in which the form or type of association of any given relationship becomes the privileged site (Rosenberger 1994: 102). In other words, 'I' only becomes meaningful by contextualising one's position relative to others and so 'I' is interwoven into and implicated in a multiplicity of constantly shifting hierarchical relationships. Arguably, this notion of a fragmented 'self' has the potential to open up spaces in which 'whole' identities do not need to exist in order to be inside various social contexts. However, to know which part to reveal in what situation, usually learned from early childhood in Japan, is a little more complicated for lesbians. This was expressed clearly by one of the women whose perspectives are presented in this book. As Fumie explains, when initially 'coming out' to her mother, her mother's (lack of) reaction clearly fits in with Kakefuda's analysis of the general response to minority groups in Japan.

> [S]he didn't say anything outright because we just have this custom of not saying things … and not saying positive things when you feel it. It's better not to express things. And that's what really oppresses me here [in Japan].

The issue, therefore, is that these different selves are contained in strictly bounded hierarchical groupings. In Japan these are primarily founded on sex, age, status and ethnicity. The moment at which one attempts to recognise and/or separate one's self from one's accepted position within a relationship, the relationship based on 'form' and 'tolerance' is disrupted and affirmed as anti-social.

One of the major aims of this book is to challenge this myth of 'tolerance' by critiquing the apparent overwhelming desire to create the impression of harmony and consensus through 'sameness' within Japanese society. This 'harmony' and

'sameness' are represented in terms of cultural (Japaneseness) and (hetero)sexual homogeneity in which notions of outsider and outsiderness are set in opposition to norms grounded in the maintenance of appropriate hierarchical forms of being. These hierarchies subsequently become internalised and eventually normalised. In contrast, those who do not *appear* to fit in are either explained away within narrow and limited explanations as some form of deviancy, at best anomalies, or, more commonly, they are simply ignored. Part of the problem however is that these two pseudo-explanations themselves are constructed within a contained binary opposition of inside/out, or sameness/difference (Fuss 1991).

A further aim of the book is to reinforce what has now become apparent within recent scholarship on identity formation. That is, that socio-cultural factors such as sexuality, class, age, ethnicity and gender are not separate entities but work simultaneously. In Grosz's words all these factors are 'mutually constituted' to produce multiple meanings (1994a: 19–20),[2] the effects of which in this instance enable or disable Japanese lesbians to appear and disappear as social, economic and political subjects in Japanese society. In order to make sense of these dis/appearances I attempt to work in a somewhat unconventional form, in the telling of 'this story' (Kondo 1990: 8). For the women I worked with and for myself, this final text is the result of various discussions, negotiations, friendships as well as misunderstandings and altercations which we grappled with over a six year period (1993–94 and for a short period in 1998).

And this brings me to a critical issue: that being the way I have decided to produce this text and represent the voices of the women with whom I talked. This account examines narrative themes rather than individual life stories. Indeed, there is very limited information offered about the appearance, residences, work lives or routine daily comings and goings of the women involved. Furthermore, this book explores a range of social and geographical sites rather than locating 'lesbian activity' in a particular geographic space or in any one specific community (Robertson 1998a; Wolf 1979; Krieger 1980). In addition, I have adopted an interdisciplinary approach in that the work draws on history, social and cultural anthropology as well as Japanese, lesbian, gay, queer, women's and cultural studies.

Similarly, all the participants, myself included, were located in multiple shifting subject positions some of which included those of researcher, friend, academic, paid and unpaid worker, confessor, confidante, political activist, parent, lover and of course same-sex attracted women. Within these various guises I want overtly to acknowledge what has hitherto, particularly among Western academic researchers – whether working in the area of anthropology, sociology, history or behavioural psychology – been generally met with some amazement, that is, that narrators have knowledge and expertise about both their own lives, and the socio-cultural contexts in which they and their 'others' live.[3]

At the same time, the recent and often well-founded empowerment strategies of acknowledging women's expertise in interpreting their own lives and their own socio-cultural positionings, previously the domain of the outsider or 'objective researcher', continue to call for constant critique. That is, there is now a tendency to construct the subjectivity of 'the insider' merely as a mechanism in 'the projection

of an all-knowing subject'. Trinh Minh-ha refers to this twist as 'a paradoxical shift of the colonial mind' (1988: 75). In doing so, she asks whether this move is simply a post-colonial reinvention of the self/other relationship through the privileging of female voices without serious reflection of the hierarchical process inherent in the gesture of calling on other women's voices. This can result in the construction of false representations of homogeneous and romanticised subjects where 'the other would always remain the shadow of the self. Hence not really, not quite all knowing' (Trinh Minh-ha 1988: 75).

The above issues are integral to the form the text has taken in that the women involved determined the context in which their voices could safely speak and be heard. In contrast, other women who were initially involved felt that the research process, sometimes due to our personal relationships and at other times because of the sensitivity of the research itself, placed them in an untenable position and subsequently withdrew. Due to the ethical, emotional and intellectual complexities (and potential minefields) of these issues, it is no accident that this is the first published English language analysis of both institutionalised heterosexuality and female same-sex attracted Japanese women and it is one that almost did not happen.

The process of the production of this text has been changing since its inception. There are no surprises in that! Indeed, I did begin with the idea of collecting life stories but over time I was made aware that the narratives could not be presented in this form because of the homophobic and sexist climate in Japanese society. For example, as alluded to above the fear of being 'outed' through this research, despite the use of pseudonyms or only first names, caused so much distress that a number of women withdrew. This fear – whether real or perceived – was not just about being 'outed' as a *rezubian* (lesbian) but rather rested on being 'outed' as a lesbian and an unmarried woman, the latter a precarious position to be in in Japanese society in terms of housing, family, work, gender or sexual relations.

On a personal level, the withdrawal of these women caused me great distress, anger and sadness as I had already been working and collecting stories for one year. More significant however was that it also resulted in the end of a number of close friendships. Acknowledgement of this situation in the introduction by way of their virtual disappearance in the rest of the text is in itself evidence of the sensitivity and vulnerability of their socio-political positions, emotional vulnerability as well as the inherent ethical dilemmas faced in the process of doing research and intervening in other people's lives (Edwards 1993: 185).

What has eventually materialised is broadly speaking a three-way conversation which gives a partial picture of how the women I talked with see, contextualise, explain, analyse, and make sense of certain issues in their lives as self-identified Japanese lesbians. The result is an exchange in which the women's views are juxtaposed alongside academic and popular discourses and encapsulated within my theoretical/methodological approach. The fact that they would only appear/participate under particular conditions attests to the coercive and dominant position heterosexual discourse plays in all areas of Japanese women's lives. Thus, while some may be critical of what may appear to be simply 'talking heads', at least they are talking.

   I believe that what makes this work different is the fact that, as I have men-
tioned above, there is almost no contemporary academic discourse in English[4]
about lesbian sexuality in Japan. And furthermore neither are there any works in
English or Japanese that challenge or open up a space that allows a paradigm shift
in who and what is being analysed.[5] In other words what has emerged is a space in
which these women are able to express their critique of Japanese heterosexuality
from a position both within and outside of heteronormative behaviours.

> I don't really know anything about the academic world in Australia, but in
> Japan there are women who are supposedly intellectual who still react nega-
> tively to women's studies. There was one woman at the last place I worked
> who was really outstanding … . But even she rejected women's studies as a
> discipline. She said that putting together a lot of opinions and impressions as
> a discipline would only give people yet another opportunity to poke fun at
> women … . She considered herself a feminist … . [but] so far as she was con-
> cerned, an academic discipline wasn't a discipline unless it had the right sort
> of data and objectivity. Of course I don't know whether it's that important to
> be acknowledged by academic circles – that's your decision. But on the other
> hand, acknowledgement of your methods would be an indirect but important
> influence toward change in the academic world.
>
> (Mitsu)

The Japanese education system thrives on the notion of collective learning, and
'difference' is seen as a negative attribute in student and teacher interactions
(Hendry 1986; Lewis 1989; Peak 1989; Rohlen 1989: 19–26). This concern was
reflected in the above observations by Mitsu, one of the women I talked with over
fifteen months. Central to Mitsu's analysis was a concern with how I would legit-
imate the direct words and lived experiences that constitute the substantive
knowledges of different lesbians' lives. 'Will academics criticise you or ignore
you?' This worry is not unique to my work but is a fairly common reaction by
women to participating as active voices in feminist research. That is: is what I am
telling you and how I am telling it worth anything (Contratto in Buss 1985: 1;
Kennedy and Davis 1993: 16)? This vulnerability, as Buss argues, often translates
into invisibility (Buss 1985: 14; Vance 1984: 13). Thus, the silences and practices
of marginalisation which surround lesbians' lives in Japan are also indicative of
the personal experiences within academic institutions and mainstream popular
discourses both in and outside Japan. Consequently the changing developmental
process of the research – at times volatile – was at risk not only from outside crit-
icism, but we also had to overcome the negative attitudes attached to speaking
about women, the language women use to express themselves (Gluck and Patai
(eds) 1991; Personal Narratives Group (eds) 1989), speaking and writing about
(homo)sexuality (Walsh-Bowers and Parlour 1992: 109; Williams 1993: 118;
Bolton 1995: 158; Duberman *et al*. 1991: 1; Humphreys 1975: 228; Lewin and
Leap 1996: 19), and speaking about lesbians by lesbians. The latter to some
degree can be explained by internalised homophobia in regard to our collective

fears of 'coming out' in the text as well as the anxieties and pressures in relation to the acceptance and legitimacy of feminist research. In addition, as alluded to by Mitsu, there is an on-going academic struggle between Women's Studies and the position of oral narratives as a legitimate research method in Japan (Tomida 1996: 22). The low status of feminist methodologies, in combination with the trivialisation of sexuality studies as a serious and relevant area of research (McLelland 2000: 61; Allison 1996: 9–15), work towards the marginalisation and de-legitimisation of both projects as academically worthwhile.

Despite these fears, lesbian invisibility and the active production of these silences in Japan can only begin to be understood with the cooperation, involvement and analyses of Japanese women themselves. Thus, what I have attempted to achieve is to present a partial picture of how this group of women see, contextualise, explain, analyse and make sense of their lives, lives which are implicated and complicit in mainstream heteronormative Japanese discourses, while at the same time appearing to exist in a separate space.

> Even feminists and lesbians have been brought up inside Japanese culture, so there are some aspects of their households which resemble those of heterosexual households, but there are also rebellious aspects. I think the image received by people reading your work will depend very much on the way you describe the situation. I think people would find it very easy to understand if you said that heterosexual societies to date have been like this, while lesbian households are different, like a counter-culture. However, I don't think the situation is that simple. I've thought about that while we've been talking. Even as I've been talking to you about being a lesbian, I've realised how much of my behaviour and attitudes are shaped by heterosexual society's conventions. For example, not talking to the children about sex. It's been interesting in the sense of thinking about the interplay between being a lesbian and being in Japanese society.
>
> (Kumiko)

Another critical issue in deciding how I would reveal their thoughts was that of the age range of women with whom I worked. The women ranged from their mid-twenties to those in their early fifties. However, the majority were in their late thirties and forties. This is significant and is reflected in the information and critiques they presented. That is, they were part of the first generation of women who accepted lesbian sexuality as part of their conscious subjectivity and one from which they could articulate their understandings and personal experiences. Thus I was able to collect a living history of the changes that have occurred over the past thirty to forty years. These personal experiences were augmented by a history of the modernisation and industrialisation of Japan which they gained from listening to their parents' stories, a generation who went through massive social, economic and political changes. At the same time, their ability to question, challenge and respond to mainstream representations of female same-sex desire throughout their earlier lives was extremely limited. The images these women were presented with

were either those of the pathological female deviant represented in the guise of the heterosexualised butch/femme roles (*tachi/neko*) or women who were portrayed in androcentric pornography. Thus, this story stands in contrast to a younger generation of people who appear in, write to and read a variety of what emerged as a primarily male 'gay boom' consumer culture in the early to mid-1990s. This new generation identify within a range of minority sexualities as lesbians, gay men, transgender, transsexual and 'queer' people, while many choose or feel no need to identify with any particular sexual identity at all. I am not suggesting that there are not overlaps between the generations but rather they have grown up and experienced their sexualities under different historical conditions.

For those women who agreed to speak with me, except for one, none were 'out' in the Anglo-European sense and for this reason there was too much at stake to present their daily lives in a conventional ethnographic form. While they were prepared to share their experiences and ideas with me, albeit under very specific conditions, they were also very sensitive to and aware of the socio-economic limitations placed on them in their ability to survive in Japan independently – as 'older' women, some as mothers – let alone what it would mean to be 'out' as a lesbian. In short, 'coming out' in the text in terms of personal details such as their jobs, workplaces, children, appearance, residences was simply not an option for the overwhelming majority of these women. Indeed, in most cases 'coming out' was not even considered an inevitable goal to be attained – the latter an assumption more readily conceived of through a Western modernist paradigm of individual rights and liberation.

Rather, the primary approach I have adopted is an exploration of dominant, and still pervasive representations of what it is seen to be a healthy 'Japanese woman' and how these images have been historically constructed in juxtaposition to those of women who do not necessarily 'fit in'. I argue that these earlier representations are not part of a past gone by but rather can still be found in and reflect the degree to which mainstream portrayals of Japanese lesbians remain firmly in the category of anti-family, anti-reproduction, anti-social, transgressing normal (*futsū*) female bodily behaviour. On the one hand, contemporary female same-sex eroticism has been represented as 'deviant' either in terms of androcentric pornography or pathologised as abhorrent in the media and literature. On the other hand, and more commonly, it has simply been ignored. I have interspersed the primary narratives throughout the book as the narrators speak to both the past and present dominant representations of the notion of 'female deviance' not in terms of distinctive and separate historical periods but as a continuous process which has had a direct relationship on their lived experiences.

In so doing, the women explore, tease out and deconstruct critical issues that work towards the maintenance of a system of compulsory heterosexuality and marriage in Japan. Part of this process involved their insistent resistance to fitting into my initially neatly predetermined set of issues. They rather often redirected, indeed demanded, that I constantly rethink my position both as a researcher and as a lesbian doing research about other same-sex attracted women living in Japanese society.

Whether they think the same way now, whether they are single, or live with the same partner, whether they have changed jobs, or if they live in the same place or not is irrelevant to this work. What is significant is what each of these women articulated when these various conversations took place. It is no more or less significant than that.

Inside–outside circles of silence

My introduction to Japan was in 1985. I was twenty-eight years old and travelled on a one-year working-holiday visa. At that time I lived in Sojiji, a small town in between Kyoto and Osaka. I taught English in Osaka six days a week and studied Japanese language in Kyoto one morning per week. There wasn't much time for socialising outside of joining my students – overwhelmingly businessmen – who regularly took me to their usual hostess bars. These drinking excursions were mutually beneficial. They allowed my students to show me off as a blonde, blue-eyed Anglo-European foreigner whom they knew, as well as someone with whom they could practise their English. For me, it was a wonderful introduction to the male-centred nightlife of the business world and an opportunity to chat with both the men who took me and the hostesses who served us. After about six months, however, I was becoming increasingly aware that as a lesbian-feminist who was unable to speak these words out loud I was beginning to question my decision to spend so much time in Japan where connections with other lesbians seemed extremely remote, particularly outside Tokyo. I therefore made the decision to go looking. After numerous attempts at standing at the local phone box and dialling half the phone number of the Osaka Women's International Network (WIN), I finally swallowed hard and began speaking. The conversation went something like this:

WIN CONTACT: Hello?

SHARON: Yes, hello, umm … I got your phone number out of Kaleidoscope Kyoto[6] and was interested to find out where and when your group meets.

WIN CONTACT: Yes, of course. We meet on the third Saturday of every month and newcomers are always welcome. We usually meet outside the Big Video screen at Osaka Hankyu Umeda complex at 5 p.m. [Umeda Station is the largest train and bus station in Osaka.]

SHARON: Thanks very much for the information. Umm, by the way, I was also wondering whether you know if there are any lesbians involved in your group?

WIN CONTACT: (Slight pause) Umm … well, no, I don't think so but maybe that is something we could talk about one day.

I did go to the next meeting and was taken around and introduced to various women with the repeated tail-line of 'And Sharon is interested to find out if there are any lesbians in our group' with the common response of 'Oh, really, how interesting (*omoshiroi ne!*) which invariably brought the conversation to a speedy conclusion.

Throughout this first trip one of the constant questions I was asked was why I was still unmarried in my late twenties. In response I spent a significant amount of time either lying about my sexuality or at best not using 'he' or 'she' when discussing past partners – somewhat easier in Japanese than English given the possibility of avoiding the use of gender-personal pronouns. My second trip was in 1989–90 and again I lived in Osaka. This time I was with my Australian partner. Although less isolated, with the odd exception we both kept up a heterosexual pretence in our local community and workplaces. At this stage lesbian events had begun but because of our working hours (often in the evenings, Saturdays and sometimes Sunday mornings), we were invariably unable to attend.

Despite, or perhaps partially because of these experiences, I decided to proceed with what Du Bois refers to as 'passionate scholarship' (1983) and find out more about the silences that surround lesbian subjectivity in Japanese society. Seven years and two trips to Japan later – when I entered the PhD programme at my Australian university – I was faced with a similar response when I showed an interest in pursuing this subject. I was discouraged and advised by my then supervisor that there was no literature and that my chances of gaining access to speak with or even find Japanese lesbians would be extremely limited. Despite these cautions and a contingency research plan[7] I left for Tokyo.

Given my previous stays in Japan I also had a pretty good idea of why it might be difficult first to make connections with Japanese lesbians and second to gain the trust necessary to carry out a research project with their direct involvement. Initially I made contact with what was known as the 'foreign' lesbian community in Tokyo among whom were some women who had already spent several years in Japan. Among them a few had built up relationships with Japanese lesbians to whom they introduced me. Through participating, socialising and continually bombarding women with talk about the possibilities of carrying out interviews, I was eventually able to link up and begin to discuss my project with a number of Japanese women who identified as lesbian.[8]

Thus my opening or entry into, and potential acceptance by the Japanese women I met, was initially based on our collective identification as lesbians. However, in my excitement at being able to carry out what I had originally wanted to do, I did not at first realise the provisional nature of my seemingly successful 'arrival'. Although sexuality was a significant common starting point, it did not, in itself, automatically give me permission to carry out research, for, as Reinharz was aptly reminded, 'identification is useful, not "sacred"'(1992: 232). In the same vein, Narayan perceptively argues that in our contemporary global political economy, where anthropology has diversified in terms of who are the 'natives' and where they are located, it is rather naïve and overly simplistic to assume any unified notion of an 'authentic insider'. She contends that:

> at this historical moment we might more profitably view each anthropologist in terms of shifting identifications amid a field of interpenetrating communities and power relations. The loci along which we are aligned with or set apart from those whom we study are multiple and in flux.

(1993: 671)

The introductions that I first received through 'foreign' or non-Japanese lesbians were a beginning, but certainly did not equate to either total or unquestioned acceptance. I was going to spend at least another year in Japan and I also wanted to become involved in different lesbian-related projects. This involvement included helping to organise community events, running workshops at 'lesbian weekends' for Japanese and 'foreign' lesbians, working with other Japanese lesbians to build a drop-in space for women and sometimes holding lesbian-only events, which all assisted in building up relationships. Some of the women I worked with agreed to participate and when appropriate introduced me to other women who they thought would be interested in taking part.

Consequently, neither the lesbians I interviewed, nor myself, can be categorised in a simplistic dichotomy of researcher/researched. Rather, our words and actions must be viewed from our different locations including those of mothers, lovers,[9] sisters, daughters, aunts, paid and unpaid workers, artists and friends. Sometimes the narrators chose to make their lesbianism publicly visible, as writer and political activist Kakefuda Hiroko did, but overwhelmingly they did not. This containment of their sexuality into 'appropriate' cultural contexts does not equate with a suspension of their sexuality but it does secure them a legitimate disguise under which they enter different social, political and economic sectors of society. In other words, despite the compartmentalisation or how in general we express our outward appearance – in the Japanese context this is known as *tatemae* – we are still always gendered and sexual beings and as such these factors contribute to any social interaction, 'affect[ing] how we respond and how others respond to us, even in non-sexual contexts' (Gearing 1995: 188).

Living the research

Critical to a feminist approach is the ability constantly to reflect on the research process in an effort to transform the inequalities embedded in traditional forms of interviewing. However, perhaps this is impossible given the asymmetrical power relations inherent both in 'doing research' as well as in broader societal relations (Lal 1996: 197; Stacey 1991: 114). Further, I concur with Lunsing when he asserts that researchers are not, nor should they position themselves as pseudo-benefactors or 'experts' from which it is assumed research participants are hoping to gain social benefits, assistance or advice (1999a: 189). Rather my willingness to participate in various aspects of lesbian communities while in Japan was based on my needs both as a researcher and as a self-identified lesbian. As Kath Weston maintained in her research, as a lesbian carrying out a study about lesbians I was 'living a social reality as well as documenting it' (1991: 14). This means I became personally involved with the people with whom I spent time with and I formed some close friendships.

I also hope that this research might contribute to transforming the knowledge that has generally misrepresented and made invisible many of their lives. However, there was nothing altruistic about my aims. While I tried to sustain friendly relations with most women I met, this does not mean that I agreed with or became friends with all the women I met and interviewed, and the nature and

intensity of our relationships constantly changed. Thus, inherent in living any social reality are the contradictory, inconsistent, conflictual as well as positive emotional affinity shifts that occur over time and place.

Over the first twelve months I worked with ten women with whom I carried out between three and four open-ended semi-structured interviews. I also undertook several one-off interviews throughout this initial period. All these women lived either with their partners, children, by themselves or in one case, Narusa, lived in a 'women's house' – an unusual situation among Japanese living arrangements. I did not interview women who were still living with their parents, nor those who were living with their husbands. There was no conscious decision not to engage with the latter two groups. Rather I had become involved with the former groups and decided to focus on their 'independent' living arrangements. I also carried out an afternoon workshop with about twenty-five women while attending a 'lesbian weekend'. All the interviews were taped and the participants received copies.[10] Obviously the issue of representation surfaces here. I did not enter this research with any intention of trying to represent 'Japanese lesbians' as an homogeneous group, nor did I plan to look at 'real practices' in order to deduce grand theories. Both these methods, as Deleuze points out, simply privilege particular universalising truths and expose 'a process of totalization' (1977: 205–6).

As mentioned previously, over the last three months of my stay in 1994 a number of women decided to withdraw from the research. In consultation with these women I signed an agreement that forbids me from using any material from the formal interviews we had done. One of the major concerns centred on shifts of information and identities (both my own and the narrators') between *uchi* (inside) and *soto* (outside) positions. First, there was great concern about their exposure both within their own lesbian communities and their margins, the Japanese mainstream heterosexist as well as the academic world. Second was the possibility that the information that had been imparted may be translated into Japanese. In other words, who would read about their lives and would they be identified?[11] Despite initial agreements, I was now seen to be – and this was certainly the case – the voice of author/ity, moving from inside the community back to a 'foreign' academic and cultural environment with extremely sensitive information. The result for those continuing was the change in focus from the presentation of detailed life histories to the present textual form, one that mirrored the politics of the day. I also negotiated that nothing from the research would be published until those who were involved in the long-term interviews had the opportunity to see the complete text and only then was final permission to publish granted. This took place at the end of 1998. Interestingly, at these meetings one of the most common remarks after our discussions was that they hoped the text would one day be translated into Japanese.[12]

Consequently, this account, far from being objective, is in fact a political product that draws on a variety of discursive practices that are constituted through 'a set of ideological moves' (McRobbie 1982: 51). That is, what is seen as well as that which remains silent sets the political agenda (Reinharz 1992: 46).[13] As such, the act of how we question and listen, and the preparedness to deconstruct and change the research process itself when necessary, is both a political strategy and,

I would argue, central to any feminist methodology (Blackwood 1995: 55; Buss 1985: 14; Mohanty 1988: 62; Oakley 1981: 37; Personal Narratives Group 1989: 216; Reinharz 1992: 44).

The interview/conversations were held in a variety of locations chosen by the narrators and these sometimes shifted depending on their particular schedules and living arrangements. They took place in their homes, coffee shops, workplaces, parks, and on trains. Again, depending on individual requests, we often waited until children were either absent from home or asleep before commencing our more structured discussions. In the case of one couple, I met them separately outside their home because of their decision not to discuss the research when together.[14] Although I began by interviewing couples individually, at times through either their or my own suggestion we held some sessions together.

Interesting, but perhaps not surprising, is the fact that the only constant among the narrators was the differences I encountered both in terms of the stories I heard and the responses to any set format. In terms of the structure of the interviews, I often interrupted and asked follow-up questions, queried details or just threw in my opinion. While at times this was accepted, even appreciated, just as often it was seen as an interruption that, for the sake of politeness, needed to be dealt with as quickly as possible in order to continue the story.

Second, given the complexity of the issues that were being raised, my interruptions sometimes resulted in a narrator losing the thread of her explanation. This became more obvious to me when I reviewed the tapes. At these times, the feminist dictum of breaking down asymmetrical power relations through constructing an active dialogue was not particularly useful. In fact quite the opposite was true. As Kennedy and Davis observed, there are no rules, as sometimes listening can be 'an adequate and respectful response' (1989: 21). However, in other situations, as stated, my input was not only appropriate but actively sought. Of course, reactions also depended on individual temperaments and what someone felt like on the day. Furthermore, my own input was to some extent tied to the degree of difficulty of the Japanese language that was being used by the narrators. I carried out all interviews–conversations in Japanese, except with one participant. In this case, Fumie was completely bilingual (in fact she was multi-lingual) and she offered to do the interviews in English.

Throughout the year of interviewing I progressively developed a more open-ended approach. Initially I framed questions through my own knowledge of Japanese culture and history. For instance, at one point I wanted to explore the construction of female friendship in Japan. Consequently I put together a series of questions including, 'What importance is placed on friendship in Japanese society? Do you think different values are placed on male and female friendship? And if so, could you explain some of these differences?' The responses were generally, 'I don't know' or 'I've never really thought about it.' This did not mean that these issues were irrelevant, far from it. Rather, over time they permeated the conversations in more subtle and complex ways.

Fragmented selves/ fragmented hierarchies

Explorations of how inside and outside positions can or should be interpreted may be seen in all cultures and Japan is no exception. In fact the notion of inside–outside (*uchi–soto*), and the large degree to which it is so obviously enacted in everyday relations in Japan, also becomes highly significant to the analysis of lesbian subjectivity. The possible and actual shifts that occur from inside (insider) to outside (outsider), and from outside to inside in Japanese society by way of the linguistic, spatial and temporal concept of *uchi–soto* (inside–outside) are continual, yet provisional.

> It is often noted that it is vital in Japanese social interaction to adopt suitable form, to know how to behave appropriately. In order to accomplish this one must define the situation correctly and in particular know who the other is, where s/he belongs.
>
> (Lebra 1976: 23)

It has been argued that the notion of *uchi–soto* has the potential to problematise and assist in reconceptualising the oppositional and essentialist nature of inside/outside locations (Rosenberger 1992b). Indeed, Japan has been described as 'the pre-eminently postmodern society' (Clammer 1992: 205). Or, as Lunsing asserts 'The idea of queerness is grounded in Japanese culture' (1997: 285). This perspective is premised on mainstream Japanese conceptualisations of subjectivity which are read in terms of the fragmented self, where 'I' only becomes meaningful through identifying the specificity of one's position relative to others (Rosenberger 1994: 102), along a (non-oppositional) continuum (Bachnik and Quinn 1994; Kondo 1990; Lebra 1984; Hamabata 1990).

While I agree with the above proposition, I would argue that too much emphasis on the assumed uniqueness of the relational qualities of Japanese society subsumes, even reframes, the issue of hierarchical arrangements into explanations of complementarity, in which men and women have equal power but separate roles.

These hierarchies of 'difference' are also plainly evident in the treatment and representation of issues around race and ethnicity. For example, in Creighton's discussion of race and advertising, she describes the different uses of the term *gaijin* (outside person) and *gaikokujin* (a person from another country). The former term is used in reference to Anglo-European white foreigners and the latter is employed for other Asian, Arab and Black foreigners. This form of Occidentalism she suggests renders 'the *gaijin* [as] distinctly Western, and not just alien' (Creighton 1995: 136–7; 152). This Occidentalised construction is not a new phenomenon. It was in fact evident in the early 1900s when:

> 'Japanese' identities were constructed with reference to perceptions of European, American, and other Asian identities, often implying hierarchical notions of national identities.
>
> (Mackie 1997: 18)

This issue came to the fore when Prime Minister Nakasone in 1986[15] and subsequently Watanabe Michio in 1988 made racist comments about the intelligence of Afro-Americans and other ethnic minority groups in the United States.

Representations of 'foreigners' are also connected to the status of the English language in Japan and to the way in which it is taught. This was illustrated both by my own previous experiences when working in a *juku* (cram school), and Fumie's experiences when returning from living in the US for four years when young. While there have been some changes in teaching English since the mid-1980s, for example, with the introduction of the JET scheme (The Japan Exchange and Teaching Program),[16] English is still primarily a textbook-based affair, mainly due to the form the final examinations take. Even as a native English speaker, I still had to teach from an antiquated English grammar textbook that contained incorrect English. When I pointed this out to the Japanese English teacher I was told that this was what the students would be tested on and to continue to teach accordingly. Thus, the ability to pass 'examination English' (White 1988: 68) and the status of English, rather than the applicability of the language as a communication skill, were emphasised.

Fumie, on the other hand, was faced with discrimination as a 'returning child' (*kikokushijo*)[17] where children were disadvantaged for having both better skills in English than their Japanese teachers, and for standing out as better or different in level from their other schoolmates. Fumie dropped out of school at fourteen and later left Japan because she did not fit in with what was expected and accepted as 'Japanese' behaviour.

> My experiences in Japan, the Japanese community and the Japanese children's community is one of rejection, and I somehow had to get over it, because before, the natural response was to reject the person who rejects you, if you don't do that, you're hurt right? This is the very reason I left the country and tried to survive, work and earn my living and learn other languages and make other friends. I think I wanted to prove to myself that I didn't have to come back here [Japan] from necessity, but that I came back from choice.

As stated, Fumie was partly rejected because of her proficiency in English. While English is exalted as the cultured language (with the implicit assumption of the monolithic 'Westerner' as being white, fluent English-speaking and usually North American), the appropriation of the skill from an outside position elicits the notion of *soto* (outside) in terms of non-Japaneseness or difference from the norm and thus a cultural anomaly. For children, this notion of inside–outside is epitomised by the ultimate punishment for children that is the threat of being sent outside the house (*soto*), separated from the family or *uchi* (Smith 1983: 72).

Consequently notions of belonging inside particular communities can be debilitating, when for all practical purposes 'us' becomes the antithesis of 'them'.

> Fitting into a society [Japanese] in which an outside experience is at best irrelevant and at worst stigmatizing is most difficult for returning children. Children are under strong pressure from the community to be 'normal'.
>
> (White 1988: 65)

As such, Fumie was disempowered in order for her schoolmates and her teacher(s) to retain a notion of possessing a group sense of Japanese identity. In doing so, in both the short and the long term Fumie felt disenfranchised from various *uchi* (inside) groups and thus lost out on the social status privileges that are associated with such belongings (White 1988: 45–7). For example, interruptions to the flow of the growing up process can influence school, job and even one's ability to secure an appropriate marriage partner. Consequently, the impact of ostracism in Japanese society cannot be underestimated.

While the notion of *uchi–soto* fits in very neatly with the postmodern discourse of fragmented selves and critiques of an integrated subjectivity, these shifting positions are grounded within a conservative set of hierarchical fixed relationships. At the same time, the implication of an opposite emerges among 'Western' conceptualisations, that is, a notion of an independent I-centred self. In constructing this dualism, as Anglo-Europeans, we also prevent ourselves from reflecting on relational selves in our 'own' societies.

For example, the highly contentious conundrum of 'how inside is an insider?' not only presents itself as a theoretical issue but as a lived daily reality for lesbians and gay men in a variety of cultural contexts, albeit in different forms. As Blackwood and other lesbian and gay researchers have pointed out, the notions of 'belonging to a culture' or 'coming home'[18] hold completely different meanings and consequences for lesbians and gay men than for particularly male but also for female heterosexual researchers (Kulick 1995; Lewin and Leap 1996; Newton 1993; Seizer 1995). This is because academic disciplines themselves are enmeshed in heterosexual norms and as such lesbians and gay men are constantly shifting from partial insider–outsider locations.

Furthermore, as a non-Japanese in Japan, and a white middle-class academic, I was always going to be constructed as an outsider (*gaijin*), Japanese/foreigner being the ultimate *uchi–soto* (inside–outside) boundaries of the culture (Valentine 1994: 50; Iwabuchi 1994: 51). Yet, because lesbian identity transcends mainstream discourses, the foreign lesbian community, to some extent, supports and helps to constitute part of the feeling of 'lesbian community'. Thus, in the same way that *uchi no kazoku* (our family) summons up the values of intimacy and belonging, so *rezubian no komyunitii* (lesbian community), or as one woman described it, *onnakama*, a play on the words *onna* (woman) and *nakama* (a group, circle), invokes feelings of inclusion. In this context foreigner as outsider while lesbian as insider is conceptualised respectively as 'other' and an other. As Blackwood explains:

> By establishing a relationship with an-Other lesbian, I became both an
> insider and an outsider: an insider because I shared her marginalisation as a
> lesbian and her love of women, and an outsider because of our different sex-
> ual identities and cultural frameworks.
>
> (1995: 69)

Therefore I entered my fieldwork with an existing partial understanding of the
multiplicity of relational positions that both researchers and narrators hold. First,
I found that shifting positionality and location in Anglo-European ideas of
inside–outside were not necessarily outside my lived reality of 'self' as frag-
mented, provisional, relational and shifting. And second, that the Japanese notion
of *uchi–soto*, while relational, also produces a rigid separation of spheres.

This separation of spheres within Japanese society can be described as 'suit-
able form' and knowing where one fits into particular hierarchies which are
primarily founded on sex, age and social status and – while generally unstated –
also includes ethnicity. Of particular interest to lesbian sexuality is that, within
this common definition of the dominant social determinants, the term sex is
rather ambiguous. Does 'sex' refer to distinct anatomical bodies where one is
attributed either male-ness or female-ness, the sexed body; or the construction of
systematised practices which are inscribed on sexed bodies through particular
behaviours that are read as either feminine or masculine, that is, gender. Or, is it
one's sexuality, that is, one's object of sex and sexual desire? While the first two
possibilities tend to be collapsed and are usually employed as interchangeable, the
result of the third possibility is clear. There are both implicit and explicit pre-
sumptions – resulting from the assumed naturalness of the act – of heterosexuality
on which the answers to the last two questions rely.[19]

> The category 'lesbian,' then, is problematised by – and renders problematic –
> the illusory coherence of gender whereby anatomical sex determines gender
> which determines sexual desire.
>
> (Jagose 1993: 275; also see Butler 1989: 258)

As long as there is little analysis of the system of compulsory heterosexuality in
Japanese society, there will continue to be a relativist reading which assumes a
level playing-field of power relations. As such, the cultural construction of 'rela-
tive' positions forecloses, or at least severely limits, the opening up of gender
relations to include a more critical analysis of the distinctions and interplay of
sexed bodies, (hetero)sex and gender relations in Japanese society.

The above discussion also applies to the broader analysis undertaken in this
book. What I am trying to hint at here and examine in detail in the following chap-
ters are the contradictions and implications of blindly accepting *uchi–soto* as
simply a function of Japanese society. This is achieved through a sustained focus
on compulsory heterosexuality and how and under what specific circumstances
lesbian bodies might fit or indeed not fit into such a system. For example, how do
the women I talked with relate to 'the Japanese family'? While everybody wants

to feel that they belong – particularly when the family is ubiquitously defined as the pinnacle of insiderness – I found a tentativeness, at times outright hostility, towards a kinship system that so overwhelmingly privileges heteronormative and sexist practices. Are there limitations to reading the constant and relational identity shifts of *uchi–soto* as a liberatory strategy? For I also claim that lesbians can employ these shifts to disguise themselves in various contexts.

The concept of 'coming out' is a case in point. 'Coming out' is not a one-off disclosure, but a life-long process in a constant attempt to be included. Butler, however, raises a number of complex questions about who is actually revealed, to whom and with what results. For example, does 'coming out' imply that sexuality is the sum total of an individual's sense of self? Can the revelation of personal sexuality really be considered a liberatory move that opens up unlimited spaces and cancels out homophobic practices? And probably most important, how will any set of *particular* lesbian practices that are revealed be employed within regulatory systems? As Butler points out 'it is always finally unclear what is meant by invoking the lesbian-signifier, since its signification is always to some degree out of one's control' (1993a: 15–17). Thus, I examine in more detail the notion of 'coming out' (*kamingu aouto*) in the Japanese context and question the Foucauldian concept of confession or 'revealing one's self' as a whole or complete person as universally applicable.

On a more general level I explore the ways in which various inside and outside positions are employed in order to reveal how every day social practices affect those who identify as lesbian to operate in a wider Japanese socio-political environment. On the one hand, *uchi–soto* is often framed as underpinning Japanese social relations and it will become evident that lesbians in Japan also employ this concept to test and expand the limited boundaries of Japanese heterosexist discourses. On the other hand, I also draw attention to the extent to which 'knowing one's place' within multiple hierarchies may in fact re-inscribe contained subject positions. Part of this containment, I argue, is enforced by a notion of 'tolerance' that at best ignores and at worst expels 'others' in an effort to reinstate an appearance of cultural and sexual homogeneity.

2 Lesbian in/visibility in Japan

Passing into the present

Male same-sex practices and the introduction of 'homosexuality' into Japan

Male same-sex practices have been discussed in Japanese literature since the thirteenth century, and there has recently been an increase of academic interest in this area (Childs 1980; Hiratsuka 1983; Ihara 1990; Leupp 1995; Miller 1996; Pflugfelder 1992, 1999 Schalow 1993; Tōno 1979; Watanabe and Iwata 1989). Indeed male–male love, generally referred to as *nanshoku*, was sanctioned and took on different forms depending on social status combinations such as class, profession and age. For example, sexual liaisons commonly occurred between priests and their young lovers (*chigo/wakashu*), samurai (*nenja*) and youths (*chigo*), and male kabuki actors or male prostitutes (*kagema*) and their patrons. Moreover, within this period male sexual relations were not exclusively homosexual but part of broader bisexual practices (Schalow 1991: 119).

However, there were differences in status and expectations. The samurai model, for example, was based on loyalty, duty and obligations grounded in samurai notions of masculinity, while the *kagema* relationship was marked by gender differentiation (Furukawa 1995: 100). This hierarchy also influenced the way future male homosexual practices would be both 'tolerated' and scorned. There was the romanticisation of *wakashudō* (the way of loving youths) and its links to *bushidō* (the way of warriors), and the *kagema* subject who became the object of contempt and seen as deviant in the 1920s. However, while *wakashudō* is romanticised and sometimes even glorified in Japanese history, and while such age-defined man–boy love is not unique to Japan,[1] it is important to recognise that male homosexual practices, even between consenting adults, have been neither tolerated nor accepted within the same periods in Anglo-European history (Duberman *et al*. 1991: 9). As Japan was strongly influenced by the new sexology discourses of England and Europe from the 1910s through to the 1930s, it is no coincidence that male homosexual practices shifted from one of 'tolerance' to a construction of homosexuality as deviant. Indeed, the strength of Western sexology and psychoanalytic discourse as integral to a universal notion of modernity is still reflected in contemporary literature that portrays non-Anglo-European same-sex practices in pre-Meiji Japan as 'child prostitution' (Seigle 1993: 85–6).

In contrast to the term *nanshoku*, Schalow argues that there was no pre-Meiji (1868) equivalent term for female same-sex desire (1991: 119). Even if there were, it is unlikely a term would have survived, as references to the prohibition of women's sexuality, specifically female same-sex practices, were maintained within Tokugawa literature (1603–1868) (Yasuka cited in Roden 1990: 52). In other words, female homosexuality was not sanctioned. Portrayals of female same-sex practices can be seen in Tokugawan art but it is obvious from the prominent place of dildos in the prints and the often hidden voyeur, usually a male, that such behaviour was constructed, presented and consumed by and for men. This use of dildos within lesbian practices is explained within a Freudian context as a substitution for woman's 'irremediable lack' – the castrated woman's desire for the absent penis. This leaves the viewer, usually a male, titillated by an active female sexuality while female pleasure always remains dependent on and presumed only to be fulfilled by vaginal penetration (Buckley 1991: 167–8; Creed 1995: 93–4; McNaron 1993: 294–5).

The recognition of female same-sex desire in Japanese society

The major consequence of these misrepresentations, but more generally invisibility, is that female same-sex practices have only been articulated in the 'modern' post-Meiji (1868) era. It is at this time, during the Meiji (1868–1912) and Taishō (1912–26) periods that women became more publicly visible on the streets in small towns and cities, and in literary, 'scientific' and educational discourses.[2] In the latter case, education was made compulsory for male and female students in 1872 under the Education Ordinance (*Gakusei*). Hence it is not surprising that female same-sex desire came under the educational microscope after the establishment of girls' schools (Robertson 1992a: 176). Apparently one of the methods employed to stop same-sex sexual activity was to prohibit the gathering of even numbers of girls in a room together (Furukawa 1995: 114). The logic was that there should always be someone on the outside, thus putting a stop to all such relationships. However, this presupposes that these women merely mirrored heterosexual monogamous practices when in fact monogamy itself was still being institutionalised in the early Meiji period (Mackie 1997: 25). Yet, despite the codification of monogamy in the Meiji Civil Code, in reality the accompanying law that viewed adultery as a crime only pertained to married women or men who engaged in a sexual relationship with another man's wife (Yoshizumi 1995: 189).

The early 1900s saw the introduction of the words *dōseiai* (same-sex love or homosexuality) and *iseiai* (heterosexuality). Furukawa asserts that the term *dōseiai* was a response to the existing male-related term, *nanshoku*. Arguably, by using this new term and by including women within its meaning, *nanshoku* relations could be distanced both historically and psychologically from the new 'science of sexuality' that was surfacing in Japan. Collapsing male and female homosexuality into one term also helped and continues to create an illusion of, in this case, the 'unnatural' gender connections, that is, women who want to be masculine (*danseiteki joshi*) and men who want to be feminine (*joseiteki danshi*), by tying

male(ness) and female(ness) together, incapable of sexual autonomy. To a large extent, this mirrored biologically essentialist constructions of 'modern' institutionalised heterosexuality emerging within Western texts at the time. As a result, gendered oppositions became clearly demarcated.

Explanations of female same-sex desire in the early accounts by Meiji social commentators portray women's desire to be more spiritual than physical, describing lesbians as more interested in close friendships than sexual practices.

> Female homosexuality took its place along a continuum of sentiments ascribed to women including consideration, kindness and affection.
>
> (Furukawa 1995: 115–16)

This description conjures up Adrienne Rich's notion of the 'lesbian continuum' (1980), in which she defines lesbianism in terms of a woman-identified consciousness, demoting and sometimes ignoring the physicality of lesbianism as a sexual practice. Rich postulates an 'anything is possible' model through a glorification of women's inherent sameness, based on a middle-class ideal, in which sexual difference becomes inconsequential.[3]

The discourses enunciated by Meiji educators, are remarkably similar to those proposed by Rich, both drawing on essentialist notions of 'woman'. In Japan, however, women's sexuality needs to be understood in terms of the desexualised good wife and wise mother (*ryōsai kenbo*) of the middle class. This stereotype was espoused through the dominant Meiji education ideology and was framed within the conservative rhetoric of the 'duties of womanhood' (*onna no honbun*), which defined 'caring' as an inherently feminine characteristic (Hara, K. 1995: 97; Lock 1993: 69–70; Niwa 1993: 74). This was institutionalised by way of the new Meiji state ideology that called forth the notion of 'educating mothers' through the romanticisation and glorification of motherhood as the pinnacle of women's duties and obligations to the family (state) (Hayakawa 1995: 36; Niwa 1993: 73–4). Yet despite, or more likely because of, these changes implemented from the early Meiji period, women's resistance was inevitable and manifested itself in the rise of feminism and the emergence of the 'New Woman' in the 1910s.

Concurrently, a 'science of sexuality', based on 'an established system of classification' (Foucault 1978: 64), was becoming increasingly influential within Japan with the introduction of the writings of sexologists such as Krafft-Ebing,[4] Havelock Ellis, Magnus Hirschfield, and Freud. In fact, Furukawa asserts that the translation of Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* was 'the most important work in sexology, [and] contributed greatly to turning sexology toward the study of sexual perversion or, *hentai seiyoku*' (1995: 118; Robertson 2000: 56).

This emerging containment of sexuality was overtly aimed at women and conservatives tried to devalue the legitimacy of some women's newly-found visibility and voices with what was seen as the pejorative term of 'lesbian' (Roden 1990: 44). For instance, comments were made to discredit Hiratsuka Raichō,[5] a leading advocate of women's rights (1886–1971) and the 'New Woman' in general by inferring that they were driven by being 'man-hating lesbians or frustrated spinsters' (Rose

1992: 147). Yet at this stage it seems that female same-sex desire was not the problem. Rather, it was the shifts in gender roles that were seen as a threat to the Japanese social order through the potential rejection of marriage and motherhood (Robertson 1989: 59) and the increasing number of women in waged labour.[6] However, during the 1920s, because of the widespread popularisation and dissemination of discourses around sexology (*seigaku*) (Furukawa 1995: 118) – produced and mediated (Frühstück 1998: 64) in the print media,[7] popular fiction, movies, and characterised by the *modan gāru* or *moga* (modern girl) (Silverberg 1991: 242, 250) of the 1920s and early 1930s – gender ambiguity and by direct implication, lesbianism became the focus of condemnation by sexologists' and social critics. As Frühstück points out, it was much more difficult to control the sex lives of the increasing numbers of women in the paid workforce than simply quarantining prostitutes in the leisure quarters (1998: 77). Many of the critics blamed this gender ambiguity on 'the "masculinizing" effect of Westernization on Japanese women' (Robertson 1992b: 425), which, taken to extremes, was now directly correlated with 'unnatural desires' (*fushizen seiyoku*). Criticism was often directed at the all-women theatre troupe, in particular the *otokoyaku* (women who performed as men) in the Takarazuka Revue.

The Takarazuka Revue

It is impossible to discuss the phenomenon of female 'gender-bending' or gender ambiguity throughout the twentieth century without calling on Jennifer Robertson's extensive work on the Takarazuka Revue. Her discussions of the historical construction of gender, heterosexuality and female same-sex desire in relation to the internal and external production of sexuality both within and outside the theatre troupe is indispensable to an understanding of the 'predicament' or 'social imperative' (Kennedy and Davis 1989: 244) in which *tachi/neko* (butch/femme) were employed by lesbians during the 1960s and 1970s. In particular, I examine the relationships among the *otokoyaku/musumeyaku* (male and female roles), the emerging popularised imaginings of the *tachi/neko* and the audience's reactions. To achieve this, I significantly draw on Robertson's work and insights to contextualise my argument of the performative nature of gender and sexuality throughout this section (Robertson 2000, 1998b, 1992a, 1992b, 1991a, 1991b, 1989).

Kobayashi Ichizō, the owner of the Hankyū railway and department store, founded the Takarazuka Revue in July 1913. His aim was to create a new national theatre (*shinkokumingeki*) that also appealed to women as a new urban consumer middle-class (Robertson 1998b: 291; Domenig 1998).[8] In comparison to Noh and Kabuki theatre in which only men perform – women were prohibited from performing on stage in 1629 – the Takarazuka troupe is made up of young women performers. In a similar construction to other Japanese theatrical styles, the roles are divided into two distinct genders, male (*otokoyaku*) and female (*musumeyaku*).

Of interest here is the difference in the use of the terms denoting male and female roles between Noh, Kabuki and Takarazuka. In all three theatres the male

performer is known by the title *otokoyaku*, while in Noh and Kabuki, the male who plays a woman is known as *onnagata*, *onna* referring to an adult woman. In the Takarazuka Revue, however, the female role is denoted by the term *musumeyaku*. *Musume* literally means daughter and signifies this role as less than an adult. This role also fits into the organisation's familial hierarchy. In addition, in Noh and Kabuki the 'male' (*otokoyaku*) is considered real and thus signified by his part, rather than his gender or sex. This is in contradistinction to the 'female' performers who are referred to as *onnagata* (female model), and who are defined by their ability to recreate what it is to be a 'Japanese woman'. Thus, from the perspective of women playing the *otokoyaku*, masculinity and the male body is considered a 'known' and therefore can be emulated by observant women, while the notion of 'woman' is thought to be in the realm of the unknown and therefore malleable to the extent of being perfected by men or women 'becoming' women.

> The Takarazuka *otokoyaku* affects a 'male' guise, while the [Kabuki] *onnagata* acts on his feelings and is completely transformed into a 'female'. Contrarily, as the term *otokoyaku* attests, the female who plays a 'male' role is but performing a duty.
>
> (Nozaka cited in Robertson 1989: 53)

In Takarazuka the difference of gender terms employed also reflects the distinct status and hierarchical nature of both Takarazuka as a legitimate art form (Mochizuki 1959: 169) as well as that of the 'male' and 'female' performers regardless of what gender(ed) roles they play. The difference in representation may also be tied to the fact that the *musumeyaku* (daughter role) was based in and supported by, the Meiji ideology epitomised in the notion of *ryōsai kenbo* (good wife/wise mother) where sexual desire was confined for married women to reproduction or for prostitutes to servicing male sexual desire. In contrast, the *musumeyaku* (daughter role) epitomised both sexual innocence and filial piety (Robertson 1991a: 167–8; 1992b: 425). Thus the image of the 'Western woman' – whom the *musumeyaku* is supposed to emulate, and the construction of the *musumeyaku*, who is supposed to defer to both the *otokoyaku* and the male directors of Takarazuka – are paradoxically opposed.

From the perspective of the theatre management, they have endeavoured to imitate the gender norms of the day and have consistently asserted that in doing so they are able to train the actors, whether *otokoyaku* or *musumeyaku*, to become good wives and mothers. Moreover, from their acceptance into the Takarazuka Music Academy for a period of two years and consequently during their performing careers, both the physical and emotional training environment is predicated on the Japanese family system, in ways similar to other institutional structures in Japan. This familial structure is epitomised by Kobayashi being referred to as father (*otō san*) by the performers (Robertson 1992a: 171). During the training period at the Academy the young women are imbued with traditional feminine middle-class familial values such as obligation, duty and filial piety. These values are also mirrored in the school motto of 'purely, righteously, beautifully' (*kiyoku*, *takashiku*,

utsukushiku) achieved through the highly disciplined nature of the training regime which emphasises military-like deportment, endurance and knowing one's place within the gender hierarchy of the school. These values are played out both between the 'male' and 'female' actors and in relation to the students' relationship to the management through the replication of *kazokushugi* (Japanese familism). The following interchange between a leading *otokoyaku* and *musumeyaku* (in the film *Dream Girls*, a documentary film made about the Takarazuka Revue) clearly illustrates the depth to which the actors' performances maintain and perpetuate the fixity of gender polarity *vis-à-vis* mainstream Japanese society.

> *'Female' actor*: The male players can be more natural. That's my view as a female player. We must back up the men. In normal life we have to stay in the background. We end up boosting the men. [She pauses and then turns to the 'male' actor.] Help me!
> *'Male' actor*: Traditionally in Japan we talk about the boss of the house [household head]. The positions of men and women are very different. Women respect and serve men. It's like that here too.
>
> (Longinotto and Williams 1993)

The decision on the allocation of secondary gender, which takes place in the form of both masculine and feminine, and often racialised re-constructions, is generally made on the basis of the physical appearance of the girl and to some extent on the individual's personal preference. Nevertheless, *otokoyaku* are usually taller, have deeper voices and 'exude *kosei* (charisma) which is disparaged in "females"' (Robertson 1992a: 171). The acceptability of this characteristic in *otokoyaku* but not in *musumeyaku* is interesting, for in Chapter 5 Kumiko, in a discussion about the representation of foreign women in Japanese advertising states, 'They (Western women) are not cute, they're charismatic.' In addition, many of the Takarazuka productions are based on classic Western works and the actor's physical appearance is grounded in a re-invention of foreign 'maleness' and 'femaleness'. Even those that are based on Japanese themes are generally situated in the context of a romantic feudal past and so set up a similar distance and feeling of 'fantasy' between the audience and actors in the same way Western productions do (Mochizuki 1959: 173).

Indeed, these representations of charisma in the guise of both Japanese (naïve/innocent) and Western (experienced/promiscuous) womanhood, are permeated with racialised constructions of 'sexiness'. This is exemplified by the following advice given by a leading *otokoyaku* (male performer) to a 'female' actor in *Dream Girls.*

> You're not Western enough, you're too Japanese. Try and be more Western. We Japanese hold our feelings in, we don't express them. Be more dramatic. Western women would flutter their eyelashes. You should be more daring. You'll understand more about being sexy when you're older, don't worry about it now.
>
> (Longinotto and Williams 1993)

In contrast, as Robertson notes, the only time 'female' characters are referred to as 'charismatic' is when there is a 'gender-reversal' and they are played by *otokoyaku* and always in Euro-American plays (1992a: 183).[9] The 'charisma' is therefore limited to the *otokoyaku*, who becomes the imaginary male protector. This results in the building of a patriarchal parodic heterosexual fantasy world.

Part of the fantasy for the actors, audience and the company directors alike is the implicit knowledge that the dreams of Takarazuka can only exist if they are contained both in terms of stylised gender(ed) re/presentations and only if these representations are contained within a space, the theatre. Robertson argues that, '[a]t the same time, a priori knowledge of the underlying body neutralizes both the masculinity of the costume and, by extension, the "male" gender identity of the female in question' (1992b: 429–30). However, it is the recognition, the knowing that this fantasy is working through female bodies, in terms of what the women in the audience dream of in a man, as well as how this dream is constructed by the actors to contain the dream, that produces empathy, or a complicit acknowledgement between the actors and audience which is mediated through a negotiation of idealised romantic female desire. Thus, I disagree with Robertson's contention. Even assuming that Kobayashi consciously intended to construct an androgynous *otokoyaku*, the acceptance of the spectator in acknowledging the existence of the female body marked by masculine gendered costume, physical characteristics and deportment requires the spectator at the very least to refigure her or his sexual desire in relation to that specific gendered body. Thus, Robertson's assumption that the Takarazuka's *otokoyaku* sexuality becomes ambiguous reifies the sex/gender distinction by assuming the body and the inscriptions on that particular body are both docile and neutral.[10]

As the following excerpts illustrate, Takarazuka fans are more than aware of the difference that different sexed bodies make when they *come into being* alongside the performance of gender.

> If the actors were real men the result would be coarse. But because women act the male roles they can create the ideal man that women really want.
>
> Real men only care about work. They don't value their wives. Work is so important they sacrifice their families to it. For the men portrayed by Takarazuka the most important thing is their partner, their wife or lover. I so wish that real men were like that. Wouldn't it be lovely?
>
> (Longinotto and Williams 1993)

Robertson traces the historical linkages between the Takarazuka actors and lesbian sexuality, specifically in terms of butch/femme constructions, back to the social commentaries of the 1920s. And, as the following narratives suggest, these earlier explanations have continued to feed into recent and contemporary accounts of the 'origins' and interpretations of lesbianism.

> When I started to wonder whether or not I was a lesbian, I started to read books on psychology and psychiatry to do with lesbians. I also found out a bit by reading *manga* [comics] written for junior and senior high school girls. So it wasn't through feminism or anything like that.
>
> (Mayumi)

Interestingly, but not surprisingly, both social critics and sexologists became fascinated with and concentrated on the *otokoyaku*, claiming that there was a direct relationship between playing male roles (*tachi*) and abnormal psychology (*hentai seiri*) (Robertson 1989: 58). According to the literature of the time female homosexuality was divided into two types, referred to as *dōseiai* and *ome no kankei*. On the one hand, *dōseiai* implied non-sexual, that is, platonic intense friendships, which, while seen as 'abnormal', were tolerated as a transitory 'girlhood phase'. This period in a 'girl's' life, from puberty to marriage, is known as *shōjoki* (Robertson 1989: 56; Matsui Midori 1993: 177). The meaning of *shōjo*, according to Robertson, is that of a 'not-quite-female' female. The connotation is that prior to marriage Japanese girls are heterosexually inexperienced while homosexually experienced. The term *ki* (period) also intimates that this is a transitory phase (Robertson 1989: 56). In a similar way to contemporary representations of lesbianism, this form of toleration was expressed through 'ignor[ing] the girl's behavior'. Mochizuki also asserts that this appearance of 'latent homosexuality' among fans and actors alike decreased significantly with the introduction of co-education in the post-war period (1959: 170, 172). Indeed, to some extent it was encouraged by parents to steer their daughters away from pre-marital heterosexual relations.

> When I was about twenty-two I was reading lots of psychology books and came to the conclusion that I must have been wrong in my thinking, because these books all presented the standard view that homosexual love among young girls is common until they grew up and found themselves the real thing in a man. I thought I was only going through that process.
>
> (Kumiko)

Or, as in the case of Toshiko, who in her early twenties, lived together with her female lover (*koibito*) in the late 1960s:

> Our mothers were disturbed by our relationship and seemed to have the attitude that this sickness would pass after some time.

On the other hand, *ome no kankei* directly referred to the *tachi* and by implication the assumed gender binary of the butch/femme, in which the butch's sexuality was premised on carnal depravity (*nikuteki daraku*) (Fukushima cited in Robertson 1992a: 177) and inherent perversion (*shinsei tōsaku*) (Watanabe 1992b). In contrast, the *neko* (femme) was basically ignored, but perhaps she was seen as the 'pseudo-homosexual' enticed away from men by the *tachi* who was 'technically proficient at manipulating women' (Robertson 1992a: 177).

> When I was fourteen I fell in love with a classmate, and started to read books on psychology and the Bible. Psychology told me that I was abnormal … . This was sexual perversion, and women who played *otokoyaku* were the worst examples of this, incurable. Women that played *musumeyaku* could still be saved, be cured. I read this and believed it, which led me to a lot of mental anguish because I thought that my sexuality was basically oriented toward playing *otokoyaku*. But when I was in love with my classmate, I thought I was homosexual, abnormal, the only wrong person in the whole world.
>
> (Sachiko)[11]

However, the contradiction emerges between the assumed passivity of Japanese female bodies[12] and the resistance to gender and (hetero)sexual conformity by both the butch and femme. That is, the conventional discursive construction of female subjectivity in the 1920s and 1930s was grounded on the assumption that women, or rather girls (*shōjo*) as they were referred to until marriage, were sexually naïve and innocent (Robertson 1992a: 173–4). Thus, the emergence of the *tachi* was explained by some commentators as originating in the propensity of the *otokoyaku* to embody their male roles outside the theatre, thus producing the shift from a *dōseiai* to an *ome no kankei* relationship (Robertson 1992a: 178). This argument emphasised an evolutionary and spatial shift. It was a response and explanation to deal with the potential and actual resistance that was already evident and in opposition to the ideal of *ryōsai kenbo* (good wife, wise mother) during the 1920s.

Ironically, it was this very embodiment of *ryōsai kenbo* that Kobayashi (the founder) espoused as the ultimate goal in the training of the gendered performances of both the 'male' and 'female' Takarazuka actors. Kobayashi's aims notwithstanding, the aforementioned acts of resistance are most often centred on the butch, as it is she who literally 'appears' as the disruption to the hierarchical nature of the male/female dyad (Kennedy and Davis 1989: 244; Charles 1993: 61).

> In this society only *otokoyaku* has been seen as sexually perverted, a hermaphrodite (*otoko-onna*), or abnormal (*ijō*), because their appearance expresses their refusal to play the role of women. While *onnayaku* remains within the sexual control of men, *otokoyaku* intervenes in the male domain.
>
> (Watanabe 1992b: 5)

However, as Creed suggests:

> In one sense, the femme lesbian is potentially as threatening – although not as immediately confronting – as the stereotyped butch because she signifies the possibility that all women are potential lesbians.
>
> (1995: 101)

Thus, it is important to recognise the historical construction and social positioning of butch/femme relationships within the context of feminist discourse and culturally

specific gender relations and not merely dismiss it as universal heterosexual mimicry (Blasius 1994: 88; Kennedy and Davis 1993: 12). The ramifications of accepting this latter simplistic explanation conjures up a return to a pathologisation discourse in which the cause of such behaviour is reducible to usually 'negative' psychological and/or physical experiences, and the consequent appropriation of either a powerful or disempowered position exhibited in either masculine or feminine roles (Stimpson 1988: 59). This interpretation fails to acknowledge the options, although limited, available to lesbians in different times and places in relation to Japanese heterosexual society, as well as the values ascribed to the notions of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' at different historical and socio-cultural moments. In the case of the Takarazuka Revue the gender extremes embodied by the female actors and their relationship to the audience, set within an erotic fantasy world, throw into relief or demonstrate the dominant and oppressive nature of gender/(hetero)sexual relations in Japan. At the same time, however, the very fact that both 'masculinity' and 'femininity' are enacted through and by female bodies transcends and resists the social containment it is supposed to produce.

'*Tachi*' or '*neko*': which one are you?

In the late 1970s the only places where lesbians could meet publicly were in the bars, which, compared to male gay bars, were few and far between. Moreover, the lesbian culture in these bars was generally based on male/female gender divisions or *tachi/neko* (butch/femme) roles. Thus when Fumie entered this bar world without knowing the performative gender distinctions that were already in place, she was initially taken aback and confused when confronted with the question of whether she was *tachi* or *neko*.

> I was asked for the first time if I was butch or femme. '*Dotchi na no*?' (Which one?) So I asked, 'Do I have to decide?' And the owner of the bar said, 'You know, these young people now they don't decide on these things any more.' She complained a bit but didn't force me to say it.

The confusion, however, did not stop there. At the time Fumie had long hair and because the stereotype of a *neko* was grounded in a reflection of heterosexual feminine dress and appearance codes, she was assumed to be femme. This meant that even though she was not interested in these divisions, because the code had already been established there was the existing presumption both that she was *neko* and that she knew this when she entered. One of the effects of this silent understanding was that as a *neko*, she must take on a passive role. In other words, she could neither approach butches because they were supposed to initiate conversation, and as for talking to femmes, what would be the point? In this guise, rather than butches approaching her directly, information about her was sought through the friend with whom she had arrived. This made Fumie feel powerless. As a result, she decided to cut her hair off. Since Fumie's intention was not to attract sexually anybody but simply to find out information, and to accomplish

this she needed to ask questions, she decided on the conscious action of reversing her role.[13]

> I felt harassed as a femme, and I didn't want to invite that because then I would have to say 'go away' and it would be a hassle. And I wasn't there for that. So I thought if I cut my hair no one would approach me and I would have to start the conversation … . I thought my position would be better.

Thus, the fact that butch (*tachi*) is positioned as a more autonomous powerful and visible role needs to be read within a historical context of the politicisation of pseudo-scientific knowledge and analysed in relation to its intimate interactions with popular culture and social practices. For example, Sachiko, now in her fifties, describes the only lesbian group that existed in the early 1970s as a mirror of Japanese heterosexual practices of the times. That is, many Japanese men and women met by way of family or work introductions in the form of *o-miai* (arranged marriage meetings) – and subsequently married. Although the system of family introductions was hardly a possibility for same-sex attracted women, the fundamental idea of introductions was taken up and played out in similar ways. Sachiko explains:

> The people choosing roles were those in that lesbian *o-miai* group, and obviously the idea of taking on 'male' and 'female' identities was something they had learnt from society. The way they divided and stereotyped a quality like strength into male and female was borrowed straight from society, because there were no good lesbian models available. So the period I happened to be born in and grew up in was very heterosexual, and there was no information. Because of that, lesbians thought that playing an *otokoyaku* (male role) was a good thing, and that's what I did.

Sachiko goes on to explain her own early experiences during the 1960s.

> I had been to a single-sex junior and senior high school, and in environments like that I had always been told that I was quite masculine (*otokoppoi*). *I think it was qualities like strength and courage that they* [her school friends] *were labelling as masculine, rather than really thinking that I was like a man*. And of course those are qualities that women also have. In fact, it is women who are the strong ones. But up until now our culture had told us that women are weak. Conversely, women who seemed to be strong were the attractive ones within all-women environments. Because I was loved for those qualities, I think I gradually became more and more masculine. That makes it hard to fit into society in general, but as I was with a partner who was looking for those kind of qualities, I was loved by that person in our own world, even if I found it hard to get by in society and felt that I had no freedom. (emphasis added)

As Sachiko suggests, the critical, but often overlooked point is the fact that 'butches did not completely take on a male persona, and fems were aware that they were not with men' (Kennedy and Davis 1993: 190). In other words, it is *which* body that matters and it is therefore crucial to differentiate and comprehend that, 'the man "in the woman" is not the same as the man "in the man"' (Grosz 1994a: 273). Nor is there usually any desire to be a man (Blackwood 1995: 67).[14] The regulatory nature of gender polarity and differentiation in post-war Japanese society left few choices for lesbians. The options were limited to either remaining completely invisible or making a conscious decision, as both Fumie and Sachiko did when appearing in the lesbian 'public', albeit for different reasons, of adopting a 'masculinised' role. In both cases, however, the configuration of the female body with so-called masculine traits, or, conversely, the femme who 'likes her boys to be girls' (Butler 1990: 123) needs to be read as a complex interplay of erotic roles and social practices located in specific material, discursive and historical contexts (Eves 2001). Hence, even though the 'imaginary anatomy' of male and female bodies has been predicated on gender extremes and is reflected in the outward appearance and performance of butch/femme, the transgressive nature of this relationship in terms of sexual object choice and sexual practices differs significantly from institutionalised heterosexuality.

The first and perhaps most obvious difference is that lesbian eroticism depends on two female bodies and thus the penis as erotic signifier is displaced (Kennedy and Davis 1993: 192). Second, the femme is both actively involved in attracting the butch and in sexual reciprocity in that the femme also demands sexual satisfaction, which is a fundamental shift from the usual primacy of heterosexual male pleasure. This 'active-passivity' of the femme (Blasius 1994: 89; Kennedy and Davis 1993: 193) thus reveals a disjuncture in the nature of hierarchies between gender identification and sexual practices. Finally, although the butch and femme may appear to reinstate a heterosexual hierarchy, there is no associated social, economic or political privilege attached to either role. In fact, arguably, it is the femme who has the greater possibility to receive the social advantage (if invisibility is read as a benefit), by replicating the performance of gender(ed) norms, thus not drawing attention or disdain to her outward appearance or behaviour (Blasius 1994: 91; Kennedy and Davis 1993: 233–4).

The all-women's Takarazuka Revue is a significant example of the way popular culture has played a highly influential role in mainstream constructions of lesbian subjectivity, particularly in relation to the 1920s sexological readings and subsequent pathologisation of the *tachi/neko* (butch/femme) roles. These representations continue to play an important part in the ways that popularised early medical/sexology discourses have produced 'truths' about female (same-sex) sexuality. In so doing, questions arise such as what it is to be normal/abnormal, sexual/non-sexual, masculine/feminine and at the most basic level what it means to be a man or woman. And finally, the Takarazuka Revue is not merely theatre suspended from social reality. Rather, it can act as a point of entry into the construction and reflection of the past 100 years of historical–political processes around the discourses of gender and female same-sex desire that are beginning to reveal themselves.

3 Identifying the lesbian in contemporary Japan

Tolerance, containment and the 'homosexual' body

'Tolerance' has been the catch-word of mainstream explanations of how 'homosexuality' is perceived in contemporary Japan. This has come about through a process of temporal and spatial containment by focusing on male homosexuality, usually within the confines of parody or expressions of lesbianism directed to satisfy male desire (female same-sex pornography). In the same vein, another 'gay fashion' has been the popularisation of *manga* (comic books) from the mid-1970s, written by women for teenage girls and women, about male homosexuality. This has been closely followed by a plethora of scholarship on this phenomenon (Aoyama 1988; Buckley 1991; Fujimoto 1991; Matsui 1993; Nishiyama 1989; Watanabe 1992a; Allison 1996; McLelland 2000). What is particularly interesting in this genre is that containment, albeit of excess, is still a priority in the way these characters are constructed.

When looking through these *manga*, I was struck by the way nostalgia and the exotic are employed to distance readers' personal experiences from both the story lines and the portrayal of characters. For example, by employing the romanticised *bushidō* (way of the warrior) traditions of *nanshoku* (male–male love), and by presenting it in terms of reminiscences of Japan's military greatness, male homosexuality can be remembered as a noble tradition, while remaining well within the past. Watanabe, in her discussion of this form of *manga*, also points to a number of other distancing methods employed. She argues that often the men have the physical characteristics of Caucasian males, although they are effeminate to the point of 'looking like women without breasts' (Watanabe 1991: 3).

Moreover, these portrayals of white male gays and women – for the illustrations are obviously supposed to be caricatures of women – are more often than not represented as promiscuous, sado-masochistic and perverse (Watanabe 1991: 3; Nishiyama 1989: 401–8).[1] Thus, in the same way that Anglo-Europeans have tended to employ passivity in constructing a 'feminised' orientalist discourse in terms of the quiet, exotic/erotic (Kabbani 1986: 67–85), these *manga* reverse the process and play into multiple stereotypes, both working to produce 'unique' differences. In so doing, male homosexuality, women's sexual autonomy, aggressive and often violent sexual practices, and foreign-ness are portrayed as 'diseased'

and/or outside (*soto*) of Japanese women's realities. This serves a dual purpose. First, it revalidates the notion of Japanese women as passive and second as Hall points out 'stress[es] a female desire for male intimacy without the social conditions on which that intimacy is offered – as wife or as whore' (2000: 63). Moreover, as Watanabe also points out, they represent male gays as having no families or social backgrounds. This not only separates the readers and writers from the stories (the readers are assumed to be heterosexual), but also separates gay males and, by their absence, lesbians from any Japanese socio-cultural contexts (1991: 3).

Since the mid-1980s there has also been an increasing amount of research on contemporary representations of male same-sex desire and HIV/AIDs in Japan (Lunsing 1995, 1997, 1998, 1999a, 1999b; Valentine 1997a, 1997b; Long 1996; Pinkerton and Abramson 1997; McLelland 2000; Treat 1994, 1999; Dearing 1992). While it is true that mainstream discourses play an instrumental role in limiting or excluding representations of female same-sex desire, other marginalised groups are also implicated in this 'lesbian blindness'. There has been a tendency by male gay researchers to ignore, subsume, or at best (and usually by default) assign lesbian practices to the margins of their work (see for example, Pinkerton and Abramson 1997: 68). To some extent this phenomenon also reflects the androcentrism of most heterosexual social science disciplines, which tend also to subsume women under the generic 'man', or when difference does demand explanation, 'add women and stir'. In saying this, I am not trying to set up a hierarchy of oppressive practices. Rather, my aim is to point out that assuming sameness either through constructing silences or collapsing one group under another is to re-inscribe minority sexualities in terms of – whether accurate or not – male representations (Watanabe 1990: 184). This androcentric technique is used pervasively in Pinkerton and Abramson's article on 'homosexuality' in Japan. For example they claim that:

> [i]n Japan, *a person* is not fully recognised as a social adult until he or she is married, *an occasion that is often marked with a substantial raise and promotion at work*, in anticipation of the added expense of raising a family.
>
> (1997: 70, emphasis added)

In this one sentence the author's misuse of supposed non-sexist language is misinformed to say the least. Men and women are not in the same socio-economic positions within the Japanese employment system. Indeed, it is men only who are given raises and promotions in line with their marital status while women are often pressured to leave or take up part-time positions which has the opposite effect of lowering their status, promotion and salary opportunities within the paid workforce. In contrast, as explained in detail in the following chapters, women are considered to achieve full adulthood by first getting married and second producing children, a significant difference from the above explanation.

At least part of the reason for more innocuous oversights can be explained, although not justified, by the fact that male gay and lesbian politics and social

events have remained relatively separate in Japan and so it is not always easy to make contact with Japanese lesbians. Nevertheless, it should be noted that lesbians have worked alongside gay men in the area of HIV/AIDS and have often fought hard to be represented both in the organisation and content of the Tokyo gay and lesbian film festivals. Another example of coalition amongst the communities is the annual Tokyo Gay and Lesbian Pride Days that began in 1994. Reported participation rates varied across the media, from 300 to 1500 (*Shūkan Shinchō* 1994; *Brother Sister* 1994: 6), while in 1997, the first 'Lesbian Pride March' was held (*Sydney Morning Herald* 11 October 1997). The separation of the event can be partly explained by an incident that occurred in the previous Gay and Lesbian Pride Day (1996) where generally unacceptable rules were implemented by the organisers concerning dress and behaviour with no consultation with the various participating groups. There was also an incident in which a lesbian who tried to speak was dismissed as being inconsequential. While this incident may or may not have influenced their decision to form a separate public presence, it is indicative of the marginal status lesbian issues have taken both within and outside the 'gay' movement in Japan. Therefore it is not surprising that a separate day was chosen in which lesbians and bisexual women could highlight issues directly affecting them as women and as lesbians.

The result is that unlike male homosexuality, which is at least recognised as existing, in history, contemporary research and more recently in the mass media, lesbian sexuality has been constantly and actively silenced – and the predominantly male 'gay boom' has not significantly changed this situation. The 'gay boom' did increase the visibility of the existence of homosexuality in Japan but the ways in which both men and women were represented remained fixed in the category of voyeurism. While there was some increase in the number of lesbian magazines such as *LABRYS, Magazine for Gay Liberation, Adon, Anisu: for womyn* and *Phryné*, due to the lack of resources and the lower wages that women earn, the opportunities for lesbians to produce, distribute and buy lesbian-focused magazines remain extremely limited (Ishino and Wakabayashi 1996: 98). Moreover, although discussions of homosexuality within the mainstream media did occur, the images tended to portray both lesbians and gay men as one-dimensional caricatures. And even these were short-lived as the media 'searched furiously for any available homo/lez copy' (Izumo and Maree 2000: 120–1, 128). Jonathon Hall also points out that these representations primarily centred around European and North American gay men, focusing on 'coming out' experiences while lesbian sexuality and discussions of female desire were conspicuous by their absence (2000: 42).

Heterosexism, feminism and the emergence of lesbian spaces

The perception that female same-sex desire is merely an adjunct to any discussion of male homosexuality is further mirrored in academic feminist texts. For instance, Yoshizumi focuses on male practices, with a brief after-word about lesbians at the end of her discussion. Moreover her examples of contemporary

cultural 'tolerance' are restricted to expressions of male and female homosexuality within the entertainment industries. She states '[s]olidarity among men has tended to be glorified, and there is a generally tolerant attitude with respect to cultural expressions of homosexuality (1995: 190–2). Miya goes a step further and distinguishes between the kind of tolerance for gay men and lesbians. She states, '[e]ven in the modern period there has been a fairly high tolerance of a homosexual sub-culture *so long as it did not "flaunt" itself* … . I would say the public is more tolerant toward male homosexuality than toward lesbianism' (Buckley 1997a: 162–3, emphasis added). In both the above instances, what remains clear is that tolerance is only acceptable for lesbians and gay men as long as 'they do not act homoerotically socially' (Blasius 1994: 39).

In addition, contemporary Japanese feminisms have been complicit in producing these 'homophobic oversights' (Martin and Mohanty 1986: 203) in their general refusal to engage with any debate of female sexuality – limiting their discussions to Japanese institutionalised marriage and the nuclear-extended family system. In so doing, feminist critiques, although covering a wide range of issues, continue to privilege and limit their analyses of female sexuality to heterosexual gender relations (Lunsing 1999b: 306).

Yet, lesbian spaces and groups have been in existence since at least the 1960s. In 1971 the group *Wakakusa no Kai* (Young Grass Group) was started and was mainly composed of women who identified as either *tachi* or *neko* which, as discussed above, can be likened to the Anglo-European constructs of the lesbian butch or femme. As Robertson explains:

> the 'male' lesbian is referred to in popular parlance as *tachi*, written in the katakana [borrowed word] syllabary, with the likely meaning of one who wields the 'sword'. The corresponding term for 'female' lesbian is *neko*,[2] but also a historical nickname for unlicensed geisha.
>
> (1989: 58)

As part of their membership requirements women were asked to fill in a form which included their name, age, occupation, address, height, weight, a photograph, a brief description and 'an image of a desired lover'. In other words, it acted as an *o-miai* (arranged marriage meeting group) and, at times, they were criticised for creating a lesbian group that was read as just mirroring existing Japanese gender practices (Hirosawa 1992: 114–15; Hisada 1992: 126).

In 1976 the *mini-komi*, *Subarashii Onnatachi* (Wonderful Women), was published by a group of ten women and was the first feminist-lesbian *mini-komi* newsletter. *Mini-komi* is a phrase used in Japanese alternative political circles to refer to small-scale communication media in contradistinction to mass communications media. What has remained fairly consistent is that the *mini-komi* network has endured and has been the desired choice, initially as an 'underground' but now as a more open, albeit limited, communication system. This system has now also been supplemented by e-mail lists and the internet. Among its first articles *Subarashii Onnatachi* presented information from a survey of lesbians that had

recently been carried out (Hisada 1992: 124). Another feminist lesbian network letter called *Za Daiku* (The Dyke) was published in 1978, followed in the same year by the publication of *Hikariguruma* (Wheel of Light). At this time consciousness-raising workshops were taking place (Watanabe 1990: 185–6). In 1982 the *Rezubian Tsūshin* (lesbian newsletter) emerged and the following year *Space Daiku* (Space Dyke), a once famous Tokyo bar appeared, although it has since closed, and others have come and gone. In 1985 the now established and continuing lesbian newsletter *Regumi Tsūshin* began. According to Hisada:

> The *Regumi Tsūshin* has provided the space for shaping their ideas, thoughts, and expressions. In this journal members contribute in autobiographical notes, history of their families, their experiences of love, their work, travels, and so on. It includes interviews, reports, reviews of films and books. Through these writings their experiences and discoveries as lesbians are freely expressed, whereas their expression as lesbians is restricted in the straight society.
>
> (1992: 126)

The catalyst for the publication of the newsletter was partly the International Feminists of Japan conference held in June 1985. Japanese and non-Japanese lesbians, frustrated by the lack of acknowledgement and support by heterosexual feminists, broke off and held a separate session which was to mark the beginning of the regular 'lesbian weekends' held outside Tokyo.

> I've trodden the feminist path myself. Before I really thought about my sexuality, I was a feminist. A teacher of mine was one of the old post-war heterosexual feminists … . She was the sort of feminist aiming for equality, male and female equality. I grew up listening to her, so I learnt about abortion and the status of Asian prostitutes in Japan and so on. So it was through feminism and obviously the AIDS issue that I came out. Things like AIDS are not just to do with lesbians but the reproductive health of all women. But speaking from the standpoint of a lesbian, feminism in Japan is a very heterosexual oriented movement, and a lot of the time it doesn't consider lesbians.
>
> (Kakefuda)

During the 1910s and again in the 1970s there was a push by some Japanese feminists to interrogate concerns directly related to female sexuality, although these discussions still took place within a heterocentric discourse.[3] The 1980s, however, saw feminist concerns 'shift back to the private domain of male–female relations' (Buckley 1997a: 160) in a return to gender, rather than female sexuality (in whatever form) as an autonomous field of inquiry (Hara *et al*. 1994; Inoue *et al*. 1995).

> I found it at first much easier to be in the lesbian community than in the feminist community, especially because I could talk about sexuality for the first time.
>
> (Kakefuda)

In an interview between Kanai Yoshiko and Biddy Martin they discuss contemporary feminist discourse in both Japan and the United States. Kanai points out that one of the main reasons women's studies (*joseigaku*) has not been able to grasp some of the more complex issues is because of this limited focus on the social construction of gender (Kanai and Martin 1993: 1–2), which contains its scope of female (femininity) and male (masculinity) to dualistic heterosexual imaginings. In short, Japanese feminists all but accept and rarely challenge institutionalised heterosexuality within the contemporary Japanese patriarchal family system (Ehara 1993: 68). This re-emphasis on and lobbying of gender difference as the single root of sexist practices has highlighted the assumption made by heterosexual feminists and some lesbian-feminists that Japanese heterosexual women now have a choice as to whether they marry or not.

> Heterosexuals have gone their own way, and unfortunately this has produced the very widespread idea that marriage is a woman's choice. In fact, marriage *isn't* an option for lesbians, they have no choices at all. So while there are a lot of issues we should be working on together, there is a lot that heterosexual women could be learning from us, there's still a gulf between us. A big gulf!
>
> (Kakefuda)

Although there is a gradual increase in the number of women who decide not to marry, as well as an increase in the divorce rate, particularly among older women, the pressure for Japanese women to marry is still overwhelming (Chalmers 1995; Nakamatsu 1995). Indeed, it is not an overstatement to claim that compulsory heterosexuality is firmly in place within contemporary Japanese society. The difference is that women, in particular, now decide to marry later than they did twenty or thirty years ago, particularly among the group of college-educated women (Fujimura-Fanselow 1995a: xviii).

However, Kakefuda's claim that marriage is not an option for lesbians is incorrect. Indeed, there are many women who identify sexually with women but remain in heterosexual marriages in name only, or who are bisexual. Naha, when discussing married women who come to lesbian bars, states that they would often slip out of home and make their way to the bars after they had put their children to bed (1992: 104). In Japan the main reason for continuing marriage in these circumstances is the effect divorce has both socially and economically on dependent children, since it is very difficult for divorced women with children to maintain a reasonable standard of living (Mackie 1995: 8; Lock 1993: 74). These circumstances are not limited to lesbians within marriage although lesbians would be far less likely to remarry. There is also the added factor that as a married woman one secures certain privileges because of one's social status.

Yet Kakefuda makes an important point, for there is a presumption that if you are not married, by default you are single, thereby subsuming lesbian sexuality under the general sign of women's (hetero)sexuality (Calhoun 1995). In doing so, there exists a homophobic blindness to different forms of sexed and sexualised socio-economic everyday practices. Thus, 'a big gulf' does exist, and not only

between the conceptualisation of the relationship between 'choice' and institutionalised marriage in Japan, but also between the privileges conferred by virtue of being heterosexual, whether single or married, and the oppression(s) those who live independently as lesbians face.

However, I am not suggesting that, as feminists, some lesbians do not see all sexual politics as significant. If this were the case the high level of lesbian involvement in both HIV/AIDS and women's health issues would not have occurred. Indeed, despite the academic Ueno Chizuko's comments to the contrary (1991: 120–3), many feminist-lesbians have been active and influential in reproductive health issues such as lobbying for access to safe contraception, particularly in relation to the pill and abortion. They were also instrumental in the establishment of the first Rape Crisis Centre in Tokyo in 1983. While some of these issues are general women's health issues, both the debates and the resources offered were directed specifically toward heterosexual women's requirements. Hisada refers to comments made by one lesbian who felt her needs were not considered within the mainstream feminist movement:

> issues such as 'single mothers' and 'abortion rights' which were raised by the WLM (Women's Liberation Movement) in their struggle against the *Yūsei-hogo hō* (Eugenic Protection Law) amendment [but] were far from her real interests.
>
> (1992: 123)

Moreover, there is a limit to where one can invest one's time and energies, particularly when there is little empathy or open political support for different positions. Hence, for feminists to ignore lesbians' involvement in their groups because they may remain closeted is to admit the lack of support many self-identified lesbians[4] receive in these organisations (Mackie 1980: 106). It has also led to the often well-founded impression that mainstream feminists actively distance themselves from lesbian issues in order to create a more 'sanitised' or more acceptable version of feminism. Over the years this has resulted in a growing separation between lesbian and heterosexual feminist groups.[5]

Defining terms

Throughout the book thus far I have interchangeably employed the terms 'lesbian' and 'same-sex desire/attraction' to describe same-sex attracted women both in historical and contemporary periods. In terms of this specific project, I asked the women how they would define themselves among a range of identifications, including the option of non-identification. They all chose either/or *rezubian* (lesbian) and/or *daiku* (dyke) and both they and I have used these terms within the contexts in which they were spoken. Whether they use these terms because they are 'politically active' or not is debatable. All the women I talked with were involved in different ways and to differing degrees in issues relating to their sexuality on a daily basis. To assume this lived and acquired knowledge is somehow

beyond or outside 'real' women's understandings is highly problematic and therefore I have no intention of characterising them as either anomalous or in opposition to mainstream notions of what it is to be a 'real Japanese woman'. Nevertheless, their choice of sexual identifications does need to be understood within an historical context of Japanese socio-linguistic meanings particularly given the negative and exclusionary techniques that have been employed over the past hundred years.

In contradistinction to the plethora of language used to describe – both in neutral and negative terms – male same-sex desire, the language employed to express female same-sex desire is far more limited (Valentine 1997b: 97). In the early 1900s the term *okama* was used for the first time and described male homosexuality but more specifically it was employed for those who expressed effeminate outward behaviour (Lunsing 1998: 280). On the other hand, Valentine asserts that *okama* described male prostitutes in the early Meiji period – although the former may be how the latter communicated their sexualised profession. Nevertheless, Valentine does argue that this categorising of gender attributes rather than the naming of sexual identity was more prevalent in the pre-1945 period (1997b: 97). Over the past thirty years, this term has changed and has been used extensively by the mass media to denigrate and mock gay men. *Kama* literally means a pot or kettle in which rice is cooked, '[t]he pot is considered to be shaped like a bottom, and its use in cooking further connotes a hot bottom' (102). This term also tends to refer to the stereotypical male sexual partner who is both the passive receiver of anal sex and who is effeminate and cross-dresses (Long 1996: 216). Valentine goes on to suggest that the equivalent term for lesbians *onabe* (pan) – 'is shallower and has a wider opening than a pot' – was an afterthought and despite media attempts it has never really come into common usage by the general population (1997b). These two phrases are also supposed to represent a comparison between the anus and vagina with pots and pans (Cherry 1987: 115) and a pun on the word *onna* (woman).

In Chapter 2 I discussed the recognition of female same-sex desire with the introduction of compulsory education for girls. These relationships were designated with the letter 'S' connoting 'sister', 'sex' or *shōjō* (prepubescent girl). Jennifer Robertson asserts that these relationships came under the category of *dōseiai* and were portrayed as non-sexual and 'innocent' (Robertson 1998a: 68). In contrast was the *ome* relationship which was described as 'pathological … the latter being not only explicitly sexual but also a heretical refraction of the heterosexual norm formalised in the Meiji Civil Code' (69). These terms, however, are no longer used other than in some male gay contexts where 'sister' (*onē-san*) is used among themselves to establish feminised 'family' associations (Valentine 1997b: 105) based on familial hierarchical arrangements.

The common understanding of the word *rezubian* (lesbian), usually abbreviated to *rezu*, is women who take on roles in same-sex sex scenes in pornographic movies or magazines (Ishino and Wakabayashi 1996: 98–100). The connotation of this term is widely understood in Japan amongst heterosexuals and lesbians alike.

> About ten years ago there was a Japanese singer who was a lesbian. Her for-
> mer lover came out and told everyone that the singer was a lesbian, and after
> that society didn't want anything to do with her. Everyone kept on saying
> '*rezu*' [lezzo], '*rezu*'. In Japanese the word '*rezubian*' isn't used very much,
> people say '*rezu*'. And that's what everyone called her in magazines and
> newspapers … . Everyone was fascinated. After that she vanished from the
> public eye. That's frightening, isn't it?
>
> (Marō)

The English equivalent of *rezu* would be 'lezzo' which, although not taking on a
primary identification with pornography, is nevertheless still employed to deni-
grate lesbian sexuality. While *rezu* is used as a disparaging term (Cherry 1987:
115) – and understood as such by lesbians who for this reason rarely use it –
Kakefuda argues that the term *rezubian* needs to be reclaimed.

> The first image people have of lesbians is through pornography, and some
> people see it and think it's okay … [and] because the image of lesbians is so
> strong, some people refuse to call themselves lesbians. In my case I really dis-
> liked this pornographic image, but if I attach a different label to myself, there's
> no debate, the preconceptions and prejudices of society won't be confronted.
> So I think it's good if I can present another image than the stereotype of a les-
> bian, and use this to break down the stereotypic image. So really, any label
> would be okay. But if society is going to use the word 'lesbian', I want to show
> them the way that I live, and make them recognise that my life is reality,
> whereas what they see in a movie is just an image. In other words, if prejudice
> disappeared, then 'lesbian' or any other term would be equally acceptable of
> course. But because prejudice does exist, it's better to use the term 'lesbian'.[6]

In medico-legal discourse, which has emerged from the early Meiji discourse of
homosexuality as a disease, both lesbianism and male homosexuality are usually
referred to as *dōseiai* (same-sex love).

Because those who deride or eroticise lesbianism for male consumption have
invented the majority of words that describe lesbianism in Japan, many lesbians I
spoke with preferred the use of the English term *daiku* (dyke). This latter term is
effective for two reasons. First, it gives Japanese lesbians a word which is not
associated with negative connotations and, second, it can be used both inside and
outside lesbian circles because the majority of Japanese are unfamiliar with it.
This is in contrast to the history of the term 'dyke' and where and how it is
employed within Anglo-European lesbian communities.[7] The pronunciation of
this word is also the same as the Japanese word for carpenter, and gives an added
meaning for those lesbians who use it. The image is thus of a lesbian as
autonomous, both physically and sexually.

> I use *daiku* [dyke] when I'm talking to people in cafes, for example, because
> even if we are overheard the people sitting around us won't know what it

means … . Usually heterosexual men and women don't understand. So we feel safe to talk.

<div align="right">(Marō)</div>

While Cherry asserts that '[l]esbians in Japan are at a loss for words' (1987: 115), as Marō suggests, with a little imagination there are ways to break through these limitations.

The fact that these women have to subvert and play with language attests to the fact that there are few positive representations and little information available about lesbian sexuality in Japan. Further, the little information that there is often has to be surreptitiously searched out. This factor, along with distorted mainstream representations of lesbians in pornography, combines to produce a climate in which heterosexuality becomes naturalised. This naturalisation limits the notion of choice to either being married or not married, the referent for normalcy being implicitly and explicitly Japanese women's relationship to men. Thus the concept of woman as lesbian is read as either excess or lack but always remains within a heterosexualised hierarchy of male/female relations.

In pornography where the 'act' of sex between women is eroticised for the benefit of the male gaze,[8] women are characterised as excess, going beyond the limits of 'normal' sex, but at the same time contained and fetishised for male consumption. On the other hand, women who are not fulfilled by a heterosexual relationship based on marriage and childbearing are often characterised in terms of inadequacies, somehow lacking and perceived as less than 'real' women.

Searching for information, from the 1960s to the 1990s

The connection of lesbianism with pornography is so strong in Japan that most women on first hearing or seeing the word *rezu* (lezzo) associate it with pornography. For Kakefuda this brought about dissociation between her feelings towards women and the pornographic female same-sex acts she viewed. She argues that 'because the image of lesbians in pornography is so strong, some people refuse to call themselves lesbians'. Of course this is not the only reason women do not employ the term 'lesbian' but it does go some way to expose the fear, anxiety and ambivalence such misrepresentations present women who are questioning their sexual desires.

The word *rezu* itself, then, becomes a shorthand for pornographic lesbianism, denying lesbians a psycho-sexual identity in which to claim a social space in which to move. For Asako, it was the pornographic associations of the word *rezu* that conjured up unpleasant images and she could not extrapolate her own feelings from what these images implied. On asking her where she first came across the word, she explains:

In magazines, I think. I also heard adults and even children the same age as me using not *rezubian* (lesbian) but *rezu* (lezzo) … . It had a revolting, disgusting sort of image. I disliked the word. It seemed to imply sex, women

having sex together, very unclean. I felt that I was different, that I wouldn't become like that.

Indeed, as Kakefuda suggests, the reaction of many women is, initially at any rate, to dissociate themselves from the language, viewing their relationships as something different. The problem, of course, is that this can lead to further feelings of isolation and separateness, for if everyone dissociates themselves, connections are much more difficult to forge.

On the other hand, the opposite can also apply. While these images may not necessarily correspond to how lesbians visualise or construct their own relationships, they at least are in a position to acknowledge that this form of sexuality does exist and have a point of reference to either accept or reject such portrayals. In other words, to some extent it is the naming which is significant. It is also a question of through whose eyes one is viewing. Lesbian pornography sets up a space in which the male gaze can be involved, either as the instigator of the act, or as a viewer of the movie or magazines, in both cases, however, within the confines of voyeuristic capitalist consumption. However, for those women who at some level identified with pornographic images, it was in terms of searching for some form of information. The fact that this information was often described as dirty or deviant by the mainstream, or set up in opposition to 'family values', nevertheless opened up the possibility of other kinds of sexuality existing.

> This may seem a bit strange, but when I was about ten I saw a poster for a porno movie. I had gone shopping with my mother and here was this poster with a woman sitting on a sea wall and a naked woman rushing toward her. My mother said it was horrible but I couldn't see anything horrible about it. It was called *Utsukushii Dōseiai* [Beautiful Homosexuality].
>
> (Mayumi)

Fumie, on the other hand, actively sought female same-sex representations. She had lived in the US for some time while a young child, and on her return to Japan was able to gain access to American lesbian fiction (such as Ann Bannon's *Beebo Brinker* 1962) of the 1950s and 1960s which was only available in English. She also sought visual images and felt no hesitation in openly buying magazines.

> I started to get some pin-ups when I came back to Japan and bought *Playboy* magazines. Inside there is a pin-up of a woman, nude, and sometimes there is a lesbian article for men. Like two women kissing each other or holding each other … . I would buy them and put them up on the wall. I always went to the neighbourhood shop and the whole family knew me and just said, 'hi'. I never paid for them. I didn't have the money at that time. My mother always paid for all the books at the end of the month.
>
> (Fumie)

Despite Fumie's ability to access 'lesbian' images through soft porn magazines, she was still faced with the lack of a language in which female same-sex desire could be positively expressed. Fumie's range of early experiences attests to the significance of marking the notion of 'lesbian' even when this may be produced through contradictory messages.

> I started a relationship with a woman I had met and it was very intense and I was really into this woman. That didn't last very long. It was just about a month and she started to talk about her identity, and *my* identity. She said that we were not lesbians. I thought maybe you're not a lesbian, maybe that's what you're trying to say … . So she gave me the words, 'not a lesbian', so then I could come up with these other words, 'I am a lesbian' [laughs]. It was like anything that had to do with a direct way of talking about lesbian, saying 'lesbian' was what I wanted. It didn't matter that she said 'you are not a lesbian' or 'you are a lesbian', all I wanted to hear was that word, because no one ever said it, there wasn't any word.

Once Fumie was able to connect her sexual desire with a word, there was no stopping her. For years she had considered the risks involved in relating to women were not worth the dangerous reactions she had experienced and for some time had been wary of both close friendships and sexual relationships with women. With the affirmation that other lesbians at least existed, her curiosity was once again raised and she was more determined than ever to at least attempt to make links. Nonetheless, not many women I talked with were as daring, or perhaps as forthcoming as Fumie, and finding information was a lot more agonising and often disappointing. Moreover, the fact that they had to search so hard worked to sustain the discourses and their own beliefs that heterosexuality was 'natural' and so the search became again, as with female same-sex pornography, one of understanding the 'deviant', as did Mayumi.

> [W]hen I started to wonder whether or not I was a lesbian, I started to read books on psychology and psychiatry.

Many of the messages that these women receive, whether explicitly or implicitly, are contained within medico-legal explanations which secure dualistic notions of the hetero/homo, inside/outside hierarchy, in which the latter term is marked by devaluation – as the outlaw – and is set up as outside heterosexual norms. Yet, for this exclusion to take place and be protected, the 'other' needs to be included in order to construct it as 'contaminated' in the process towards exteriorisation (Fuss 1991: 3). This act of expulsion, however, is never fully realised, for the centre relies on repeated sites of contestation in order to maintain its hegemony. Mayumi's search for information explains the contradictions and alliances implicit in what amounts to a lack, which constantly needs to be supplemented in the continual and constant reification of heterosexuality as a system.

> I read books to find something approving the way I felt, but most of what was written was fairly negative, referring to it as something temporary, or connected with hatred of men, *which wasn't a very satisfactory explanation*. (emphasis added)

The negative representations that were being offered to Mayumi were attempting to push her over the borders of the heterosexual binary divide through a medicalisation of her subjectivity. However, through her questioning and refusal to accept this oppositional logic, she disrupts the hetero/lesbian boundaries by claiming a different ontological presence, while still being portrayed as outside. On the other hand, when Izumi started looking for information she was faced with a situation where she was made to feel alienated, unthinkable, outside Japanese society:

> I searched for information, particularly from books, and I also watched movies. I was looking for other people like me, but of all that I found out, the only information that seemed relevant was from Western countries, and I was bitterly disappointed. I thought I wouldn't be able to survive in Japan.

The lack of information, which placed Izumi in a position of questioning her survival in Japan was embedded in the notion of inside/outside, hetero/homo, Japan and the West. At this stage Izumi perceived her situation in dualistic terms, reacting to a culture that would not allow her entry, or even a glimpse at the possibility of living with her sexuality of choice. At this point her only 'out' was literally to leave Japan, on the assumption that she might fit in within another culture, a rather tenuous assumption to make. A number of women voiced similar frustrations to Izumi. These feelings did not merely unsettle them but made several women question their ability to counter or defy the pressures of conforming.

> I scoured magazines and newspapers for information, but there was virtually nothing.
>
> (Junko)

> If there had been any information around, or I had known other lesbians, I don't think I would have wasted so much time and energy doing all of those *o-miai* [arranged marriage meetings].
>
> (Sachiko)

Therefore, for a number of women their first sexual encounter was not grounded in terms of a 'lesbian identity' but rather they were attracted to a woman/women and reacted to the specific situation. In fact, Asako, who only had pornography as a reference for lesbianism, made a point of dissociating herself completely both from the concept and the sexual acts that she imagined went along with being lesbian. To a great extent this dissociation of herself as lesbian was bound to her acceptance of the images that mainstream representations portrayed, that of a sexual act, often rough, at times violent, without any affection involved. Thus

Asako's explanation of how 'her love' was different and unconnected to dominant images of lesbianism is hardly a revelation.

> I thought that the general image of lesbians was completely separate from the love I was experiencing. Our love was pure and beautiful, totally different from the general image of love between lesbians … . So I didn't acknowledge myself as a lesbian at all.

Sex as taboo

In Japan, taboos surrounding discussions of sex and sexuality are significant and particularly evident within discourses directly relating to *kazoku* (family). 'The Japanese family' however cannot be simply read as a separate or isolated unit from the public sphere. And, it is far too simplistic to assert that women in both the public and private spheres do not discuss sex/sexuality but men in the public sphere do. One obvious example is that there are tens of thousands of women involved in the sex industry and all they do is talk and perform both lesbian and heterosex. Thus the silences are constructed for particular women in particular spaces. For married women within the domestic sphere, these taboos produce home (*uchi*) or family (*kazoku*) images that represent active sexual pleasure as the antithesis of motherhood and reproduction (Coleman 1983: 173).

This impression of the 'home space' as sex-free or desexualised is consolidated by the architectural design of Japanese homes and the way space is utilised. Most apartments/houses are quite small and with limited space, rooms are often used interchangeably.[9] It is not unusual to find the bedroom and the sitting-room to be one and the same. Yet, when visitors come to a Japanese home there is usually no sign of a sexed space. For example, at times *futon* (mattresses) are left out on *tatami* (thick floor matting), and at other times stacked away in cupboards. In one house I frequently visited I saw the same room used as a bedroom, a space for parties, the children's play area and a music room. This to some extent allows lesbians living together to keep references to their sexual activities invisible.

This desexualisation of the home space is certainly not limited to lesbians and in fact adds to the 'moral virtue' of married women in heterosexual households. On the one hand, the image of 'Japanese woman' is upheld primarily in terms of reproduction and child-rearing. Representations of the male, on the other hand, rely on his active sexuality. Thus, women are seen to be the protector and controller of the home space while men are generally perceived in relation to the public sphere through their work and/or after-work activities. The organisation of the Japanese home thus sustains the notion of female as mother, rather than as sexual partner – primarily read in terms of reproduction for cultural and material capital.

This results in a stark dichotomy in which good girls/women are set up in opposition to women involved in the *mizu shōbai* or the so-called entertainment industry. Thus, mainstream images of lesbianism which are found within pornography both work to construct lesbianism as anti-reproduction, anti-family, and

anti-motherhood and simultaneously represent pleasure and desire as the province of active male sexuality. Women, on the other hand, are divided into good/bad, young/old, mother/whore, and heterosexual/lesbian.

> The media portrays very young women dancing at discos in a pornographic way, and then jumps from them to older women, mothers. In other words, men like young girls who suggest sex, and then older women who will look after them. Women are mothers, wives or prostitutes. Men decide women's positions. That's why as a lesbian I don't like the image of women portrayed by the mass media. You're expected to become a mother, a prostitute or a cute girl.
>
> (Toshiko)

At the heart of the meaning of 'Japanese womanhood' is the wife/mother role, or the potential for such a role. Indeed, as Brinton argues, the dual roles of wife and mother in Japan are difficult to separate because 'childbirth is a much more inevitable consequence of marriage and a more integral aspect for adulthood for Japanese women than for American women … ' (1992: 99). Thus, lesbian sexuality, which does not depend on a notion of either complementarity or dependence on a male, remains unthinkable within Japanese mainstream discourses.

> Because the Japanese commonly view marriage as an entrance into adult society, moreover, statements of what it means to be a married person must also articulate views of the person's role as a member of society, and therefore touch on fundamental notions about society itself and the individual's place within it.
>
> (Edwards 1989: 7)

It is the processes of marriage, childbearing and child-rearing which, in contemporary Japan, largely define the concept of what it means to be a woman. This situation has come about through the romanticisation and glorification of the ideal of 'motherhood' and the Japanese housewife.

> I thought that being a full-time housewife was a truly lucky thing. I was the kind of person who wrote 'full-time housewife' in the space for occupation.
>
> (Chiho)

The concept of 'Japanese womanhood' is achieved through the representation of women's activities as concerned solely with 'the family', whether these activities take place in private or public spaces. It is important to distinguish between Western and Japanese notions of the public and private. In Japanese society, although women's roles are primarily seen as directly concerned with benefiting 'the family', these activities are not necessarily located in the private sphere. Nor are they interpreted by governmental discourses as private or individual activities. Indeed, policies dealing with 'the family' have consistently been a prime focus of

state policies and interventions since the Meiji period, with women themselves playing a critical role in the negotiating processes (Bernstein 1991).

Nevertheless, even with the large increase in married mothers entering the paid workforce, usually as part-timers, they are predominantly portrayed and often justify their work in terms of supplementing the family income for the children's education or prospective marriages. Paid work for married women still tends to be validated only if it does not threaten 'the family' (Iwao 1993: 80) and private and state childcare validates this view by its limitation on pre- and after-school care hours. Indeed, for full-time women workers childcare is not seen as morally correct and it is not unusual for women to be made to feel extreme guilt if they are not available for their children outside school hours (Coleman 1983: 132–4; Chalmers 1990: 62–86; Allison 1996: 96).

Thus the pressure to appear as heterosexual or to be interested in men is very strong and becomes more pronounced for women during the marriageable age period (*tekireiki*) (Lebra 1984: 78; Brinton 1992: 80). It is at this time that biological family members, employers, workplace colleagues and friends are particularly aware of both men's and women's marital status. The centrality of marriage and children that constructs married women's high status in the domestic sphere also has an important effect on their position within the paid workforce. For example, prior to marriage 'single' women are addressed by their surnames and their title *san*. After marriage, the term changes to *oku-san* (Mrs) or *oku-sama* (a married woman), which reflects her increased social status. However, in some contexts married women are addressed by their first name plus *san* to prevent confusion while their husband uses the family name plus *san*. Employers and work colleagues are also bound by social convention to shift the social markers and make the distinction in status. Management often interpret this shift, and here I am particularly referring to women workers who continue as full-time workers after marriage and childbirth, as undermining both their superior and in particular junior male workers' authority, thus disturbing the hierarchical harmony of the workplace (Chalmers 1990: 35). These age, gender and sexualised mores are also socially reinforced by the government, media and medical profession.

As stated the government offers minimal state childcare facilities – although there is some regional variation – and private care is extremely expensive. At the same time the media often make examples of women who are working if their children happen to be involved in any kind of 'anti-social' behaviour (Ehara *et al*. 1995: 27; Iwao 1993: 159; Niwa 1993: 80; Ōhinata 1989: 317). Reports by 'experts' such as medical practitioners, psychologists and advice columnists in the media often substantiate these views and are highly influential in informing women on how they *ought* to live their lives (Ōhinata 1989: 323; McKinstry and McKinstry 1991). Television dramas also validate the assumed 'norm' of the conjugal family unit in which women are characterised by the positive virtues of motherhood (Muramatsu 1986).

It is not only the government and media that contain women's choices to socially prescribed roles but also the complicit relationship with medical discourses that construct and heterosexualise women's bodies. The Japanese medical

profession is generally known to be an extremely conservative sector of Japanese society and has been criticised for over-prescribing and dispensing of medication (Buckley 1997b: 268; Long 1987a: 76; van Wolferen 1990: 54). Moreover, their attitude – 90 percent of Japanese physicians are male (Long 1987a: 79) – to women's health can be defined by an overall commitment to upholding the gender status quo by constructing biological essentialist explanations when linking women, motherhood, the family and paid work. Even among heterosexual married women there are obvious contradictions where women who work are caught between the rhetoric of equal opportunity and family obligations. While this dilemma is not unique to Japan the Japanese medical fraternity does play a significant role in the pathologisation of women who deviate from a Japanese woman's life-course, over the past twenty-five years represented by an M-shaped curve.[10] In other words, a stark disjuncture occurs when the 'traditional' mother with the associated feminine virtues of perseverance, the archetypical *kyōiku mama* (education mother) is constructed in opposition to the independent 'modern' selfish woman. On the one hand, married women are criticised and pathologised for their so-called obsessive or psychotic behaviours, generally described as syndromes or neuroses such as 'kitchen syndrome' or 'moving day depression' (Lock 1987: 143–5). Yet on the other hand, they are censured for breaking away from the isolation of their homes when entering paid employment, in particular the full-time workforce.[11] The more extreme critique of this latter portrayal is said to lead 'to the "masculinization" of women' (Lock 1990: 47), which is somewhat reminiscent of the emerging discourse of the Japanese sexologists during the 1920s (see Chapter 9).

Although research in the area of lesbian health has not been carried out in Japan, there are strong indications that deviations from the norm of 'Japanese womanhood' and living in a heterosexual family unit are seen as an aberration and would be diagnosed as such.[12] Under these circumstances it seems fairly safe to assume that lesbians would be hesitant and feel vulnerable when dealing with Japanese health professionals, as the following experience suggests.

> I had a myoma of the uterus. And I had only the myoma removed, not the whole uterus. So the doctor told me that I still had my uterus and I could still have children, so hurry up and get married. I thought maybe god was telling me to live an ordinary straight life, and that maybe it would be better to get married.
>
> (Chie)

Thus the medical profession and reports by 'professionals' work to sustain popular attitudes that proclaim, for example, that 'childless married women over thirty are assumed to be barren' (Perry 1976: 160), or 'less than a full woman' (Hara, M. 1995: 72), and it is considered 'unwomanly' (*onnarashikunai*) not to want children (Coleman 1983: 159). In short, they reinforce and emphasise motherhood and reproduction as a woman's *ikigai* (life's worth) (Lock 1993: 54) and in so doing add to the stress on women to conform and comply within socially accepted roles.

Indeed, Sachiko found this pressure the catalyst for contemplating marriage. Sachiko was in her early twenties in the late 1960s and needless to say chances to meet other women were few and far between. Sachiko's parents' expectations for her to marry, her feelings of loss when her female lover left to get married, and her love for her family – which translated into notions of family duty and obligation – convinced her to take part in a number of *o-miai* (arranged marriage meetings):

> [B]ecause my father was in an important position at work, he wanted a son to pass it on to, so I was supposed to get married and bring an adoptive son (as husband) into the household, and to that end I went to *o-miai* any number of times.

Sachiko did not want to get married, nor did she desire an intimate relationship with a man. Given the lack of options that women were faced with in the 1960s and, in comparison to what she saw at that stage as a life of loneliness, Sachiko resigned herself to the prospect of marriage. The primary motivation for Sachiko's decision was based on pleasing her parents, which translated into acquiescing to her father's aspirations that someone, that is a male, would continue the family line. Nevertheless, Sachiko still saw that she had 'choices', even if those choices were socially unacceptable and potentially isolating.

> I thought that because she [her lover] had got married that that was the end and I wouldn't find another partner. I could choose to be by myself, or try to like men. That was it. I wanted to do something for my parents, and I thought there was nothing for it but to live with a man, so that's what I resolved to do. But no matter how many times I went to *o-miai*, I wasn't interested in men at all, there was no one I could bring myself to like.
>
> (Sachiko)

Women in contemporary Japan do have greater decision-making in the timing of their marriage and when they have children, although the inevitability of their eventually doing so still remains firmly entrenched (Brinton 1992: 80). This influences lesbians as much as anyone else. The fear that produces an inability to express their sexual and emotional desire toward other women can influence lesbians to psychologise their own feelings.

> Finally when I was in university I met someone, and realised that I did have feelings of love and also sexual feelings. Even when I was involved in that relationship, however, I couldn't help feeling that perhaps I should be trying to put together a relationship with a man. I rang a friend for advice, but I just couldn't bring myself to tell her that I liked women, so not surprisingly I was told that my problem was simply that I'd never met a good man.
>
> (Mayumi)

Thus, women often interpret their experiences as something unnatural or outside 'normal' behaviour rather than being able to articulate their emotions in terms of

the meanings and effects that manifest themselves within the Japanese system of institutionalised marriage. Consequently, their focus of concern turns inwards and results in a questioning of their own normality.

> Although I had never had a relationship with a woman, my relationships with men always seemed strange, and yet I never really connected this with myself perhaps being a lesbian, I just thought I was a little strange.
>
> (Sumiko)

Sumiko's response reflects other women's feelings about the tensions and pressures in making an effort or trying to conform to a sexual system in which they feel 'strange'. This strangeness is usually internalised, taken up on a personal level, and individualised rather than placed within a socio-historical context. As a result, many women go through feelings of isolation and confusion, problematising themselves as different and strange in a negative sense, rather than interrogating the discourses that construct those differences. This then begs the questions of how same-sex attracted women have and continue to engage with these mainstream images and, given these particular constraints, how Western notions of 'coming out' (*kamingu aouto*) are perceived within a Japanese context.

4　Negotiating boundaries

Implications for 'coming out' in Japan

> In America and the West, when I read about people who have come out, it's as if hiding the fact that you're a lesbian is really bad. They seem to think that telling your parents is the way to go about forming a relationship with them, even if you end up fighting. I think that's really different to Japan, where it's thought that hiding it is kinder to your parents.
>
> (Kakefuda)

As discussed above, sex is rarely talked about within Japanese households. References to heterosexual kinship are, however, ubiquitous. Indeed, as Foucault argues, the lack of overt discussions about sex cannot be equated with repression, for a discourse on sex and sexuality has to exist to be repressed or seemingly made insignificant and invisible (Foucault 1978). Moreover, the assertion that gender/sexuality and kinship are mutually exclusive domains of study is highly problematic. Rather, as Yanigasako and Collier have demonstrated, they in fact 'constitute a single field' (1987: 15). Hence, all areas of contemporary Japanese kinship relations are premised on a hierarchical genealogical grid in which the heterosexual nuclear family is accepted as the ideal form.

The centrality of heterosexism is both overtly and covertly built into constructions of *kazoku* through such institutionalised norms as the sexual division of labour, gendered spheres, motherhood and work practices which sustain a particular family type as privileged. As such both the act of (hetero)sex and (hetero)sexual practices of individual family members as well as the ideological construct of *kazoku* as a bounded unit are kept under surveillance and normalisation (Foucault 1979: 195–228) within all areas of social and cultural discourse. This makes it extremely difficult to discuss sex, let alone sexuality in such familial groupings (Weston 1991: 43). Thus, on the surface it appears that 'coming out' to family members in Japan holds similar difficulties as it does for Anglo-European lesbians. Yet there are significant differences. Weston found in her study of lesbian and gay kinship relations in the Bay area of San Francisco that:

> Most of the people that I interviewed believed that deception has a negative effect on social relationships, undermining the trust considered a prerequisite for 'close' connections. They experienced unspoken truths as things that come between people, barriers that introject 'distance' into relationships.
>
> (1991: 44)

However, as Kakefuda suggests above, conceptualising the meanings and importance attached to notions of 'closeness' among family members significantly affects the meanings assigned to 'coming out' in Japan. For example, does 'hiding' equate with dishonesty? Is there necessarily a positive parallel between 'forming a relationship' and self-disclosures? And is revealing the 'truth' or confessing directly linked to concepts of 'trust' or doing someone a favour?

Elsewhere, Kakefuda has also argued strongly that it is important for Japanese lesbians to come out (1993), to break the silences that uphold heterosexuality as an assumed universal norm. Yet, as Weston suggests, '[d]isclosure turns out to be not simply a matter of producing truths about the self through confession in the Foucauldian sense, but of establishing that self's lesbian or gay identity as a *social* "fact"' (1991: 66). Morevoer, Kakefuda's two seemingly contradictory views only become contradictory if kinship relations are read as being constituted by values that take on the same meanings cross-culturally and trans-historically. Indeed, the historical context in which coming out for lesbians and gays in the US took place, according to Card, has shifted over time from more of an emotional identification to that of lobbying for juridico-political and social changes.

> Historically it was not the desires of lesbians or gay men for security that led to the closet. It was the desire of kin to keep things 'all in the family' to preserve their own reputation. We used to come out into gay or lesbian communities instead of keeping our secrets at home or locked in our hearts.
>
> (Card 1995: 209; also see Kennedy and Davis 1989: 253)

Thus for Japanese lesbians it may not simply be a matter of the longer one keeps a secret the more difficult disclosure becomes to kin-family (which I will hereafter refer to as kin-*kazoku*).[1] Although this is significant, the point is that the values attached to unconditional love and everlasting family solidarity have developed within a different set of ideological, symbolic and linguistic constructs, those of *tatemae* (outward or surface appearance) and *honne* (inside or real feelings). Moreover, for Japanese lesbians there are a number of conflicting definitions of 'self' in play. These draw on the strong influence of US culture and values such as individualism which in the ideal is based on a whole autonomous identity alongside 'traditionalised' Japanese values – highly regarded particularly among women – which include endurance, will power, and self-control (Lock 1993: 71).

The common understanding of 'coming out' is usually based on some kind of public statement or action – whether that be to friends, family, work colleagues or the media – that one identifies as a lesbian. It is to state a position to the outside

mainstream, either socially or politically, in order to be included socially and politically inside. As important as this public form of expression is, it also raises the question of how an existence can be declared when the oppression that Japanese lesbians face – and they are by no means unique – works through the production of discourses which function to maintain lesbian invisibility. Judith Butler argues:

> To be prohibited explicitly is to occupy a discursive site from which some-thing like a reverse-discourse can be articulated; to be implicitly proscribed is not even to qualify as an object of prohibition.
>
> (Butler 1993: 20; also see Chesler 1989: 187)

In Japan, questions of sexual difference have only been raised within the bound-aries of institutionalised heterosexuality. This conceptualisation is limited by assumptions that define sexed, gendered and sexual 'norms' as fixed and existing only *between* men and women.[2] In this way, lesbianism and homosexuality in gen-eral is set up *within* heterosexual discourse as its natural opposite, and as Fuss asserts, 'as its necessary outside' (1991: 5). In short, the heterosexual/lesbian binary is deeply implicated in the notion of inside/outside. However, while there is no conscious challenge to this model, a conceptual void remains, as Izumi's confrontation with her mother shows.

> My mother nearly had a fit, but I made it very clear that I liked women … . For a while there was a Cold War, but one day my mother turned around and said that in fact she'd never thought about whether she preferred men or women. She'd simply thought that she would get married and have two chil-dren, and that's exactly what she did. When I told her I preferred women, it was a big shock to her simply because it was something she'd never thought about. That's why she had trouble understanding.

Hence, how can one talk about a subject when the subject does not discursively exist? And if one attempts to create one, who are we talking about and in what ways and whose interests do the meanings and effects of 'coming out' serve? To name the lesbian is to set up a notion of 'lesbian' in critical opposition to that which it is not. And in doing so it is assumed that what it is, is simply in opposi-tion to the real or original position, in this case the naturalisation of heterosexuality both as a system and a practice, and so 'lesbian' is relegated to and expelled as outsider – not object, but abject – an unsubject (Butler 1993: 20). Therefore, if one remains in, and accepts the debate which posits lesbianism and 'the lesbian subject' as outside of, in dialectic opposition to, heterosexual dis-course there is no way of discussing lesbian subjectivity except in terms of silence, absence and lack, or on the other side of the same coin, as excess, trans-gressing the limits of 'Japanese womanhood'.

   While lesbians do not merely take on or imitate heterosexual norms, their sub-jectivity as 'lesbian' is intimately implicated in the construction of

heterosexuality in order for heterosexual discourse to function (Sedgwick 1990). Thus, for heterosexuality to be central and naturalised, lesbian and gay men cannot merely be on the outside, for it is their insiderness, the need for them to lie alongside, that necessitates their expulsion to the frontier, the borderlands. Indeed as Grosz asserts:

> As a concept, sexuality is incapable of ready containment. It refuses to stay within its predesignated regions, for it seeps across boundaries into areas that are apparently not its own.
>
> (1994a: viii)

When looking at Japanese society, however, there is more than one notion of inside–outside that confounds Anglo-European understandings of how narratives of sexuality are produced within the ubiquitous rhetoric of Japanese familism (*kazokushugi*). These are the socio-linguistic concepts of *uchi* (inside) and *soto* (outside) and their intimate associations to the terms *kazoku* (family) and *ie* (household) in Japanese mainstream discourses. *Uchi–soto* are used in a multiplicity of contexts to delineate one's insiderness or outsiderness in any particular situation.

> The term *uchi* describes a located perspective: the in-group, the 'us' facing outward to the world … . *Uchi* defines who you are, through shaping language, the use of space, and social interaction. It instantly implies the drawing of boundaries between us and them, self and other.
>
> (Kondo 1990: 141)

Kinship terms can also change depending on whether one employs them inside the home – among those within the home – or in a variety of situations outside (*soto*) the household. In fact, the home itself, referred to as *uchi*, also connotes one's attachment to the household. Hence, in relation to kinship terms, the Japanese language itself is deeply embedded in constituting and being constituted by the interactions of family members based on a hierarchy of age, gender and sexuality which to a large extent produces an individual's status in relation to the family unit within, as well as outside, the household. For instance, as one woman pointed out to me, even the feminist notion of 'sisterhood' is problematic within a Japanese context as a differential power relationship exists even between biological sisters which is based on an age hierarchy. A socio-linguistic concept of 'sister' depending on what one's relation is to other male siblings as well as to where one fits in the overall age structure of all siblings clashed, she suggested, with a concept of 'sisterhood' based on a universal equality.

Arguably, it is possible for people to move in and out of different contexts with relative ease in Japanese society. However, the fragmentation of self that to some extent appears to allow for greater pliability within changing hierarchical contexts also has its limitations. The insistence that kin-*kazoku* membership fulfils limited socially gendered and sexualised defined roles according to a set of vertical fam-

ily relationships sets up a situation in which an individual family member's ability to move into multiple roles is contained. While it is correct that an individual takes on multiple positions depending on her/his position within and outside their family, each of these individual subject positions remains relatively fixed within that particular hierarchical relationship. As a result, the strong delineation of knowing and accepting one's place in a vertical hierarchical family system tends to preclude the idea that the various roles one performs can work concurrently in any one *uchi* context.

> It is often noted that it is vital in Japanese social interaction to adopt suitable form, to know how to behave appropriately. In order to accomplish this one must define the situation correctly, and in particular know who the other is, where s/he belongs.
>
> (Valentine 1994: 102)

The difference between the two conceptualisations of inside–outside and *uchi–soto* is that the Western-informed notion is based on an oppositional dualism while the Japanese concept is described as a continuum in which there is an explicit acceptance, indeed, the absolute necessity to be able to differentiate one's social position by calling on the 'other' in the various processes of delineation. However, while one could argue that this notion of *uchi–soto* is openly founded on its own 'indispensable interior exclusion' (Fuss 1991: 3) that suggests flexible borders, this is not the case. Rather, flexibility is intricately connected to multiple shifts according to status, and status is grounded within heterosexual, gender, age and ethnic hierarchies. How, then, are lesbian bodies and the notions of coming out implicated in these two parallel concepts of inside and outside?

The above discussion seems to revolve around the emotional values ascribed to 'closeness' and 'distance' within Japanese kinship relations. Arguably, in Japan it is the functional differentiation of space based on sex, age and status hierarchies produced in conjunction with the changing negotiations of *uchi–soto* (inside–outside) and *tatemae* (outward appearance) and *honne* (inside feelings) that delineates how intimacy may be played out. In other words, *tatemae* and *honne* are not in themselves oppositional descriptive categories inferring honesty or dishonesty, but relational concepts that are used in the framing of appropriate disclosures within particular contexts. A tension emerges however in that although 'coming out' has emerged from a Western philosophical framework it has also been highly influential in Japan, and the social, political and emotional implications of this process have been extensively discussed within the Japanese lesbian and gay communities. One of the results, for a number of women with whom I spoke, is that there exists a conflicting set of values which at times places them precariously on a tightrope when dealing with their sense of self in relationship to familial bonds. Therefore one cannot assume that the emphasis and value placed on coming out and the centrality of declaring sexuality among lesbians to their biological kin in the Western context[3] can or needs to be transposed into a Japanese setting.

Eiko's explanation of why she has not come out to her parents exemplifies the intersection of cultural and political factors.

> My parents are in their seventies, so they will probably die soon. If I say nothing for that long, they can die with nothing having been said. The feeling I get from them is that what I do with my sexuality is a personal matter.

The fact that Eiko's parents are already elderly means that she does not see why they should be given a shock or why she should introduce the subject that has the potential of causing a rupture in their relationship. Implicit in such a view is that we already know what the reactions will be, that is, a fear of disappointment or disapproval, which is based on 'generally reflected cultural assumptions about gender, power, and specific categories of kinship relations' (Weston 1991: 52; also Hidalgo and Christensen 1976–7: 119). This disappointment can manifest itself from both positions, by her parents towards her and by Eiko in her reaction to her parents' not understanding.

What is particularly interesting in Eiko's statement is her description of sexuality as a personal matter in the context of Japanese kinship relations. If *uchi* does produce feelings of privacy and belonging and kin-*kazoku* relations are the allegory of all Japanese social relations, then one would suppose that this would be the very space in which one could expect acceptance. However, Eiko is calling on notions of autonomy/individualism in her choice of sexual preference that are at odds with heterosexual norms, while at the same time engaging with the 'sex as taboo' rhetoric that characterises discussions of sex and sexuality within Japanese homes (*tatemae*). In doing so she challenges the assumption that 'intimacy' is based on disclosure of one's true feelings (*honne*), that 'intimacy' is inherent or necessary to sustain close biological family relationships, or that *uchi* is the place where one can express one's real feelings (*honne*). At the same time there is nothing 'purely' Japanese about her responses but rather Eiko draws on a number of existing discourses in her explanation.

There is also a certain apprehension that disclosure would be a catalyst in causing an illness which at an elderly age could hasten her parents' death and such explanations are employed 'to protect' family members.

> How can I introduce Toshiko (to my parents)? We thought that because it would be the first time they met her, I should just say that she was a friend, and that we were living together at the moment. Anything more than that would be a great shock to my father and mother.
>
> (Eiko)

In Chiho's case, however, she did decide to come out to her mother and many of the fears that are mentioned above as well as the often-correct presumption of the intractability of gendered familial norms became reality for her.

> I've come out to my mother, and my mother doesn't want to know. She does-
> n't want me to tell anyone either. She doesn't even want me to talk about my
> divorce. She's afraid of what people will think about that, let alone about my
> being a lesbian. She thinks I'm an absolutely hopeless daughter, that I can't
> be trusted. I'm worn out from dealing with her, so now I'm in a situation
> where I can't say anything about being a lesbian (to her) and I guess I'm los-
> ing, losing emotionally.

Chiho's mother's priority is protecting 'the family name' and her mother makes it
clear that there is no room for Chiho's actions, whether they are divorce or stating
her sexuality. For Chiho's mother, Chiho represents everything that Japanese
womanhood is not – active, open, unmarried, divorced, lesbian, lacking a sense of
duty to the family, and unreliable. To keep any kind of relationship with her
mother, Chiho has to remain silent, the performance of which is emotionally
exhausting and painful. Thus, as Weston argues, coming out to biological relatives
'puts unconditional love and enduring solidarity to the test (1991: 43–4). Yet there
is nothing inherent within any family structure, nor any monolithic inter- or intra-
cultural meaning about the concept of 'love' to suggest that it is either
unconditional or enduring (Yanagisako 1978; 1985). Hence, what is at stake in
coming out in a society in which form holds precedence over tolerance, where
'knowing one's place' amongst functionalist familial bonds excludes the entry of
different bodies of 'love' and affective ties?

   In contrast to Chiho's feelings of enforced silence elicited through a notion of
familial loyalty by her mother, Marō recognises and uses the culturally separated
domains of affective ties within her lesbian community, and biological kinship to
produce feelings of both fracture and self-protection.

> I have two identities at the moment, don't I? One in the lesbian community
> and one in the real, other world. They're completely different, the values and
> everything. So at the moment I'm finding the situation very awkward.
>
> (Marō)

As Marō suggests, there is a conscious choice about whom she chooses to divulge
her sexuality to, but that so-called choice can be as divisive both for her place
within her kin-*kazoku* and for her sense of identity. Her reference to her some-
times awkward feelings of living two lives makes her feel torn apart, living in two
worlds, but has also led her to employ the notion of *uchi–soto* in multiple ways in
order to produce different forms of shelter for herself.

> Sometimes being within the [lesbian] community makes me very tired, and at
> those times I find I can relax within heterosexual society … . So although
> going home to my family can be a little boring, my blood relations and
> straight friends don't know anything about me, and there's a certain relax-
> ation I find in them not knowing. I don't have to say anything. The relaxation
> I feel in the community is the relaxation of mutual understanding. In the

community I can say something and be understood, have my situation under-
stood, and that's a relief. That's on the one hand. On the other hand, my
straight friends and blood relations don't know, so if there's something I'm
worrying about, they help me forget it. I don't have to think about it. Because
whatever I am worrying about, for example, in connection with my [lesbian]
community, doesn't exist in straight society … and that gives me the licence
not to think about it.

(Marō)

Marō's relationship to both her lesbian community and heterosexual kin-*kazoku* and
friends can be described as sites from which she can draw emotional, erotic, politi-
cal and material sustenance. However, the very fact that these relationships are
constructed in a hetero/homo opposition limits what she can create, give and take
while setting up the *uchi–soto* distinction. Thus, as her explanation suggests, the
way she integrates herself into them respectively is based on conscious decisions.
The feelings of belonging in her lesbian community are grounded in an active con-
struction of her sexuality grounded in an ethic of accepting difference, which is
constantly being analysed and challenged within the community. Therefore,
although there is a base of mutual understanding among self-identified lesbians,
this does not negate the differences that can cause as much friction as exhilaration.

That is, the lesbian community in which she participates is consciously con-
structed/created in order that she can communicate, meet, act with other lesbians,
while her use of the words 'real' or 'other world' implies something 'natural'
about the space she occupies in the heterosexual world. For any kind of lesbian
community to exist one has individually to put energy, time, money and emotion
into sustaining it while 'the real world' is based on already existing socio-political
institutions that support particular kinds of erotic and non-erotic practices. These
latter heterocentric institutions and practices also require constant sustenance and
maintenance to appear natural and inevitable yet are rarely discussed as social and
cultural constructs themselves.

Consequently, it is hardly surprising that Marō does become tired and uses the
sanctuary of her kin-*kazoku* in which to relax. Marō draws on her position as
daughter within her immediate biological family. As such, hesitancy in coming
out is tied up with her father's status in his workplace. Thus, Marō defends her
reluctance to come out on the basis of how it would affect her family as a unit. She
is also fortunate that her family supports her graduate studies both emotionally
and financially. For Marō, her kin-*kazoku* is just as important as her lesbian com-
munity, and being involved in one does not exclude or detract from the
significance or the intimacy of the other. At the same time the power inherent in
the position of her kin-*kazoku* status within dominant heterosexual norms stops
her from coming out to them, for ultimately her fear of isolation or being cut off
emotionally or financially from a family she feels close to, and the social impli-
cations for her *kazoku* as well as herself, is, at this stage, not worth the risk.

Contrary to the presupposition that lesbians and gay men cut off from or
'threaten' family relationships after self-identifying or coming out as lesbians or

gay men, the opposite scenario is more often the case. The issue I wish to address here is how *uchi–soto* is constituted through hierarchical relations, and how the power to destabilise 'the Japanese family' is not founded on the lesbian subject who threatens family relationships but rather the intractability of 'form' in Japan that purports to claim tolerance but refuses to acknowledge lived difference. Consequently, one of the greatest risks for all lesbians and gays is to be 'outed' and as Izumi's narrative illustrates, the notion of *uchi* and thus *soto* is as volatile and fluid as any other cultural construct and is subject to withdrawal if 'form' is not adhered to.

> Only my mother knows that I am a lesbian, and that is not because I told her but because my first lover, who was married, was getting a divorce and had walked out, so she came over to stay with me. Her husband came knocking on our door, confronting my mother. Afterwards, I found out that he had told her that I was a lesbian. At first I denied it, but then it all blew up, with my relatives getting involved and everything, so I couldn't remain at home … . There were threatening phone calls so I was frightened, and there were a lot of sleepless nights. My parents were divorced, and telling them that I was lesbian broke up the household still further which is something I felt terrible about. Then there was a two-year 'incubation period' when I was alone and after that I started going out to places where there would be other lesbians … . After that I lived with my mother again for a while, but we had a few battles of the will. If I was writing a letter she'd be trying to read it over my shoulder, that sort of thing. At that time my mother couldn't even say the word *rezubian* (lesbian) so she could only talk about 'that thing that you do' or '*that* friend'. But she seems to have come to terms with the situation, and now she just puts it down to the fact that I was strange even when I was a child.

Hara Minako (1995: 72) concurs with Kakefuda's earlier claim that the fear of parental disapproval is often the justification for a lesbian's decision not to come out, especially in the case of young women still living with their kin-*kazoku*. However, Izumi's 'outing' cannot be equated with coming out '[f]or a statement of sexual identity to be classified as coming out, a gay or lesbian subject must be its author' (Weston 1991: 49). Therefore, her denial reflects her initial fears in having control not only taken out of her hands but also in the recognition of how this knowledge could be employed against her, and as this narrative illustrates, her fears were well grounded. Throughout the events, her position as lesbian subject shifted to that of lesbian object displacing her location both as author and family member, even when returning to live with her mother.

  Izumi's explanation of the events is all couched in terms of lesbian as deviant. For example, when her lover's husband came and confronted her mother with Izumi's lesbianism, the implication was that Izumi was the real lesbian while her lover was portrayed as the 'pseudo-homosexual' (Wolfe and Penelope 1993: 17–20; Jeffreys 1985), lured away from her husband and family. Moreover, the distress Izumi felt at contributing to 'the break-up of the household' is premised

on the hetero/homo opposition, whereas in fact the dissolution of her parents' and lover's marriages was each grounded in a male/female breakdown.

Her departure from what she considered her family home, the verbal and emotional violence, the involvement of other kin-*kazoku* members and her 'incubation period' all worked to alienate and place Izumi as *soto* to her immediate family. Interestingly, her mother's final explanation that Izumi was strange even as a child links the notion of strange (*hen-na*) with the idea of outsiderness and difference (Iwabuchi 1994: 75). Furthermore, her mother's attempt to find a cause for Izumi's lesbian identification along with her lover's husband's 'outing' implies 'that sexual identity is "caught" rather than claimed' (Weston 1991: 24). Both the husband's engagement with her mother and her mother's search for the source of the problem remove Izumi's individual agency to construct self-definitions. Thus it appears tolerance is only possible when difference is silenced, ignored, expelled or contained in very specific socio-cultural contexts primarily premised on Japanese familial hierarchical structures.

Illusive bodies

> In Japan the correct values are oriented toward getting married and having children, *playing* father and mother to your children for the rest of your life. But in our case we're not *acting* out those roles, and I think that creates a big gap between general society and us. We don't have to *play* those roles.
>
> (Eiko, emphasis added)

Representations of women's bodies in Japan are inextricably connected to representations of lesbian bodies and both are associated with what Waldby refers to as 'socially generated "imaginary anatomies"' (1995: 268). That is, dominant images such as 'the Japanese woman', 'Japanese motherhood' or 'the Japanese lesbian' are grounded in a combination of individual psychic and culturally available forms of desire that cannot be separated into sex/gender distinctions (Gatens 1983, 1996). Thus, the 'imaginary anatomy' is the ideal, the un-real body that can never exist, or can only exist as a mis-representation in which its sustainability relies on 'the hegemonic bodily imagos of sexual difference'. Waldby uses Lacan's term *imago* rather than body image because she asserts:

> unlike the latter term [body image] '*imago*' does not connote a real biological body over which a cultural image is laid. Rather it places the morphology of the body, the configuration of its flesh, its boundaries and its relationship between parts, in an indissociable relationship with its psychic investment by the subject who lives that body.
>
> (1995: 268).

She goes on to argue that although these hegemonic discourses contain and constrain sexual practices grounded in biological sexual difference, the instability of the categories themselves, although setting the terms of the debate, makes

their complete dominance unsustainable, for they are lived bodies not ideals (268).

> When I was heterosexual I felt very strong pressure because of the difference between my own feelings and what was being pushed on me from the outside, but I think that was just an illusion, created by living with a man, created from myself in that situation. I felt that burden so strongly that it was inevitable that we would break up. I felt I was losing my freedom and suffocating, closing myself in. By breaking away from that I was able to free myself.
>
> (Eiko)

Eiko clearly articulates the point that the body, her body, is not merely an abstract instrument (Fuss 1989: 52) on to which appropriate gender norms can be inscribed. Rather, her resistance to heterosexuality, or more accurately heterosexism, is also firmly based on an awareness of the contradictory nature between the regulatory practices of specific gender roles and how they are circulated throughout Japanese society, in combination with the pressures she put herself under in order to conform to normative bodily practices. Thus, her ability to break through the limited notions of 'feminine desire', discursively contained within a system of heterosexuality, meant, first, the realisation that 'the standards of female bodily acceptability are impossible to fully realize' (Bartky 1988: 81–2) and second, a direct confrontation with the 'illusion'. The illusion, as Eiko enunciates it, is not only produced from outside her body, but through her body in which she herself is implicated in a self-surveillance that requires women's bodies to be bounded contained spaces that can be policed both from within and without.

> In contemporary patriarchal culture, a panoptical male connoisseur resides within the consciousness of most women … . [F]emininity as spectacle is something in which virtually every woman is required to participate.
>
> (Bartky 1988: 72)

However, it is at the very moment when the body is summoned that containment is at its most precarious (Best 1995: 184), and for Eiko this occurred through a process of choosing to recognise her desires, not as deficient because they did not measure up to standardised technologies of femininity, but as autonomous from and outside heterosexual desire. The following narrative explores what happens when gendered and sexualised roles are subverted or turned on their head, when gendered familial roles are exposed as a 'form' of performance.

Per-forming family: *uchi no kazoku*

In this account Fumie attempts simultaneously to challenge, reformulate and contain the concept of *uchi no kazoku* (my/our family) and what this means in terms of being part of a family. She also has a way of choosing her moments.

My father died after three days of hospitalisation. We didn't think he was going to die. But he died and everyone got together … . My mother wasn't living with my father [at the time] … . The relatives were here and we had a 'get-together' because we had to talk about inheritance … and things like that. We got together and Chie [Fumie's partner] was there, but I think she left the table because she thought she should not be in on the meeting, in the talk. We were talking about family issues and after we talked about that, I said, 'Well, I want to say something important now that we're all here because we don't often have a chance to get together this way.' And I said, 'Well, you know that my father lived with me and Chie … she [Chie] was living with my father for about one year before he died. And we were getting on very well and Chie really helped him. And the important thing is that I am a lesbian and right now I have a relationship with Chie. I don't know whether it's going to last forever and we don't know the future but I have this relationship that in the same way maybe, in the same way my sister has a relationship with her husband, because we live together and help each other. So I would like everyone to thank her for what she did and treat her as you treat anyone else in that situation, in the family.' That's what I said … . She [Chie] was doing what everyone else probably had the obligation of doing, so I thought it was really important to do that.

Fumie's admission in this context was not motivated simply by an egotistic desire 'to confess' or 'come out'. She had a specific objective and felt that it was significant and needed to be addressed. If declaring her sexuality was necessary to explain the context of her request then that was what was required, despite the solemnity of the occasion. Fumie exercised her position (her insiderness) within *uchi no kazoku* to dislocate, challenge the boundaries, although not the structure of what constitutes 'family'. In doing so, she sought recognition of her partner's largely unspoken role in caring for her father and most importantly a show of gratitude for the time and energy Chie had put into the last year of Fumie's father's life. At the same time, however, their lesbian relationship was not necessarily accepted. The decision was also precipitated by her father's silence before his death, '… because he died and didn't say anything before he died, I didn't want it to go unnoticed'. She challenged her family by using rather than defying the values ascribed to traditional notions of parental duty. 'She was doing what everyone else probably had the obligation of doing … ' Thus Fumie invoked the language of *uchi* in order to introduce Chie into the family.

Despite Fumie's attempts, Chie placed herself outside (*soto*) these events by removing herself from the room when the discussion of inheritance began. Chie not only saw herself as outside this familial relationship, but also outside the sexed hierarchical relationship that determines inheritance rights. If Chie had been a man, her position could be likened to that of a *muko yōshi*, a situation where a son-in-law moves in with his wife's family and takes on the family name.[4] Under the same circumstances, the attendance of a *muko yōshi* at this gathering would not be questioned; the reason being that he has an official status within the

Japanese kinship system. Even though Fumie attempts to draw an analogy between her sister's husband and Chie, the meanings inscribed on Chie's female body exclude such a comparison. Fumie herself uses the conditional word 'maybe' and it is likely this is employed precisely because, as two women, their relationship is not based on a hierarchical separation of gendered roles. Fumie and Chie's female bodies do not engage in or conform to butch (*tachi*) and femme (*neko*) roles. From her kin-*kazoku*'s perspective, confusion must have reigned because the bodies were wrong! The reactions of the family to this news were mixed. Fumie says:

> My sister was really interested and she was smiling … and my mother was sort of looking down and she didn't say anything, nothing! And my brother was sort of looking up.

Nevertheless, Fumie went on to say that from that time both her mother and brother acknowledged Chie's existence in her life, if not the nature of their emotional and sexual attachment.

In this narrative, *uchi–soto* worked to Fumie's advantage. Through eliciting gratitude for Chie's kindness to her father, Fumie placed her family in a position in which they were obliged to acknowledge the kindness and fit it into their understanding of the world. By declaring the nature of their relationship, she placed that obligation within her familial structure of *uchi*. What also occurred, however, was a *tatemae* (on the surface) opening up of a space within a hierarchically determined system in which the value of 'self' is still deeply embedded in the meanings and effects of what it means to be a 'man' or a 'woman' within Japanese heterosexual familial relations. Moreover, the fact that Fumie's father chose publicly to ignore both their *uchi no kazoku* style of living arrangements and the fact that it is usually children, more specifically a daughter-in-law, that traditionally takes on the caring for aged or sick parents also underscores the limits of such a sexually determined system. Thus, while this situation had the potential for allowing Chie to shift into an *uchi* context, ultimately her body, as female, and her bodily relationship to Fumie, as lesbian, cannot be accounted for within this familial formal structure.

Fumie's call for Chie's acceptance into the family was grounded in the assumption that Chie had carried out the same role any other 'daughter-in-law' would have been obliged to perform. That is, if Fumie could change the values placed on what it is to be a partner within a sexual relationship, as well as drawing on formalised values such as 'duty' and 'obligation' in order to validate her (Chie's) worth, her family would understand and accept Chie as 'part of the family'. Butler ponders the subversive nature of such a situation as:

> The repetition of heterosexual constructs within sexual cultures both gay and straight may well be the inevitable site of the denaturalization and mobilization of gender categories.

> (Butler 1990: 31)

However, why did Fumie's decision to 'come out', while strategically effective,[5] not fundamentally challenge the inherent hierarchical nature of the Japanese family system? Fumie was employing a reverse discourse in which she inverted or re-worked the conservative discourse in her favour. She asked her family to accept her partner, as they would welcome a heterosexual spouse, as well as demanding that social conformity be followed through appreciating Chie's efforts in taking care of a member of the family, in this case, the head of the family. However, the issue of Fumie identifying as lesbian and Chie entering the family as both lesbian and in a female body, remained – and by no means coincidentally – peripheral to her 'acceptability'. The fact that neither their own bodies nor their object of sexual choice fit into such a fixed hierarchical system highlights the ambiguities in the debates surrounding sex, gender and sexuality.

Throughout this book I suggest that while lesbians in Japan, in distinctive ways and to differing degrees, face tensions and contradictions, they can also call on protection through the deeply embedded concept of *uchi* (inside), whether in constituting households or within other *uchi* or in-groups. In so doing, they are able to invoke feelings of privacy and/or belonging. '*Uchi* is the world of informality, casual behaviour, and relaxation' (Kondo 1990: 141), a place where one can express one's real feelings (*honne*). Thus in relation to a household, there exists a feeling of shelter, safety and security. These values can then be potentially employed from one's various positions and understandings of insiderness, to create a camouflage from an outside perspective (*tatemae*), of what goes on, on the inside (*honne*).

The following three chapters, then, will explore the multiplicity of meanings associated with the notion of 'family' (*kazoku*) from both the mainstream and lesbians' perspectives. Are lesbians in Japan merely replicating heterosexual norms or are they confounding the very practices that serve to contain them? Or, does the realisation of the performative nature of gender, as demonstrated in the above narrative, open up possible new ways of 'familying' as examined in Chapter 7?

5   What's in a family?

The social status of 'motherhood' in Japan

> I look at my neighbours or young women and think they want to work for two
> or three years and then want to get married and have a child, and I really
> know how they feel. They are doing the things, the only things that they have
> really learned, because that's what they're taught, it's in them, they've learned
> it … [it's the one area] they are able to decide and not be criticised for.
>
> (Fumie)

Fumie's description and empathy with why most Japanese women take on mar-
riage, childbearing and child-rearing vividly underscores the ways in which the
'feminine' and the feminised heterosexual body are constructed within Japanese
society. Japanese women's and men's ability to achieve social recognition and
monetary gains is grounded in the acceptance of the heterosexual marriage con-
tract. In the case of Japanese women, adulthood is not realised until marriage and
childbirth has taken place, whereas for men the relationship between marriage
and social status is directly related to their position within the public-work sphere.
Consequently these status markers significantly affect their respective social
standing within the community.

The *nenkō joretsu seido* or lifetime employment system has been lauded as the
basis for stable employment practices in Japan. The reality is, however, that the
majority of male workers are not covered by this system and according to one
report less than 5 per cent of women workers are protected by these employment
practices (Skov and Moeran 1995: 13). Nevertheless, marriage, particularly for
middle-class men, determines their ability for upward mobility in the form of pro-
motion and increased salary. These privileges are not only tied to their marital
status but also to the period of time that they have been employed by one com-
pany. The linguistic term that describes this relationship of 'belonging to a
company' is known as *uchi no kaisha* (my-our work[place]). The implications of
the familial interconnections among the home-space (*uchi*), the paid workplace
and the concept of *kazoku* (family) are therefore complex and overlapping at a
number of levels. What is essential is knowing one's place within the domestic
and public for both spaces are imbued with gendered and sexualised values of

paternalism, obligation and duty and are said to occupy equally powerful positions. As such, familial-ised private and public spheres are inextricably entangled and informed by the Japanese heterosexual family system. Hence the social status which women achieve through marriage and childbirth, as Fumie suggests above, appears to offer Japanese women their only shelter from criticism by family, work colleagues, state policies or media representations.

While all the women with whom I spoke disagreed with the system of institutionalised marriage, they nonetheless found that the privileges bestowed on heterosexual marriage made them feel envious of the social, political and economic benefits that were automatically given.

> Marriage does have a positive side in that it can help stabilise the relationship between a man and a woman in terms of giving them a certain position socially.
>
> (Kumiko)

However, this stability only functions when wife and mother are conflated under a universal sign of 'Japanese womanhood' and supported by social structures that hold this ideal image firmly in place.

> Japanese mothers are supposed to throw aside their careers, no matter how promising, as soon as they have children. Men continue working, while women give up their jobs to raise the children. Women are supposed to be mothers before they are women. That's the impression you get from the mass media.
>
> (Toshiko)

Women are idealised as mothers, comforters and helpers within the family and virtually all discussions about women are associated with this primary role as carers, towards their husbands, but more particularly in relation to their children, and eventually their aged parents and parents-in-law. To do otherwise, to think about their subjectivity outside this construct, brings forth both social and self-criticism that is difficult to counter. As Iwao asserts, 'in a society where community and social pressures are strong, conformity to age-appropriate norms is the safest protection from criticism' (1993: 23). In short, whether among heterosexual or lesbian mothers, the call for maternal duty is ubiquitous.

> While I don't like the mother image, in Japanese society it's considered usual. So if I push the children's needs aside and do what I want, I feel guilty.
>
> (Kumiko)

However, this ideal maternal role is just that, an ideal (Skov and Moeran 1995: 25; Tobin 1992a). Yet this representation of the middle-class Japanese woman is supposed to encapsulate all that is Japanese womanhood.

Historicising the notion of 'Japanese motherhood'

In contrast to the above contemporary image, Bernstein points to the changing nature of the concept of 'Japanese motherhood'. She asserts that from even before the Tokugawa (Edo) period (1603–1868)[1] until well into the twentieth century, although marriage was an institutionalised norm, neither child-bearing nor child-rearing was necessarily considered a woman's *ikigai* (one's life's worth) or main obligation. '[W]omanhood was not primarily equated with motherhood, and motherhood was not necessarily defined biologically' (Bernstein 1991: 3; Robertson 1991b: 94–5). Niwa makes a similar point, claiming that within the Japanese literature of the 1700s, the term 'mother' was conspicuous by its absence (1993: 71). In other words, spousal relationships were neither static nor were individual activities necessarily biologically determined (Wakita 1993: 102). However, with the enactment of the Meiji Civil Code (1898) the male-headed household became institutionalised and premised on the samurai ideal (Wakita 1993: 8; Ueno 1987: 136–7).

Prior to this, only the samurai class was restricted to a system of patrilineality and so within Japanese society various familial forms existed such as the adoption of sons and sons-in-law and designating daughters as heirs (Bernstein 1991: 3; Ackroyd 1959; Lock 1990: 44–5; Tonomura 1990) and among the well-off there were instances of matrilineal inheritance (Ueno 1987: 134–5). Kumiko concurs with these recent historical readings and explains the changing nature of 'motherhood', gender and sexual practices in this way:

> There is a real double standard about sex, the image and the values attached. Japan used to be very tolerant towards sex. The European puritan idea that sex was only for begetting children didn't really take hold here, and restrictions on sex didn't occur until the Edo period (1603–1868), and those were only for the samurai class. Heirs were needed, and women had to be chaste to ensure that the child who was born really belonged to the father, … . The Edo samurai ideas of shame and chastity were taken up by the state in the Meiji period, and passed on to the children through the education system … . Even when my father was born, around eighty years ago, in his area it was common to marry about three times, and even women could decide to leave their husbands and take their children off to live together with another man. But Japanese women were heavily repressed during the Meiji period. Even in a society that frowned on sex, men had a certain amount of freedom, they could still buy prostitutes … but if women slept with other men and got pregnant, the bloodline of the family would be sullied and the line ruined. Raising children became women's duty and their only pleasure, and that kind of pressure is still very strong today.

Bernstein goes on to argue that it was during World War II and the post-war period that the construction of 'motherhood' became firmly entrenched in the polemic of biological imperatives (1991: 11–12). Yet, contemporary mainstream

discourses characterise and construct 'Japanese womanhood' as inextricably linked to marriage and motherhood as if gender and sexuality were static, trans-historical categories. As a result, this notion of womanhood is then set up in opposition to 'others', discursively portraying those who do not fit in as outsiders.

Gender, sexuality and 'race' in the Japanese media

For the women with whom I talked, a primary area of the regulation of gender and sexuality was through the ubiquitous deployment of media images.

> The media plays with images of women very cleverly. Until recently it was enough to be quiet and shy. Now women are sexy and intellectual, or the mothers in family soaps, or even more recently, Masako-sama.[2]
>
> (Toshiko)

Toshiko's comments are interesting because they point to the fact that the media too must now account for differences among Japanese women. How they account for these differences, however, still remains within the providence of appropriate feminine behaviours. While the representation of women in the media is more diverse, women are still kept in categories based on readings of their bodies within particular heteronormative and sexist contexts. Previously it was generally women as quiet and passive, heads lowered, taking up little space and acting demure that characterised the obedient and dutiful mother, wife and daughter in TV dramas, while in news programs this was achieved through exclusion. Present-day images, as Eiko notes below, are a little more sophisticated, (particularly in the case of NHK, the public broadcaster) but still rely on the relationship between (hetero)sexuality and particular types of women as consumable items.

> Komiya-san's playing a role that in the mass media is supposed to mean sexy, cute and intelligent … . She's a newscaster [a late-night news reporter] very smart with a very low and beautiful voice. She's allowed to inject her own opinion to a certain extent, although she's basically there to make the male newscasters look good, and has a different outfit on every day. What you could call intellectual fashion.[3] And you can always see her legs and her legs are really beautiful! The camera is always doing front shots so you're always looking at these beautiful legs … . As for being cute, she builds up the male guests and male newscasters by being self-effacing and by playing 'woman' a bit, while at the same time she gets in her own opinion. Cute in a good sense (*tsugō no ii kawaisa*), in the sense that she is using it rather than being used by it. She also puts out a certain sexiness where necessary, not a flood, just a touch.

In this instance, according to Eiko, the newsreader is performing a variety of roles. Her public appeal lies in her ability to act out the range of ideal images that are socially acceptable for Japanese women. Yet each performance – or simultaneous

performances, for none is enacted in isolation – is a disciplined production and thus contained to attract an audience of both women and men; maintaining the symbol of woman as support without challenging the male newsreaders' positions as 'professionals' (Skov and Moeran 1995: 44). That is, her body is both used and uses the available possibilities of socially appropriate feminine gender behaviour. It is no longer simply a question of presenting only one representation of 'Japanese woman', but rather that that representation remains inextricably linked to institutionalised heterosexuality.

The female newsreader is cute so that the male newscasters appear to be more knowledgeable; she is intelligent when allowed, and fashion-conscious in order to be decorative or to 'brighten up' the news. The female newscaster's role is usually also one of *kikite* (listener) when appearing with a male newsreader. Situated in this context she, as young and female, is used as a status re-negotiator, reconstituting the potential hierarchical differentials between the 'experts' in the media and the heterogeneous status holders among the spectatorship (Smith 1983: 76–7). Moreover, in the above example, Komiya-san's low voice, usually associated with masculinity, when reading the news is only fitting to denote the seriousness of dealing with political, economic and social events, a higher 'feminine' voice being incongruous. At the same time, this lack of 'femininity', in using a low voice and presenting news, is countered through the many shots of her beautiful legs. It is these very inconsistencies that initially appeal to Eiko. Thus, a paradoxical shift occurs in which the assumed power of the male gaze is dislocated or rather played back on itself, and a space is opened up to include the potential for a lesbian gaze.[4]

It is the small glimpses of intelligence, the 'beautiful low voice' and the legs viewed through a female gaze which attracts Eiko to this woman, although this is hardly the object of the camera work. However, what spoils it is Komiya-san's perpetual physical positioning and status in relationship to both the news as a male sphere of activity and her complicity in disciplining her body as cute with as Eiko suggests 'just a touch' of sexiness to maintain her position. Matsui Yayori, an influential feminist and journalist, concurs.

> I see more women on the television at prime news time these days, but usually they just smile and nod at the male newscaster. What concerns me is whether or not women have an impact on the definition of what constitutes 'news'.
>
> (Buckley 1997a: 134)

This point is exemplified in MacLachlan's discussion of how the authority of women's groups as legitimate sources of news is not taken seriously. MacLachlan, in her analysis of the television media's response to the rape of a twelve-year-old Okinawan girl by three American soldiers based in Okinawa, describes the different reactions by the mainstream media to information provided by the women's group, NGO Forum '95 and the Okinawan governor's office. What is interesting in terms of women's relationships to the media is that the NGO Forum '95 information was

generally not seen as relevant as compared to the governor's press briefings, which received overwhelming media exposure. When the media did decide to use information or analyses provided by the women's group, it was read by female newsreaders and according to MacLachlan '[t]his indicated to the audience that these stories were less important and [less] mainstream' (1997: 5).

Given that 99.7 per cent of the media editorial employees are male (Buckley 1997a: 252; Funabashi 1995: 255), women often have to compromise their politics or views in order to create a space for themselves (Buckley 1997a: 113–4). What is more pertinent within this discussion is the way notions such as 'cute' (*kawaii*) and 'sexy' (*sekushii*) are constructed in terms of heterosexual desire which then becomes naturalised through 'the aestheticisation and glorification of femininity' (Buckley 1997a: 13). This idea of a Japanese feminine aesthetic can be historically contextualised within a traditional erotic ideal in which it is the suggestion of the mysterious possibilities of women's bodies, which makes them sexually attractive.[5] Kumiko gives her definition of what sexy means in Japan:

> Erotic. In the case of young women that means lively and distracting to men. They aren't naked but wear mini-skirts that give glimpses of their thighs, for example. In Japanese society from hundreds of years ago, not total nudity but very partial nudity has been considered sexy. In the Kamakura period, Yoshida Kenkō [trans. Keene 1981][6] wrote about this in *Tsurezuregusa*, how sexy it was to glimpse the back of women's legs beneath their kimono, that kind of thing.

Within media representations in Japan, as elsewhere, being 'sexy' or 'cute' and the portrayal of heterosexual women's bodies is further imbued with issues of 'race' and class:[7]

> Have you seen the Mercedes-Benz ad? There's a naked woman sitting cradling a child, so you can't see her breasts or anything but she's extremely beautiful, and the idea of the ad is that Mercedes-Benz cars are treating safety as a primary concern. I don't think a Japanese company would advertise that way, use a Japanese woman in the same role … . We think of foreign women as being strong, indomitable in both body and mind, very adult. They have a strong sense of what they want, so for example, they choose the man they want to sleep with. They're sexy, they don't have that *kawaii* [cute] image of young Japanese women that makes Japanese men consider women their personal possessions. They're not cute, they're charismatic. Japan was under American control after the war and the media was full of American images, American advertising. To Japan, as a defeated country, Americans looked strong and charismatic. Maybe the present 'sexy' image is connected to that. Japanese women have to be *sekushii* [sexy] and *kawaii* [cute] at the same time.
>
> (Kumiko)

The employment of Anglo-European models in advertising is quite common in the Japanese media (Clammer 1995: 202; Creighton 1995: 135; Skov and Moeran 1995: 53; Tobin 1992b: 15) and Kumiko traces this phenomenon in part back to the strong influences of the mainly American occupation after the Pacific War. Arguably, Japan has also used a reverse discourse of Orientalism or Occidentalism to play with the stereotypes of 'the foreign woman' as 'other' in order both to attract 'Western beauty' as a consumable commodity while maintaining enough difference to contain the so-called uniqueness of 'Japanese womanhood'. In the above description of the Mercedes-Benz ad, the Western woman is portrayed as sexy – as in sexually alluring – through being depicted as naked. Yet, she is vulnerable, both needing to protect her children and needing protection from a safe, strong car. The symbolism of the car is quite clearly the phallus, as both the male protector and hunter (Skov and Moeran 1995: 44), and as the head of the household, the one who is ultimately responsible for taking care of 'the family' physically, emotionally and financially. Moreover, she, or rather the family, is also characterised as upper class, for who else could afford a Mercedes-Benz? These types of portrayals clearly set up white Western women – and it is no coincidence that Asian women are not used (Creighton 1995: 154; Russell 1991: 13; Skov and Moeran 1995: 53) – as sexually liberated and affluent. This notion of sexual liberation, however, is still always limited to freedom within a heterosexual family unit, under the auspices of a male protector.

There is also the concomitant nuance, as Kumiko points out, that a Western woman is free to choose whomever she wants to sleep with, intimating an inherently promiscuous nature (Clammer 1995: 202; Creighton 1995: 137; Rosenberger 1995: 152). For example, it is not at all unusual for Anglo-European women to be asked by Japanese men and women what they think of Japanese men's sexual prowess compared with the images of Western men as macho and sexually adept. Thus, these *imago* of Western women as sexy, confident and charismatic characterise them as both homogeneous and as the perfect bodies to emulate, while simultaneously keeping them in perpetual opposition. This is achieved by invoking cultural/racial difference to create quite distinct and contained meanings of beauty and sexual desire. This emulation expresses itself in a kind of self-colonisation.

The issue, as Bordo notes, is not only that contemporary norms of feminine beauty do change in relation to shifts in social attitudes and material designs, but also that the female body can be re-constituted through cosmetics and surgery into a predetermined object of desire by women themselves (Bordo 1993: 25–6). For instance it is common for Japanese models to change their appearance through plastic surgery on various body parts such as the eyes, nose, cheekbones, breasts, even navels (*New Woman* 1996: 40) in order to appear more Caucasian. However, while plastic surgery is not unusual among Japanese women in general, the tendency is more towards using body makeup, shaving, dieting and buying expensive brand-name clothes.

> Japanese society is a capitalist society and as such is trying to sell as many goods as possible. So that every day on TV and in other advertising media,

newspapers, leaflets, etc., we are bombarded with pictures and photographs
of women's clothes, women in swimming suits, or even women in swimming
suits who aren't selling swimming suits but juice or whatever.[8] When it
comes to selling goods, about 80 or 90 per cent of the images are of beautiful
women … . The women are always very stylish and European looking, or
even white people themselves.

(Kumiko)

This method of advertising is widespread. Although Kumiko goes on to say that
recently there have been more diverse representations of Japanese women in the
media, the goal is still the same. The objective is to create an illusion, an imagi-
nary body that can never be attained because it is a constructed image of the white
female body as bodily and material perfection, set in a 'dream world' (*yume no
sekai*) (Creighton 1995: 140–1) and many Japanese women internalise this beauty
myth until it becomes their real and seemingly 'natural' goal (Buckley 1997a:
13–14).

[C]ompared to ten years ago, I think Japanese women are appearing more
frequently and white people less. But then they look like white people, tall
with tight waists. Japanese women tend to think that if they don't look like
that, they don't look right. They have a negative image of themselves as fat or
small-breasted or whatever. They put themselves down. Fashionable people
appear before us every day in advertising, media designed to get people to
buy, and as a result, a lot of people feel under pressure to make themselves fit
that image too.

(Kumiko)

However, by never being able to achieve this imaginary anatomy, Japanese
women's bodies are constructed as lacking or deficient, less than a 'real' woman.

Compared to my sister I'm not very feminine (*onnarashii*). My sister is 156
centimetres and 42 kilos. So she's very slight and pretty. She was popular
with boys ever since she was small... but it meant that being pretty or not was
a big deal to me … I was seventy kilos … . Even my former husband said that
while I had a huge body I had a nice nature. Or that, while I might be ugly in
the eyes of the world, I was a nice person. He was always telling me things
like that.

(Kumiko)

As in Western and other industrialising societies, the images of women's bodies
are to a great extent constructed and limited through media visual images which
are encouraged and applauded by the fashion, cosmetics, health and sports indus-
tries. The large or powerful woman is seen as unhealthy, taking up too much
space, and is often met with scorn (Bartky 1988: 64). It is perceived as
'unhealthy' because women's bodies are supposed to be petite, slender, taking up

minimal space and controlled in movements. Indeed, for young women, small to the extent of being child-like.

During the 1980s in particular, but also continuing up to the present, the young, usually unmarried woman's body has been encapsulated by the term *kawaii* [cute]. For young Japanese women, the expectation of child-like looks with a coterminous naïve sexuality has been ubiquitous (Clammer 1995: 210). Kinsella defines *kawaii* as

> Being cute mean[s] behaving childlike – which involved an act of self-mutilation, posing with pigeon toes, pulling wide-eyed innocent expressions, dieting, acting stupid… .
>
> (1995: 237)

Kinsella asserts that this performance which she refers to as 'presexual' is a method that young women employ to put off the inevitable adjustment to their roles as wives, mothers and family caretakers (1995: 242–3). While I agree that this is one reason why women may appropriate this construction, it does not explain why in other spaces the same word is employed to mean overt sexual availability. That is, depending on the space in which it appears, the prepubescent female child-like figure takes on a variety of sexualised meanings. The presexual appearance is only defined as such within the private sphere, whereas in the *mizu shōbai* (entertainment industry) it is readily used to represent open sexual provocativeness and no one can fail to notice its ubiquitous presence throughout the Japanese pornographic industry. Nevertheless both these portrayals of child-like behaviour are set within the narrow containment of a male-dependent female sexuality. Moreover, there is the assumption that infantile behaviour is perceived as inconsequential, thus linking mind and body to the inhabiting of small and controlled spaces.

Media images are further promoted and sanctioned through the medicalisation of women's bodies. This can take the form of introducing diets, supporting and legitimising 'health' or beauty products, identifying neuroses which can only be cured by a return to the centrality of marriage and motherhood and through the general control of reproductive technologies (Rosenberger 1987: 179; Lock 1993: 63–6). Within this discursive framework, in which the point of reference is male desire, a woman's body needs to be contained both psychically and corporeally so as not to seep across its feminine borders (Best 1995: 184). Thus, the physical space that a woman takes up and where that space is located is closely associated with the standardised images of 'womanly performance'. For Kumiko, this was consolidated through her ex-husband's disdain for her bodily appearance and his derogatory comments, which not only chipped away at her self-confidence but also located her as abject in relation to both male desire and the self-internalisation of the heterosexual female norm. These feelings of self-disdain are by no means unique to Kumiko, as Fumie explains:

> I think there is a lot of hatred towards women's bodies and I think I've really been brainwashed by that. That is, to believe that I don't need to think of my

body … . And it shows in eating disorders and moving one's body, not caring, not taking good care of your body. All these little things in daily life … . And I realise that it comes from this neglect and hatred, just wishing your body would disappear [laughs].

Fumie locates the body both as a medium or text of culture as well as 'a practical, direct locus of social control' (Bordo 1986: 13). Moreover, her assertion that she has been taught 'to believe I don't need to think of my body' succinctly identifies the ways that gender roles are clearly set in opposition to the sexed body. The assumption thus remains that the body, specifically a female body, is inculcated with appropriate gender norms but nevertheless remains historically and culturally inactive within this process. Thus, when resistance does occur, which is constantly enacted in daily activities such as eating, dressing, unpaid and paid work, women's bodies are set in subtle and not so subtle confrontations with the image of docile bodies. Women also construct a psychic imaginary space that limits the kinds and extent of their movements. And so, as Fumie suggests, women's bodies in relation to food, exercise and bodily movements are confined and confine themselves to those spaces made available to them, whether that be in the kitchen, home, gym, beauty shop or workplace. Thus, the body is simultaneously one's enemy but also by its very imperfect existence an active substance/body of resistance (Bartky 1988: 65).

   This antipathy towards how both Fumie and Kumiko have been taught to think about their bodies within the context of a heterosexual discourse also needs to be placed within the framework of the desexualisation of women's space in the domestic sphere, which is also clearly reflected in the media.

There seems to be an image that women become more collected and understated as they get older, and they also become less and less sexy as they go along. In fact, women in their forties, fifties, and sixties are not allowed to be sexy on TV.

(Kumiko)

The distinct separation between the categories of wife/mother, unmarried young women, and sex industry workers in Japan works to produce married female bodies that deny, displace and replace female sexual desire in favour of reproduction. For it is in this bodily form that heterosexual women gain privilege and it is this body that is then set in direct opposition to active and autonomous female sexual desire which is represented as a lack or excess, both of these latter portrayals characterised in negative terms. Thus, within mainstream representations, lesbian desire becomes the quintessential 'imaginary anatomy', for despite the fact that they do not rely on a position in relation and subordinate to male desire,[9] lesbians are generally marked by male desire. These images are then disseminated through popularised cultural myths (Creed 1995: 88).

Media representations of 'the Japanese family'

These images remain despite the fact that over the past fifteen years the advertising industry has directed many of its campaigns to extolling the virtues of female individualism. However, as is argued in the recent literature on consumer culture in Japan, individualism is more often than not represented as a romanticisation of one's ability as an individual to make discerning choices in order to match consumer goods with advertised status ideals, rather than the consumption of different or unusual goods. Tanaka Keiko argues that:

> Whereas individualism (*kosei*) should be about each person acting in her particular way, in Japanese advertising it is used to mean a specific thing, such as wearing a suit of a certain brand, having a handbag of a certain colour, and having one's hair done in a certain style.
>
> (1990: 92)

This notion of individualism also applies to the family space where through magazine and television advertising women are encouraged to emulate 'Western' relationships through the representation of images that evoke an expansiveness, both in relation to the home space and emotional freedom. However, these images are firmly placed within a particular class, that of the middle-class woman living in a nuclear-extended family unit (Rosenberger 1992a: 113).

> [Media advertising is] a way to feel secure, I think. People feel secure because they are doing the same thing, have the same standard of living. Because they are doing the same thing, they feel that what they are doing must be right, that they must be happy. Like the structure of capitalism, that kind of lifestyle is safe.
>
> (Eiko)

Obvious contradictions emerge in that advertising encourages married women on the one hand to consume within the conservative rhetoric of the Japanese sexual division of labour while on the other hand to consume as individuals (Rosenberger 1995: 146). Moreover, the class specificity of these advertisements, which are directed toward an attainment of the ideal upwardly mobile Japanese wife/mother, (Imamura 1996: 2) sets up a further disjuncture with which working-class women need to contend. That is, while the working-class woman cannot financially meet the consumer images of the middle class, they are still targeted with a class-specific ideal of femininity. And as for lesbians as consumers, they are simply not considered at all. Toshiko explains that, in Japan:

> the mass media is 99 per cent made by men and controlled by heterosexual tastes and strongly reflects the domination of men in Japanese society. Women's opinions are allowed little room, the opinions of homosexuals even less. The image of Japanese women, from my point of view as a lesbian, is

one that is created to suit heterosexual society and particularly men. If television and magazines portray that sort of image, unthinking heterosexuals will think that that image is the only way to be and try to suit themselves to fit it, so media can shape reality … and no matter how hard we look we can't find ourselves there.

In contrast, over the past ten years in the US and Australia there has been a growing awareness of the consumer power of gay men, and to a lesser extent lesbians, and specific advertising campaigns have been directed toward the upwardly-mobile sections of these populations (Clark 1993: 186–201). Nevertheless, Clark qualifies this shift by pointing out that 'capitalists welcome homosexuals as consuming subjects but not as social subjects' (195) and as discussed below certainly not as part of Japanese families.

> The concepts of *ie* and *kazoku* are something I have trouble with. There was a program on NHK (*Nippon Hōsō Kyōkai*, Japan Public Broadcasting Commission) this morning where the cameraman had taken photos of one hundred families, seventeen years ago, for the *Mainichi Shimbun* newspaper or something, and he was beginning to take a new round of photos of the same families, going around the country ... . So this was the follow-up survey on the change in the family … how families had changed from the old large families into small units, which he didn't seem to think was a good thing. But that was all about 'straight' families, and although there are a lot of other different families now they weren't shown at all. I felt they weren't talking about us at all, and that's where there was a very strong impression of family as being only blood relations … . Modern families seem to be quite disparate, with not much contact between them, and the husband is hardly ever home. Now there's an advertisement out asking people to treat their families as important, which is serving to strengthen the family and go back to that style. But now there are many many different types of families, connected not necessarily by blood but by emotional ties, and people can get along very well as families on that basis. I really think they should just let people relax and form the sort of family they want to, instead of insisting that families can only consist of a man, a woman and their children. I really hate that!
>
> (Chie)

The Japanese mainstream media reflect and are part of the dominant discourses that portray 'the Japanese family' in particular ways. Chie asserts that she wants to construct a family, and wants to feel that she can live in a relaxed atmosphere in which her place in the household is recognised publicly through media representations. She also alludes to a number of issues which clearly draw attention to the constant changes that *ie* and *kazoku* have gone through in the post-war period and what it means to be acknowledged as 'kin'.

Japanese families have historically taken on various forms, such as the inclusion of servants and apprentices, the adoption of sons into the woman's father's

household (*muko yōshi*) or in some cases the adoption of a married couple (*fūfu yōshi*). Yet, it is interesting that there has been a containment rather than expansion of what constitutes a family over the past fifty years. This containment has worked through the nuclearisation of the family unit, which has limited the definition of *kazoku* to blood and conjugal relationships. While Chie questions the contemporary conceptualisation of what *ie* and *kazoku* means within various Japanese socio-linguistic contexts,[10] the sociologist Nakane categorically affirms the ubiquitous nature of the term *ie* when she states that '[the] concept of *ie*, the household, [is] a concept which penetrates every nook and cranny of Japanese society' (1970: 4).

Kumiko had an even stronger reaction to such media portrayals. This was precisely because she was attempting to live with the contradictory messages she felt as a daughter whose job it is to care for an elderly parent, calling on *gaman* (forbearance, patience) in order to keep the peace and satisfy her mother's needs, while inwardly analysing the effects that such representations of *kazoku* have on her life as a lesbian and a mother. Kumiko exploded in anger in response to my question about 'family' images within the mass media.

> I hate it! It makes me see red. In Japan every year on New Year's Eve there's a program on NHK called *Kōhaku Uta Gassen* (a singing contest between a male and a female team of popular singers), and every year 20 or 30 per cent of Japanese people watch it. The theme of the 1992 program was 'Family'. Everyone on the show was saying that there was nothing they like more than going home and relaxing with their families, that their families were their top priority, that kind of thing. It made me absolutely furious. I hate that programme and didn't want to watch it, but my mother, who was sick, was staying with me … and to her New Year's Eve wouldn't be New Year's Eve without seeing it, so I suffered in silence. I was so angry I wanted to kick the television to pieces. I get even angrier because I think that the government has a policy of controlling the people through the promulgation of this image of *kazoku* on television and through the mass media. In other words, people who are tied down within the bonds of *kazoku* can't do anything dangerous, like causing a revolution or opposing war. Men have to work hard without complaining in order to support their families, and women look after their families by doing all the laundry, working on PTA (Parents and Teachers Association) committees, taking part in volunteer activities, that kind of thing. The idea of family is used to stabilise Japanese society. That's why I don't like it. I hate the idea of the media using the concept to influence the choices of an individual. So I don't like that kind of Japanese family.

By setting up the idea that *kazoku* equates with peace, harmony and stability there is the assumption that all members of society will understand and accept their normative positions and social tensions will automatically be defused, if they are said to exist at all (Flax 1992).

Of course it has now been well documented that for many Japanese women their very involvement in the PTA and volunteer groups has been a strong catalyst for political participation in consumer, anti-war and environmental political action (Mackie 1988). Through such participation, a space was opened up in which women's political action has had the potential to be taken seriously. Moreover, given the media and government's continual re-invention of the mythic monolithic family and the limited access women have to institutional power structures, this kind of political action has often been extremely effective within the terms of these debates.

Kumiko emphasises the point that this involvement has generally been under the auspices of 'protection of the family', through the reification and naturalisation of what it means to be a *kazoku*, rather than as part of autonomous women's group actions (Nakamatsu 1995: 82). This has resulted in the maintenance of the status quo as the government, media and some concerned women's groups call on mainstream notions of femininity and masculinity within the family.

From the government's perspective, by creating specific policies which directly contain women's legal mobility – for example, the implementation of the 1986 Equal Employment Opportunity Act – the Japanese government is publicly seen to introduce desired policies while its narrow philosophical premise remains firmly intact (Mackie 1995: 10). The Equal Employment Opportunity Act has limited power and the act only 'encourages' employers to take up equal employment practices within their workplaces. There is also no legal redress, thus the employer is not liable for contraventions. As a result many women's groups have labelled the act, 'a law without teeth'. Rather, 'the law has encouraged employer creativity in legally circumventing its recommendations' (Broadbent 2000: 8), a situation which apparently still exists despite the introduction of new policies to promote greater gender equity (Prime Minister's Office 1999). This allows the government, first, legally to regain control over women's demands and, second, to implement policies that define Japanese women's needs and desires in terms of being a wife and mother. Not only does this create a homogeneous notion of wife/mother but also by default casts as secondary, trivialises or completely ignores any other demands by those who choose not to take on these roles.

Thus it is important to understand the effects that these images have on Chie's and Kumiko's ability to envision their role and place in such an entrenched conservative system. Their discomfort at the above media representations of 'the Japanese family' taken over a number of years on the one hand tells them that the notion of *kazoku* is fluid, yet on the other hand portrays *kazoku* as contained within biologically fixed categories. The examples they saw on television clearly presented the shifts that have occurred since the end of the Pacific War: a shift from a situation where the sexual division of labour was less strictly defined because the extended-stem family worked towards production of 'the household', to a more fragmented construction of small *kazoku* units (Wakita 1993: 101), based on a nuclear family form. This, in turn, has created a more separate gendered and sexual division of labour. It is gendered because feminine behaviour is seen to be associated with reproduction and child-rearing and full-time paid work

is depicted in terms of masculine roles. And it is sexual because of the assumed fixed nature of masculinity and femininity that is inextricably tied to the Japanese system of compulsory heterosexuality.

The fact that lesbian households were not portrayed is hardly surprising, but neither were there attempts to illustrate other kinds of *kazoku* structures, such as divorced and single-parent households which may not be socially condoned but are at least generally acknowledged to exist. Furthermore, there is a strong underlying push by the media to set up a norm by which other *kazoku* types are valued and assessed in terms of their social acceptability. Consequently, this sets up 'others' as anti-social, a situation that is also reflected and maintained in government and bureaucratic policies.

6   Consolidating heteronormative practices

Familial notions of the state, femininity and sexuality in Japan

Notions of the 'nation state' are often infused with symbolic meanings and metaphors that can be likened to familial genealogies (McClintock 1997: 90–1), and one could argue that this is no more so than in the history of the modern Japanese nation state. In Japan this is achieved in two major ways. First, through naturalised familial imaginings in the form of various hierarchical determinants – sex, gender, social status and 'race'/ethnicity – both in specific and broad monolithic representations of the Japanese family. And second, through the literal linguistic associations that have been made between *uchi no kazoku* (my/our family) and *kazoku kokka* (the family state) by successive governments in the post-Meiji period. What is implicit in both these constructions is the subordinate position of women in relation to men within the familial hierarchy. This is then further consolidated by the co-dependency of a heterosexual system under which these divisions are uncritically maintained. Within this nationalist milieu, conservative government policies, reminiscent of the *ie seido* (patrilineal household system) founded on a 'governance–obedience relationship', continue to frame the notion of *kazoku* (family) as the basic unit of Japanese society (Lock 1993: 56; Ueno 1987: 187).

The emphasis placed on policies that have attempted to re-establish so-called traditional 'family' values is partially motivated by government concerns about the increase in single households, the increase in the number of women remaining single, the decline in birth rates and the increase in the number of elderly people (Prime Minister's Office 1999). It is interesting to note that while the nuclear family is presented as the norm of familial relations in contemporary Japan, this is a slightly misleading representation. While the assumed meaning of a nuclear family implies a male and female parent with dependent children, there has been an increase in the inclusion of elderly parents living with adult children in the statistics as well as parents living either in the same apartment building, next door, or in close proximity to their children. Consequently, as Lock contends, the term 'nuclear family' takes on a rather ambiguous meaning (1993: 67). Thus, there appears to be an increase in what I refer to as nuclear-extended households and this phenomenon cannot be read independently of growing government influence

that is fuelling a more privatised approach to welfare, specifically in relation to methods of dealing with the changing demographics outlined above.[1]

These concerns are reflected in how the Japanese LDP (Liberal Democratic Party) government has chosen to prioritise and allocate funding. For example, the government has generally encouraged childcare for those women working part-time,[2] maintained inadequate social services, specifically in the area of unemployment benefits, and limited women's access to full-time paid employment through blindly supporting business interests at the expense of access and equity issues. The government has also initiated a shift from central government funding to privatised local services which is described in terms of 'family responsibility'. In contrast, there seems to be adequate monies for increased military spending (Fujimura-Fanselow 1995b: 14–18). However, in reality it is not 'the family' but women as 'preferred caregivers' who are held accountable for the care of elderly parents within the home (Lock 1993: 45–55; Buckley and Mackie 1986: 184; Mackie 1995: 7). While recent legislation on the care of the elderly does recognise that such care can not be managed solely within the nuclear or nuclear-extended family, it is likely that paid helpers will be casual and will tend to be part-time married women. Arguably, this privatisation of welfare can be likened to government discourses that 'claimed the home as a public place' during the period often referred to as Imperial Japan (Nolte and Hastings 1991: 173).[3] Thus continuation and replication in the 'modern Japanese family' can be read as a system of familial relations which, while negotiating its internal workings over time and space, still depends for its survival, indeed, its re-centring, on institutionalised heterosexuality. As such, it remains functionally linked to a bounded philosophical replication of oppositional gendered and sexual spheres, which through normalisation and surveillance becomes naturalised.

In such a political climate women as voters are ignored on an individual level, but are co-opted as a moral group voice in defending and maintaining the inviolable rights of motherhood. However, as was seen with the introduction of the 3 per cent consumption tax in 1989, the uncovering of the then Prime Minister Uno's[4] 'geisha affair' and the exposure of the Recruit scandal, culminating in the LDP's loss of the upper house election in 1989, the feminised moral imperative that the conservative government milked for all its worth resulted in its own political unmaking. Nevertheless, conservative government has continued, albeit in the form of ever more complicated coalitions, resulting in Koizumi Junichirō becoming Prime Minister in April 2001, the thirteenth leader in as many years.

These constant leadership shifts notwithstanding, the LDP government has concertedly tried to control women's reproductive rights. The dispensing of oral contraceptives until late 1999 remained restricted and access to abortion has been threatened several times over the past thirty years (Buckley 1988). In other words, there is a great deal of government directive toward how Japanese women *ought* to live their lives. While there are individuals and organisations that strongly oppose these government moves, women's groups – indeed most social commentators and activists – have little access to or influence over formal political decision-making (Lunsing 1999b: 301; Jain 1995). Moreover, voting tends to be

based on the relationship between particular family and small community business interests, and the ability of local politicians to be re-elected depends on reciprocal debts of obligation (*giri/on*) rather than on broader societal or philosophical principles.

Within this system, specific gendered and sexualised practices are integral to these processes. That is, femininity and its relationship to heterosexuality in Japan is grounded in symbolic and material investments that are directed toward 'others'. These diverse forms of 'social capital' (Bourdieu 1984) are articulated in a language of familial relations: for the sake of the children, family and ultimately the family nation. In so doing, references to kinship prioritise procreative sex, indeed reduce the act of heterosex (within the domestic sphere) to the single function of human reproduction within a particular familial type.

> I was born in Japan, right? And I was brought up by Japanese parents. So I was very conservative, and a very good little girl. I always did what my parents said and paid very close attention to the behaviour of adults around me. I wanted to be called a good girl. It was difficult for me to get over that. I only became aware of that tendency in myself after I had already had three children, so I really had a hard time. I really had to struggle with it. The first difficult thing was that at the time I was a full-time housewife, I didn't have a job. My life was my children. The only things around me were walls, and my only companions were the TV and the children. My husband was absorbed in his work, and he would spend a lot of time away from home. It was a typical Japanese 'salaryman' family, an urban family, a pattern you often find with families living in the cities.
>
> (Chiho)

Within this context, the general portrayal of a Japanese woman's life-course is presented as: a young woman who will graduate from high school, attend a junior college or university, enter the paid workforce until marriage or childbirth, rear her children, and over the last twenty years increasingly re-enter the paid workforce as a part-time employee with the potential obligation of taking care of one's parents-in-law or sometimes also one's own parents as they become elderly.

In all of these phases there is a central assumption and general acceptance that women's activities, whether in relation to education, the paid and unpaid workforce, marital status, reproduction, childcare or parental duty, are both self-evident and natural extensions of their potential roles as wife and mother. However, the wife/mother role is only socially legitimated through the existence of a heterosexual male figure, though he may spend minimal time both emotionally and physically with/in the family (Iwao 1993: 102).[5] This 'ideal' representation of the middle-class Japanese family is then set up in opposition to 'others', although these 'others' are rarely named or discussed. Chiho succinctly sums up the dominance of this system in the following way:

> In Japan there is a father and a mother and children, and no one can see family in any other way. Anything else isn't really family, but only a distortion, and those families that are different are judged by the degree to which they are different from the standard family.

The result of judging this representation as the 'norm' is that all other forms of 'familying' and household structures are virtually ignored or added on as an anomalous endnote to discussions about 'the Japanese family'. This practice is exemplified in Ehara's article 'Japanese Feminism in the 1970s and 1980s', where she makes the link between 'homosexuality and childless couples' in Japan (Ehara 1993: 59). This is another clear instance of Japanese feminists claiming the centrality of procreation under the guise of tolerance towards, in this case, these two groups' sameness simply by virtue of their presumed inability to reproduce. That is, while she mentions that alternative family structures are beginning to be discussed, her conceptualisation of 'family' and thus recognition of the existence of this 'modern phenomenon' rests solely on her own narrow definition of the central role of a reproductive (hetero)sexual ideal.

Other narrow descriptive devices are also found in an on-going literature that continues unquestioningly to accept explanations of difference given solely in terms of heterosexual female desire, or to limit explanations to such terms, thereby desexualising other practices of desire. This is the case even when Japanese women's voices themselves suggest that their objects of sexual desire may not be men. Nevertheless, there still seems to be the pervasive assumption that 'it's just a matter of meeting the "right man"'.[6] For example, Rosenberger, when discussing the seven out of thirty-two women she interviewed between the ages of thirty and thirty-nine who expressed their ambivalence to marriage, concludes that '[a]lthough a few had actively spurned marriage, most simply had not met the right man' (Rosenberger 1995: 165). This may well be the case, but I would argue that Rosenberger herself is somewhat indifferent to the possible implications of this woman's words:

> A 37-year-old woman who had gotten promoted in an advertising agency in the provincial city said clearly: 'I don't care if I marry'. I am making lots of women friends who are quite close. My friends and I talk of making a home together when we are old. My mother still calls with profiles of men to introduce me to, but I say, 'Just give it up, mother.'
>
> (Rosenberger 1995: 166)

While one cannot assume that this woman is sexually attracted to women, neither can one presume that she is heterosexual, single, nor automatically attribute and reduce reasons for not marrying solely to women's aspirations to continue their careers (Rosenberger 1995: 165). Moreover, while this woman may very well be planning a non-sexual community of older women with whom to spend her later years, it is more usual that Japanese older women go on trips together or spend their leisure time in each other's company (Kondo 1990: 133)

rather than live together. When discussing women's friendships in Japan, Toshiko explains:

> I think there are very few places where women can voice their own opinions. For example, women are told to shut up, or are told that this is man's work and that women aren't to interfere. And in the midst of this harassment, they [women] get together over laundry maybe, and find that they are really … they think, okay, we'll do something by ourselves. So after they get older, for example, in farming communities after the rice harvest is finished, when they have more time, they form ladies' societies, all women's groups, and they go to hot springs or do things. They comfort each other I suppose.

In contrast, a number of lesbians I spoke with talked about how they would cope as they grew older, and specifically discussed the idea of creating women's communities in order to promote sexual and non-sexual companionship and for mutual assistance.

> At the moment I'm involved with someone (*ren'aichū*),[7] so I'd like to live with my lover. But when I get older and lose that need for romance, and lose the energy for that sort of thing, I think living together with friends would be all right too. I think the way you feel changes according to age and the amount of energy you have, don't you?
>
> (Kumiko)

In other words, there are as many signs to indicate that the meaning behind this apparent indifference towards marriage has as much to do with female same-sex sexual desires as to 'meeting the right man'. At the very least the woman whom Rosenberger quotes clearly rejects the Japanese heterosexual nuclear family system. Moreover the perpetuation of the concept 'women's life-cycle', and indeed the very term 'life-cycle', suggests the assumed unitary nature of the process itself and in contemporary Japan needs to be broadened to include a greater range of diverse needs and desires. This shift, however, cannot occur while overarching assumptions about the structure and function of Japanese families overtly influence and direct bureaucratic, business, employment and government policies.

Employment and housing

In most workplaces, mainstream constructions of acceptable family forms apply, and in order to protect themselves many lesbians refrain from articulating the reality of their specific situations in an effort to accommodate conservative expectations. These decisions can hardly be read as 'choices' but rather survival tactics. Indeed, as institutionalised systems they have the power not only to devalue the importance of particular familial connections but also work to represent lesbians' lives as in perpetual conflict with dominant family values and thus have the potential to exclude them from the employment system.

The Japanese employment system is heavily influenced by notions of paternalism and attempts to elicit loyalty by calling on 'family values' such as duty, endurance and obligation. This obviously affects lesbians' choices to articulate their different sexual, social and economic positions, for whether in small, medium or large companies there is the assumption that everyone participates in the same kind of kinship relations. The fact that most Japanese lesbians do not identify their sexuality publicly, and so are assumed to be single heterosexual women who are potentially in the marriage market, means that they are perceived and reacted to through a mistaken premise.

> Heterosexuals can come right out and say that they're living together as a couple, but it's hard for lesbians to say they're a couple. There are quite a few women living together, though, so obviously it's not impossible to rent a place. You just wouldn't be able to say what the relationship was between you.
>
> (Chie)

When applying to rent or buy an apartment or house, lesbians who wish to live together often present themselves and are categorised as single women. As such they are not thought to share any emotional or financial responsibility. It is thus assumed that the women's commitment to each other is fragile and unstable, unlike a married heterosexual couple whose emotional and financial commitment is unlikely to be questioned (Izumo and Maree 2000: 148–53). Tsunoda also makes the point that '[b]ecause public housing is limited to family groups, homosexual couples are not even able to apply' (Tsunoda 1992: 203). Moreover, lesbian couples do not share the financial advantages offered to heterosexual couples such as 'family' benefits, which may take the form of employment-based housing allowances or dependants' tax deductions.[8]

> Special protection is also offered for those who get married. A wife who isn't working has special rights. For example, in many cases the husband works, and while the wife isn't working full-time she does have a part-time job that brings in about one hundred thousand yen a month. There's a special system for those people, and they don't have to pay any tax at all on an income less than one million yen a year, while the husband's company pays special allowances. In other words, they receive special treatment. So marriage in Japan has a very conservative nature legally and this protects the present Japanese system of heterosexual families and women staying in the home.
>
> (Kumiko)[9]

Indeed, whether lesbian or heterosexual, women are financially discriminated against in the paid workplace. The lack of equitable employment practices and remuneration for women affects all women in paid work.[10] Furthermore, most women are also discriminated against (financially and socially) in terms of how they are positioned within a company. The fact that over 90 per cent of Japanese

women marry at some point in their lives has a significant and negative effect on lesbians' access to constant well-paid employment since there is an assumption by heterosexual women, male co-workers and employers alike that female employees will eventually get married, take time off to have children and quite possibly leave full-time paid work (Nakamatsu 1994, 1995; Buckley 1993). These practices have obvious implications for lesbians who work either full or part-time. In the case of full-time work it is extremely difficult for a single woman – whether she is lesbian or not – to rise up in a company. On the one hand, full-time women workers who remain or become 'single' are caught up in an employment system in which the longer they participate the greater are the male–female wage differentials (Allison 1994: 108). In fact the gender wage differentials have actually increased since 1976 from 56 per cent to 50 per cent in 1988, (Buckley 1993: 358) which consequently impacts on male and female pension plans (Ōmori 1993: 83). Over time this results in a greater proportion of these women's wages being used to pay for housing compared to that of men (Saso 1990: 257). Although married women in full-time employment are in a similar financial situation, their economic survival is not usually determined by a sole wage.

On the other hand, part-time women workers, and many lesbians with children are disadvantaged because they do not rely on a male spouse for the substantial wage. In 1965 women comprised 9.6 per cent of the total female workforce whereas this figure rose substantially to 30.7 per cent in 1992 (Japan Institute of Labour 1992: 73). There has also been a steady increase in part-time women workers since the mid-1960s. While 'part-time' workers in Japan are officially defined as those working under 35 hours per week, the categories of 'full-time' and 'part-time' remain ambiguous. What is quite clear, however, is the lack of financial and job security benefits ascribed to part-time workers. Broadbent notes, however, that the majority of male part-time workers receive better pay and benefits and so there is a parallel male hierarchy evolving within the full and part-time workforce (2000: 11). The rate of married women entering part-time work has also increased significantly from 46.6 per cent in 1965 to 57.6 per cent in 1993 (Rōdōsho Fujinkyoku 1996: appendix 29). Moreover, out of the total number of part-time workers, women comprise 95 per cent (Kuwahara 1999: 385) and are primarily located in the retail, wholesale, finance and health industries (Japan Institute of Labour 2000: 19).

These practices rely on an ahistorical and pre-ordained notion of 'Japanese womanhood' in which employers assume that they know how the average Japanese woman will function throughout her paid and unpaid work-life. Such assumptions construct employment practices in which lesbians find it difficult to operate both socially and economically. One of the most obvious consequences of such a sexed and sexually specific reading of *kazoku* is the apparently inevitable separation of family and work practices. Thus, women do not enter the workplace knowing what kind of work they would like to do or are capable of doing, but rather enter with pre-conceived notions of how they will be treated and what will be expected of them (Brinton 1989: 553). This is particularly the case in Japan where most jobs are based on internal training schemes. When the treatment and expectations are

confirmed by sex-segregated, social and financial differences based on potential or even realised biological cultural imperatives, and consolidated through medico-legal discourses, employment practices are constructed as natural (Schultz 1992).

The availability of housing for lesbians is very much tied to their socio-economic status as women, since they are often invisible as lesbians. The difference between opportunities for heterosexual women and lesbians, however, is, as Chie explains, that lesbians are less likely to overcome socio-economic discrimination at some future date through marriage.

> In effect anywhere women rent is probably going to be of a slightly lower standard than what a man can afford to rent. Women live in cheaper places. Men get about twice the salary of women, so obviously they can afford to live somewhere much more expensive. So it comes down to finances. Women with good jobs are okay, but in ordinary jobs a woman's salary is usually much lower than a man's. They have to look for cheaper places. That's the same for all women, whether you're lesbian or not. But if you're heterosexual you can always attach yourself to a man and move into somewhere nice as a result. Lesbians don't have that option.

Other gender issues which negatively link employment and housing are large female to male wage differentials, housing subsidies by companies, family benefits, the non-availability of full-time employment for mothers, and the impact of low employment status on access to accommodation.

> Housing in Japan is very expensive, as you know. Before I found this place I was thinking about renting somewhere, so I went around some real estate agents. Because of the children I needed somewhere at least 3LDK or 4LDK.[11] But I was asked what my husband's job was, or told they couldn't rent just to me. Most real estate agents said that kind of thing. The other problem was that most landlords won't rent on anything except a corporate contract. In other words, they'll rent to a company but not to an individual. If they rent to an individual at all, it will be to your husband, and only if he's an employee at a top-ranking company. Wooden apartments or small houses aren't so difficult to rent, but as the rent gets steeper the owners get more concerned about your ability to pay and start to apply various conditions. I got fed up and decided to buy somewhere instead, so now I don't have to worry about being thrown out, only about paying my loan.
>
> (Mitsu)

Further negative factors affecting women's access to housing and employment are the social meanings ascribed to being a single, divorced and/or parenting woman. Thus, for lesbian mothers employment opportunities, and hence housing opportunities, are further limited by their stigmatisation as 'single' mothers and related to this is the lack of access to full-time childcare. Single women without children may also be limited to cheaper housing due to their lower socio-economic status.

However, they do have the advantage of being able to work full-time, and the possibility, depending on the size of and type of company they work for, of some form of subsidised housing, usually in the form of assistance with bond or key money (Fujimura-Fanselow 1995b: 145). This however seemed more common up until at least the mid-1990s although I am not sure how prevalent this is at present given the slow-down in the Japanese economy. The continued existence of single male dormitories provided by large companies does still disadvantage young women, who usually do not have the same housing offered. There is also reluctance by real estate agents to rent to 'single' women, whether lesbian or heterosexual, and as Mitsu and Chiho explain these are far from isolated instances.

> It was difficult for me when I was trying to rent this place. When you say single-mother families, they think, no money, tendency to make problems, they feel that they readily become problem families. That's the general view.
>
> (Chiho)

The assumption is that, as single mothers, women should only be engaged in part-time work, which would mean that they were unlikely to be able to risk negative value judgements concerning their mothering. These value judgements, which are often rationalised in pseudo-medical terms, for example, *bogenbyō* (illnesses caused by the mother) (Lock 1987: 144) and promulgated by the media,[12] are evident in governmental discourses of the family, where they may be used to limit state-funded childcare (Buckley 1993: 356; Chalmers 1990: 70–4; Coleman 1983: 132–3; Mackie 1989: 101). The working single mother is often portrayed as having failed in her duty, both as a wife and as a mother, and by implication is viewed as a moral and financial risk. This discrimination against women who are single mothers works in association with the shortage of inexpensive housing in larger cities further to discriminate against them.

Divorce and child custody

Japan's divorce rate has until recently been relatively low.[13] While uncontested divorce is not difficult, contested divorce – in the majority of cases categorised as 'divorce by conciliation' – makes up nearly 10 per cent of all divorces (Fujieda 1989: 63) and is granted in only 40 per cent of cases (Bryant 1988: 226). Despite the fact that child custody in contemporary Japan is overwhelmingly granted to the mother, the assumed contradiction of 'lesbian mother' means that the courtroom is likely to be the place where lesbian mothers would find themselves legally challenged by heterosexist norms.

> My children are out playing with the others every day, and if I told them that I was a lesbian they'd end up letting the other children know sooner or later. So I'm not ready yet to tell them that much. My husband is still around and things could get tricky.
>
> (Mitsu)

Thus the potential threat can be just as ominous as the actual challenge (Lewin 1993: 164). Within a judicial system that places great emphasis on the interests of 'the Japanese family', defined as a heterosexual household unit, a lesbian mother is likely to be emotionally and financially drained even before the question of child custody emerges. This latter presumption, and its links to comparatively low divorce rates, is partially confirmed by the numerous instances that I was told about in which many women remain in pseudo-heterosexual marriages. That is, in appearance only (*tatemae*). For instance, it is not uncommon for some married women who participate in lesbian or bisexual community activities to take on a pseudonym to protect both themselves and their children from being recognised. They do this, primarily for the sake of both financial security and to safeguard their children's future, while clandestinely gaining sexual and emotional satisfaction from lesbian relationships.

Historically, with the institutionalisation of the patriarchal *ie* (household) system codified in the Meiji Civil Code, kinship was based on the continuation of the household through primogeniture. As a result of this system, women who left their husbands were legally bound to leave their children behind. It was fairly common practice initially among the samurai class and then particularly among the middle class in the Meiji, Taishō and pre-Pacific War period for a woman to enter her husband's family's household. However, the marriage did not become official until registered on the *koseki* (family registration). Consequently, if a woman did not fit in with the new household but more importantly if she did not produce a male heir within a certain period of time, she would be sent home to her biological family home (Mackie 1997: 37). Conversely, since the end of the Pacific War, and with a more distinct separation between the public and the domestic sphere – along with the subsequent change in the role and status of mothering – there has been a reverse move to a situation where most women now retain child custody. Among the lesbian mothers with whom I had contact this was also generally the case.

I have found only one case of (male) homosexuality being used as a deciding factor in the determination of a court case in Japan. While the divorce was granted, the decision was not made on the basis of irreconcilable differences but rather on the judge's personal moral prejudice against homosexuality as a disease. He stated, 'homosexuality is something abnormal which should be fixed by medical treatment' (Tsunoda 1992: 206). Based on this account I think one can safely assume that other child custody cases in which a woman openly declares her sexual attraction to other women would be extremely controversial.

From the US and Canadian experiences, former spouses, parents and grandparents, have usually instigated custody battles. These challenges have generally centred on interrogating the moral fitness of a lesbian or gay male partner's status as a parent, the suitability of their living arrangements and their commitment to the children (Poverny and Finch Jr 1988: 118; Weston 1991: 192).[14] Furthermore, the fact that such a court case has not occurred does not mean that Japanese lesbian mothers are indifferent to or ignorant of the repercussions of such disclosure. That is, the majority of lesbian and gay men who have attempted to retain or gain

child custody in other countries, have had their fitness as parents subject to intense scrutiny solely based on their sexual practices and living arrangements, whereas, heterosexual practices *per se* are rarely examined or questioned. It should be noted however that in the US and Australia, despite the shift in who gains child custody, there is generally greater scrutiny placed on a mother's sexual conduct – heterosexual or lesbian – compared to heterosexual men. The moral status of Japanese motherhood combined with the popular representations of lesbian sexuality within an extremely conservative Japanese judicial system has obvious implications and has not gone unnoticed by lesbian mothers when considering facing the Japanese legal system.

The suppression of their sexuality by lesbians when applying for divorce is of course not merely a slip of memory, but a decision that is grounded in a well-informed knowledge of the potential dangers. These dangers, although not yet played out in Japanese courts, could lead to custody being allocated and based on what the judge deems as appropriate sexual behaviour and living arrangements. Moreover, given the kinds of judgements that have emerged in cases outside Japan, it is not naïve to suspect that child custody would be given to another family member, most likely the father. Advice by lawyers to *appear* heterosexual, as well as commitments in court to 'give up' one's lesbian practices, one's partner and lesbian and gay friends, may also be a serious consideration in order to gain or retain child custody (Allen and Harne 1988: 184). This is despite the fact that virtually all studies on this subject have shown that children brought up in lesbian and gay male households/families are no more or less well adjusted than any other child (Falk 1989: 946; Huggins 1989: 123–4; Koepke, Hare and Moran 1992: 226–7; Patterson 1997: 240–5). Notwithstanding these potential problems, the fact is that in Japan there are many lesbian mothers who have sole custody of their children.

Subverting invisibility: adoption

After marriage in Japan it is usual for women to register their names on their husband's or his family's *koseki* (family register). In the case of two lesbians setting up a household/family it is not possible to register as a household. This means that lesbians either remain registered with their biological families or are registered as individuals within a household. The family registration system, introduced in 1871, has functioned as a surveillance system whereby the government, bureaucracy, potential employers and even the family of the potential spouse have access to family records. The *koseki*, in combination with the resident registration system (*jūmin tōroku*), gives the government up-to-date access to information on every household.[15]

> It was created for control. So that the government can control the people in household units. You're linked into a household unit … . When a child is old enough to go to school, the child has to be shown to belong to a certain household, so you have to send off forms with the proof of this. And when a

woman gets married, she registers again as part of her husband's household. So when you're born you are included in that household. You need to show this registration, then, to enter school, to get a licence, to get a passport, to complete the residence form that is handed out when you move to a new area. I went from one ward to another and I had to bring along my registration to show them.

(Chie)

Thus day-to-day activities such as enrolling children at school, applying for jobs, driver's licences and passports, or moving to new areas entail showing proof of family and resident registration (White 1992: 80). Failure to register can also affect one's ability to access loans or claim benefits for children. But this is not the only way in which lesbians are both under surveillance and yet made invisible as lesbians. The national census has no category for women outside 'married', 'divorced', 'widowed', or 'single'. Households included in the census are: relatives' households, other households, non-relatives' or single households (*Japanese Women Today* 1990: 5).[16] Hence lesbian invisibility is officially consolidated through a census collection that is limited by a conceptual framework based on monogamous heterosexuality. By refusing to acknowledge the lesbian household, while at the same time threatening lesbian 'exposure', the government enforces lesbian silence.

One way in which lesbians are negotiating and subverting the household registration system is through the process of adoption.[17] Adult adoption is historically not unusual in Japan (Bachnik 1983: 63; Lebra 1992: 54; 1989; Smith 1983: 90) and generally occurs when a son-in-law moves in with his wife's family and assumes their family name. This is known as *muko yōshi*. The situation usually occurs when there are no sons in the woman's family and so a son, under the guise of a husband, is adopted in order to continue the family name and/or business. Another form is the case where there are no children. In this situation a 'son' can be adopted as *yōshi*. The aim of these arrangements is to secure and perpetuate a household/family through a male.[18] At the same time it has often been pointed out that adoption of a son/husband reduces the social status of the new husband (Hamabata 1990: 44–5; Kondo 1990: 125–6; Lebra 1984: 36). What is interesting in the present context, however, is the way in which lesbians have used the system of adoption to increase their legal and social recognition as legitimate family members.

Lesbian adoptions usually entail an older partner legally adopting a younger partner. Through adoption the couple become a 'legitimate' *kazoku*, if not a recognised lesbian family/household. The consequences of employing this method to create a recognised household between two women are significant. Most importantly, the process of adoption allows lesbian partners to name each other as 'next of kin'.[19] From my discussions, there does not appear to be any limitation on the age difference between the women in order for an adoption to take place. However, according to the 'Special Adoption Regulation' introduced in 1987, 'the adopted "child" can be older than the adoptive parent(s) so long as they are not of

the same direct blood lineage' (Buckley 1997a: 99). Thus, lesbian partners may have legal access to hospital visiting and to information and decisions relating to serious accidents and illnesses experienced by their partners.[20] In the event of death, adoption allows lesbian partners some rights concerning the funeral process, including such things as attendance at the partner's funeral in a familial capacity, the power to make decisions about a partner's ashes and the place of burial,[21] and the right to social recognition of the relationship, even if the lesbian nature of the relationship remains hidden.

Nevertheless, this strategy, which is used by some lesbians to gain a modicum of legal and social recognition of the importance of their relationship, also works to perpetuate the myth that lesbians do not exist. Lesbian adoption may thus have negative effects on lesbians' lives in the long term. Presumably, it also creates a hierarchy, the adopter and adoptee not being legally equal. However, at the present time there are few avenues available to lesbian partners through which to gain some form of 'protection' of partners' rights. Although this form of adoption is still rare among lesbians its increasing popularity suggests that lesbians are both aware of, and dissatisfied with, their precarious legal position when faced with situations that are still viewed within a strictly bounded notion of what it means to be a *kazoku*.

> Lesbians just float. They don't get married so they don't become part of a husband's household and stay registered under their father's name. But in fact, they're not at home because they're off living with a lover. There's no reason that that household shouldn't be registered, but it's simply not recognised.
>
> (Chie)

In a rigidly organised social system in which it is difficult for lesbians to create any space for themselves, the use of the adoption system can be seen as an innovative inside-outside strategy, both in terms of shifting from a *soto* to *uchi* position, as well as dislodging heterosexual norms. Whether adoption becomes more common among lesbians, thus raising the possibility that governments become aware of its subversive nature, remains to be seen. In the current context in which lesbian couples negotiate their spaces within mainstream society, and in which governments and policy makers formulate their boundaries, it is unlikely that adoption will prove to be any more than it is at present: a legal loophole for lesbians and, perhaps, a potential source of embarrassment for governments.

One of the major aims in this chapter has been to draw out the intimate connections between the modern history of the Japanese state apparatus and the limited representations of Japanese households; and by doing so, to illustrate how a relatively fixed construction of 'the Japanese family' has been employed in various discourses to serve particular socio-economic and political interests. However, my objective has not been to discredit the legitimacy of a notion of 'family'. Rather my critique is based on the ways a monolithic construction is used as a device by certain groups to maintain benefits, and in so doing oppress

others (Bordo 1986: 115). In Japan, this has been achieved through the continuous, albeit changing, production of technologies of femininity and masculinity with associated status markers, including sex, sexuality, age and race/ethnicity. These have been employed to project an image of 'the Japanese family' on to a range of social practices through discourses that work to emulate particular hierarchical structures.

7   Re-creating families

The language of *kazoku* among lesbians

If Japanese women are defined by the presumption of their heterosexuality, then there is clearly a binary opposition working in which those women who do not fit into this representation are 'not women'. This would then suggest that lesbians in Japan are in a position of non-being, an ontological vacuum, set outside or more accurately beyond the boundaries of heterosexual Japanese society. If this is the case, how do/can lesbian bodies fit into, beside, against dominant discourses of the Japanese family?

For Midori, the term *kazoku* (family) is closely associated and predicated on the *ie seido* (household system). Although she has a desire to be part of some kind of familial grouping, there is also strong resistance to feeling any connection to, or including herself in, a system that refuses to recognise her existence simply because she is neither involved in a male/female marital relationship nor related biologically or legally considered 'kin' to those with whom she shares her more intimate emotional and physical spaces. Indeed, Midori is cynical about the applicability of the term *kazoku* to describe various lesbians' living arrangements.

> As to whether I like or dislike the term '*kazoku*', thinking about it I would have to say I dislike it. This is because the term *kazoku* suggests blood relations, implying a household system (*ie seido*), and the term *ie* (household) in itself holds such significance. At the moment I am living in a *kazoku* made up of my partner and a child, and because this type of image is so different from that of my blood relations I have trouble tying together the word and the image. The term *kazoku* simply doesn't fit the situation, and that's why … . I think the term *shinzoku* (family of the heart, rather than a family under the same roof, as *kazoku* suggests) is more appropriate. I don't really like the '*zoku*' (tribe) part of the word either, but what I'm trying to explain is a family, a gathering of people attached by ties of the heart, is an image matching more closely to my experience at the moment. *Kazoku* on the other hand always suggests the environment where I was born and grew up in. There are three of us living together at the moment, and my partner and her child are blood relations, and therefore the *kazoku* image is very strong. I'm part of

this in that my partner considers me to be part of that group so I suppose we're a 'family', but I can't accept the term *kazoku* so easily at the moment.

Midori points to the significance of how language is constructed within particular historical moments in which there are dominant gendered/sexual norms. Although Midori lives with her partner and her partner's child in the same house, she rejects the narrow limits of the word *kazoku* (*ka* meaning house/household, and read by itself the same as *ie*) as being directly associated with a patrilineal and patriarchal set of household relationships, in which the household head generally holds power and privilege by virtue of his age and bodily status as a man. Midori, however, is interested in developing a domestic arrangement in which her daily experiences can be grounded in and reflect the values and present living arrangements she has chosen.

As an alternative, she suggests the use of the term *shinzoku*. Although *shinzoku* literally means a relationship by blood and marriage or kinship, Midori proposes a substitution of the first *kanji* (Chinese character) of '*shin*', referring to closeness or relatives, with another phonetically similar *kanji*, '*shin*', meaning heart, mind or spirit. She argues that through this substitution of meanings a broader notion of 'Japanese families' can include the emotional as well as the biological basis for why different people may choose to share different phases of their lives. Midori believes it is not enough to simply reconceptualise the existing language to include a different form of *kazoku* structure but to take a step further by reformulating the language itself and simultaneously defining new assumptions within it. She thus argues for a new space in language that is not based on the economic, cultural, and historical legacies of the *ie seido*.

Although it is perhaps idealistic to think that this change in language is a real possibility – in the near future anyway – this form of experimentation, which is then often passed around interested parties, is nevertheless an integral strategy pursued by some lesbians in order to talk about less contained representations. At the very least, it opens up spaces for discussion and would not be the first time such linguistic changes have occurred due to the lobbying of women activists and feminist groups in Japan. The most obvious examples are the words used for prostitution and rape. The word for prostitution, *baishun*, meaning selling one's body (*shun* literally meaning 'spring' and metaphorically a nubile young girl), has been changed to the same pronunciation but using a different first *kanji* meaning to buy a body. This has taken the onus off women initiating the exchange of sex for money (Matsui 1995: 317). The word rape, *gokan*, has also been on the decline, as the meaning of the *kanji* suggests some kind of complicity by women in the act, and *reipu* (rape) or *bōkō* (violence), the latter employed particularly by the press, are now more common (Cherry 1987: 108–9; MacLachlan 1997: 3). This is particularly significant given that a number of the narrators all make the same point. That is, because mainstream discourses symbolise and portray *kazoku* as relevant to those who live in particular accepted family types, and where socio-economic and political legitimacy is maintained through the privileging of one group over others, as lesbians they simply do not figure within such a system.

Midori also alludes to the temporary nature of her present needs and the potential changes that could occur. Unlike mainstream images which tend to represent heterosexual family types as unchanging, the overt claim by many lesbians to the daily historical specificity of their relationships – intimate, sexual, work-related and so on – leaves them vulnerable to, and at times pressured to, accept assertions by conservative discourses that lesbian relationships (in whatever form) are less stable and are likely to be short-term. Two issues stand out from this form of societal pressure.

First, lesbians have 'chosen' to be lesbian, whereas it is assumed that heterosexuals are *born* straight. Therefore, it is thought that no analysis of how the system of heterosexuality is constructed is necessary, while at the same time lesbian sexuality is constantly under scrutiny by active silencing, eroticising or pathologising explanations. Second, that 'choice' is somehow equated with concepts of freedom. The reality however is that lesbians have to make choices that other people take for granted (Weston 1991: 33). And these choices have as much potential to contain their subjectivity as they do to liberate. The automatic acceptance of most heterosexuals in believing they 'naturally' belong to a family is one of the basic assumptions that many of the lesbians I talked with could not accept, or at least not as lesbians.

Previously Ryōko had taken for granted the exclusiveness of *kazoku* in terms of blood/marriage ties to the exclusion of being able to envisage a concept of *kazoku* among and with other lesbians. Her recent participation in lesbian activities has changed or at least challenged the self-evidentiary nature of this structure, while at the same time she is aware of the lack of choices connected with its imposition from outside.

> I have been participating in a lesbian community for less than a year, and before that I had never thought of a *kazoku* in connection with lesbians. My idea of *kazoku* was … a sort of system, the consciousness of which was imposed from the outside … . So I think the difference between your original *kazoku* and household is independence, the independent love (*aijō*) felt toward the household. (Ryōko)

Ryōko sums up what Adrienne Rich (1980) has described as 'compulsory heterosexuality', that is, that heterosexuality is a system of privilege and containment imposed on individuals by various socio-cultural discourses. However, Ryōko's comments also suggest that these discourses are somehow separate from or outside the interactions of individuals in particular family units themselves, a form of imposition of false consciousness on to the family, thus rendering family participants both passive and manipulated by outside forces. At the same time, she also points to the notion of an independent love (*aijō*) separate from kin-*kazoku* ties, which appears to be founded on individual autonomy in which a person chooses their emotional affiliations based on their attractions, desires and needs. This, she implies, is not necessarily predicated on a 'family unit' but rather on a familial grouping based on connections with other lesbians.

Familying: *kazoku yatte-imasu*

Asako also addresses this issue in her description of how she and three other women have set up such an alternative family household.

> I am living in a house shared between four lesbians at the moment, and I think of them as my *kazoku* (whether or not *kazoku* is the appropriate word). This is because we are not lovers, but nor could we be described just as friends. More like a *family* [uses English]. They're all much younger than me, so they're like younger sisters – it's more that kind of feeling. So not lovers or friends. I don't mean in an artificial way at all, but quite naturally, on an emotional level, they've become very dear to me. So rather than as a part of my family, I think of them *as* my family. That's how I feel … we are making contact in that the four of us might argue but we can also relax around each other. That is what supports us, and it is very important. It is difficult to explain. Creating this space where we can relax and conducting our lives from that base is how I would describe one of the definitions of *kazoku*. A wider meaning includes the possibility of a *kazoku* of all lesbians. Specifically this means sharing of emotions, empathising. I'm sure it is not that simple, but it is one possible starting point.

Unlike many of the other women who have set up households with their partners and possibly children or parents, Asako has taken on '*familying*'[1] from a different perspective. It should be noted that unlike Australia, Europe and North America, in Japan the establishment of communal households is relatively rare. She and her friends are thus directly challenging the idea of a Japanese household that is represented by a monogamous heterosexual family unit that overwhelmingly focuses on the relationship between the mother and (male) children (Yoshizumi 1995: 192). Asako is not so much interested in 'creating' a *kazoku* but rather in shaping connections with other lesbians. The language of '*kazoku*' is not the focus, but the feelings and emotional ties. They are neither simply friends nor lovers, not merely an extension of her family, but essential members of her everyday life.

Asako, like some others, uses the word *kazoku* with suspicion because the language itself refuses to acknowledge the legitimacy of other forms of close relationships. For this household, the challenges and choices involved are different from those in single or partner households, particularly those where children live. In the latter case, at least from the outside, there is the appearance of a *kazoku* whether or not the participants consciously set out to create such an image. In contrast, this leaves Asako's form of 'familying' without a language to describe their relationships, as sex, reproduction and biological ties do not hold them together.

Moreover, within such a set-up there is nothing forcing or obligating any one person to stay. Asako later brings up the point that specific people remaining for long periods of time give one the opportunity to develop deeper emotional ties. The latter, however, does not necessarily translate into the assumption that changes do not occur to the membership of the household in order for the 'fami-

lying' process to continue. That is, as in all families, as people move on with their lives whether that be in forming a new household through marriage, or leaving one's parents' home to go out and work, there is the potential for these relationships to be just as close, as with kin-*kazoku* members living in different places. The difference may be, however, that in the case of Asako's household, new members will be found who overtly share a sexuality and perhaps may share some common interests. Thus, this gives room for a moving and changing continuation of the 'familying' process. This process is on-going and constantly shifting – grounded in daily interactions – yet there is a closeness which allows them to express their feelings whether that be in the context of arguing or agreeing with others, relaxing together, or giving each other support within a space that gives them room for diversity.

Kumiko, like the members of Asako's household, is also trying to expand the notion of 'familying' beyond the notions of duty and obligation. However, in her case, it is through her relationship with her children. She is one of the few women who described her daughter as her child *and* her friend. That is, she saw both herself and her daughter within a range of relationships: 'she's really calmed down, and we're getting on very well at the moment. We're not so much parent and child as friends.' Kumiko challenges the presupposition of mutually exclusive roles of individual family members; in which, for example, one's mother performs maternal duties or where pre-adult children are only in a position of dependence. Likewise, the role of a close friend is not necessarily limited to fulfilling one function and can take on different 'familying' positions within our lives. In this sense, Kumiko describes her multi-faceted subject position as one that includes not simply being a mother, but also relates to her daughter by drawing on her daily experiences as a woman, lesbian, friend, sister and worker.

The idea that the concept of *kazoku* is so intimately tied to procreation and marriage, that is, to ideas of (hetero)sex and fidelity, alienates some women to the point that they feel a necessity to reject and cut off from kin-*kazoku* ties in order to gain some form of independence and autonomy within their lives.

> I used to be trapped within the idea that *kazoku* was created through marriage and procreation and involved connection with a huge number of relatives, with a certain role that I was supposed to play. I finally broke out of this, and was determined never to be trapped in that kind of blood relation system again. I was ready to discard even my mother at that time in my efforts to create a family of my partner and myself. However, at that time I was still thinking that *kazoku* was something that stayed the same until you died, with no replacement of members, no departures or arrivals. Anyone outside this unit was only a friend. So when I said before that I would never have a *kazoku*, that was because I don't want to let myself fall into the trap of seeking that permanent *ie* (household) unit. Now I've come round to thinking that I would like a *kazoku*, not just a small, self-contained *kazoku*, but one where a number of women became part of one harmonious *kazoku*.
>
> (Michiyo)

One of the strongest points that comes out of nearly all the women's narratives is their growing awareness of the changing and fluid nature of any family system, despite the dominant discursive preoccupation with arguments to the contrary. Michiyo's statement that 'I used to be trapped with the idea …' clearly reveals the lack of choices open to her understanding of what 'familying' could be. Her way of dealing with these epistemological closures has been through a rejection of these values, one of the main ones being the power inequalities inherent in 'knowing one's place', and subsequently reconstructing for herself a more realistic and appropriate set of relationships in which she can move. This involved her acceptance of herself as an active subject within the process, thereby re-examining the notion that individuals and the construction of knowledge work through and not merely on malleable, passive bodies. Michiyo critiques a system in which marriage and procreation serve to facilitate an impression of the ahistorical permanence of family structures. Thus, her near rejection of her mother and the concept of *kazoku* in general is premised on her initial acceptance of the fixed nature of what constituted 'family membership'.

As a result, since lesbian relationships, whether involving sex or not, have no socio-legal privileges attached to them, there seems more space to experiment with more fluid relationships of *kazoku yatte-imasu* or 'familying'. At the same time, there is more risk-taking involved whether the outcome results in positive or negative benefits. The positive side is the room to play with/in different forms of *kazoku* relationships along with the realisation that one need not partake in the more conservative system of what constitutes 'a family unit' with its associated assumptions of permanence. It is also worth noting that for some women even the privileges that go along with a formalised monogamous heterosexual family system are suspect in terms of what the real benefits for lesbians would be if they were assimilated into such a system.

> The word *kazoku* (family) is acceptable, but there are times that I don't like it. When it is based on marriage and kinship and people use *kazoku*, then I don't like that word, so it depends on the context. 'Family' in English doesn't sound that bad but '*kazoku*' in Japanese sounds pretty bad to me, so I never use the word. I never say '*Watashi no kazoku desu*' (my family). I say, well, we're performing *kazoku*, *kazoku yatte-imasu*, or *kazoku mitai desu* (like a family). I never say *kazoku desu* (a family) because I think they [mainstream society] will misunderstand me. Rather I might say *zutto sunde-iru*, or *zutto isho-ni sunde-iru* (we have been living together for a long time). In the lesbian community it's very different, I mean there I can use the phrase *kazoku desu*.
>
> (Fumie)

Fumie stresses the significance of context, not just in terms of the previously discussed notion of fragmented shifting selves described in most depictions of the Japanese self, but as a female body that does not fit in neatly to the fixed nature of Japanese familial relations. She also clearly points to the construction of gendered and sexed performativity within the family hierarchy. In contrast, the acceptance

of using the term *kazoku* for Fumie among her lesbian friends takes on the meaning of constructed multiple possibilities in relation to both what constitutes family membership and the indeterminacy of the roles themselves. Moreover, how one fits in with other households and relates within an extended familial group often defines one's own feelings about inclusiveness.

> About a month ago we all went out to dinner, my older sister and her husband and children, my younger sister and her husband and child, my mother and father. We all sat together around a big table, but I couldn't feel that they were my family. Until two or three years ago I was sitting at that table with my husband and two children, and though I always felt there was something strange about that, everyone else was very happy. This time I was there without him, and I really felt the unbreachable chasm between the way I had chosen to live and the way they had chosen to live. I couldn't think of them as *kazoku*. I thought of them as blood relatives but not as *kazoku*.
>
> (Toshiko)

The 'unbreachable chasm' that Toshiko speaks of is premised on the assumption that two oppositional gendered halves make a family whole. This complementary image is constituted as a legitimate family unit characterised for both women and men, albeit in different ways, by the phrase *ichininmae ni naru* (to become a whole person). That is, an individual becomes a 'whole person' by becoming *half* of a couple. To what extent, however, does this fit with the reality of the vast range of experiences of Japanese heterosexual women's, and sometimes lesbians' lives? Robertson, for example, emphatically states that Japanese women marry to survive economically (1992a: 185), while Yoshizumi (1995: 186) argues that many Japanese marriages are marriages in outward appearance (*tatemae*) only. I found, in contrast, that lesbian households were not based on financial dependence, and certainly did not continue for the sake of social recognition. Indeed, in the case of finances, it is quite usual for lesbian couples, irrespective of the length of the relationship, to keep at least some of their monetary affairs separate (Warland 1990: 199). This has been commented on in other national contexts, and my interviews suggest that the same can be said of lesbian households in Japan, at least among the women whose stories appear in this book.

> Fumie and I are sharing expenses at the moment, but we have two bank accounts into which we divide the money and the arrangement is that if we separated we will each have an account with the money that has been saved. We divide the money up equally. But if we didn't have a system like that, potentially a person could be left with nothing. It would be very difficult to get by.
>
> (Chie)

Weston (1991) asserts that one of the major theoretical stumbling blocks in expanding the notion of 'family' in the US is the assumed singular and pivotal

connection between kinship and procreative heterosex, 'a fictive unity' (Blasius 1994: 125; Butler 1997: 17–18), and she convincingly illustrates how human reproduction is only part of what constitutes kinship relations. While my research in Japan completely supports this assertion, where the difference emerges is to where this claim might lead. In the US and Australia where there is a legal emphasis on human individual rights, lesbian and gay groups' demands for domestic partnership rights have in some states and to differing degrees been successful.[2] Nevertheless, despite the decision on 5 May 1993 by the Hawaii Supreme Court, which ruled that same-sex couples could not be denied marriage licences as it would infringe on and violate an individual's right to state guarantees of equal protection, this ruling was later successfully challenged.[3] Moreover, according to one survey, the majority of Americans still oppose same-sex marriage (Sullivan 1997: xxi–ii).

Given the paucity of information on this issue in Japan, I was fortunate to be able to use a film entitled *Because This Is About Love*[4] that was shown at the 1994 Japanese Gay and Lesbian Film Festival as a stepping-stone into a discussion of same-sex marriages. The film was a documentary made in the San Francisco area and raised many issues mainly affirming same-sex marriage and commitment ceremonies. Although legal changes were unlikely to occur in the near future in Japan, viewing this phenomenon in itself offered the women an opportunity to hypothesise on the Japanese situation in regards to institutional and non-institutional systems of regulation. I showed the video, subtitled in Japanese, at a number of the interviews and a variety of responses were articulated when I asked women whether as a lesbian they would like to be able to get married.

> I feel the significance of marriage very strongly. Homosexual marriage seems to be imitating the form of heterosexual marriage but the significance is quite different. And for us, whether the form was marriage or whatever, what I want most is to tell the children, the people around us, our parents, that we have chosen this way of life and that we are happy about it, without having to face an uproar.
>
> (Toshiko)

Or, as Chie comments:

> If the government acknowledged women living together, that would allow us to compete with the marriage system, which would be a good thing, I think. Though the situation would be different. With women living together, it wouldn't be a matter of one protecting the household. It would be a way of forcing acknowledgement of their shared life … it would be completely different from the marriage system.

Chie raises a number of culturally specific issues. The most salient is that the Japanese government and mainstream society in general do not acknowledge the existence of lesbians as social let alone political subjects within Japanese society.

Chie also alludes to the hierarchy implicit in the sexual division of labour, suggesting that any changes to a hegemony of conservative hetero-normative practices would have to be actively and constantly challenged. Finally, the fact that 'it would be completely different' I think pinpoints the very issue that precludes the possibility of this occurring in Japan. That is, as long as difference remains antithetical to Japanese monolithic accounts of most socio-economic and political values, there is no ground from which to argue. Chie goes on to assert that:

> Our lifestyle is that of married people, but because we're not part of the system we can't be protected by it. Being married means social recognition, and we don't have that recognition. That's very discriminatory.

On the other hand, Eiko believes that:

> If marriage were to be legally recognised, I would feel that there was no need to get married. I don't think we need to create a system. They [the participants of the documentary] wanted to show people and have people acknowledge that their kind of couple, their kind of family exists. For myself, I don't feel that strongly that I need to be officially acknowledged.

Kumiko ponders the institutional frameworks that one might be up against:

> But while I was married, too, I felt very strongly that I was being tied down by marriage into the legal system, the registration system, Japan's social system in general. And there were times when I resented that.

The one point that Chie, Eiko and Kumiko agree upon is that institutionalised marriage is not about sex, it is about a gendered and sexualised contract that confers privilege because of the status of marriage as a regulatory system. In other words, in Japan marriage gives one access to social, legal, economic and practical benefits and protective legislation which concomitantly defines notions of *kazoku* and the infrastructures which support such groups (Poverny and Finch 1988: 117). The most obvious is the *koseki* (household registration) system.

Smart argues in relation to Anglo-European marriage that these privileges are conferred on the presumption that the participants are heterosexual. As has already been discussed, however, one can be lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans-gendered and still be married, even heterosexual! Nor does marriage mean that a person is tied to one unchanging sexuality throughout one's lifetime (Smart 1996: 233). That is, while marriage is not necessarily about sex, mainstream definitions of homosexuality and homophobia are. Thus, despite the appearance of 'toleration' toward (male) homosexuality in Japan, the case of discrimination against the organisation '*Akā*' (where gay men were prohibited from staying at a government-run public facility, once they had publicly identified as gay)[5] clearly illustrates that it is what homosexuals do, who they do it with and where, and not how they

live or appear to be, that is central to this debate. This is true whether homophobia is draped in terms of the Japanese context in which tolerance is grounded in a philosophical-religious history of Confucianism and Buddhism or justified in terms of 'blame the sin, not the sinner' within Anglo-European cultures where Judaeo-Christian values dominate. In contemporary Japanese society difference is represented as strange, peculiar, outside or foreign (*okashii*, *hen'na*, *soto*) through the enactment of specific discursive socio-economic and political practices that attempt to produce a romanticised homogeneity as the desirable goal, whether in terms of class, consumer standards, ethnicity or sexuality.

The narratives offered in this chapter speak from a variety of positions. Indeed, at times contradictions emerge from a single voice. On the one hand as a number of the narrators implied, to contain lesbian sexuality in any system is, first, to assume that it is fixed. And second, by giving legal, economic and social advantages to specific household forms, which are premised on hetero-patriarchal norms, it is presumed or perhaps even hoped, that lesbian relationships are just as likely to mirror and bring about the same forms of unequal power relations and role specialisation as exists currently. That is, in the current system kin-*kazoku* ties are privileged and there is a presumption of 'no replacement of members, no departures or arrivals'.

On the other hand, the fact that the Japanese government does not have any policies that are specifically directed towards lesbians is a loud message to lesbians to keep silent and remain invisible. This invisibility and silence inevitably results in a system of oppression since it denies same-sex attracted women a space in which to exist *as* lesbians in either their public or private lives. Despite this, Japanese lesbians are very much inside Japanese society, albeit positioned in different ways from heterosexual women. This inside/outside position means that lesbians are discriminated against both directly and indirectly by policies and cultural norms that posit heterosexuality as universal. In so doing, same-sex attracted Japanese women are socially pressured not to define or name their relationships and this perpetuates the false assumption that lesbians do not exist, either individually or in families/households.

The last three chapters have examined some of the difficulties in employing the term *kazoku*. While the notions of *tatemae/honne* (outward appearance/inside feelings) and *uchi/soto* (inside/outside) can aid in protecting and disguising one's sexuality, the apparent intractibility of the ideology of *kazokushugi* (Japanese familism) can just as effectively counter attempts to extend the concept of what I refer to as 'familying' or what Fumie calls *kazoku yatte-imasu*. Despite the development of different family/household forms, and given the containment strategies in place which limit such expression, there is also the need to find spaces in which lesbians can meet and share their ideas and experiences. Thus, I will now move on to the issues surrounding the ways in which lesbians in Japan construct their own spaces/places in which to make broader connections with other lesbians. Through this discussion both the limits and strategic necessity of constructing lesbian communities will be examined.

8 Female friendships and the nature of reciprocity

The following two chapters explore a range of personal connections that affect same-sex attracted Japanese women and how and to what degree they impact on their emotional, bodily and socio-psychic experiences. This chapter in particular will tease out various issues around notions of female intimacy and women's friendship, how these connections affect diverse friendships among lesbians and between lesbian and female heterosexual relationships, and finally analyse the assumed quintessential contradiction of being both a lesbian and a mother in Japanese society.

Hovering over these discussions are questions dealing with the effects of essentialising or reducing the meanings of terms such as 'lesbian', 'motherhood', 'lesbian culture' and 'lesbian community' to a single, unified, pre-existing essence or set of 'truths' waiting to be dis- or un-covered and reified as the norm. In grappling with such concepts, it seems to me that the main problem is that assumed common goals are privileged over processes.[1] As such, what I am interested in is challenging the intransigence of these terms at the moment they appear to become fixed. At the same time I also argue for the significance of strategic essentialism as a political tool – a strategic intervention – amongst those multiple spaces that inevitably transgress the public and the private. 'Strategic essentialism', a term coined by Spivak,[2] is not an end in itself but part of an on-going process (Pérez 1994: 109), and one that Audre Lorde asserts still continues to destabilise the identity/difference binary through the perpetual 'displacement of *interior* as well as exterior boundaries' (Carlston 1993: 233). Other feminist theorists have come to similar conclusions (Calhoun 1995: 21; Hoagland 1988: 8; Sawicki 1988: 187; Ferguson 1991: 147). For instance Grosz suggests:

> The question is not am I – or are you – a lesbian but, rather, what kinds of lesbian connections, what kinds of lesbian-machine, we invest our time, energy, and bodies in, what kinds of sexuality we invest ourselves in, with what other kinds of bodies, with what bodies of our own, and with what effects?
>
> (1994b: 80–1).

What emerges from the next two chapters is both the recognition of the very instability of any category in designating or describing any identity or community as

homogeneous or static while also understanding the necessity to specify points or moments at which strategic interventions need to be made. I do this by first, exploring the notion of a lesbian subjectivity and the effects that appropriating a subject position have on personal inter-relations, while in the following chapter the emphasis shifts to individual responses to particular forms of 'Japanese lesbian cultures'.

In-different friendships

While I have no interest in romanticising or glorifying either sexual or non-erotic relationships among lesbians, throughout my discussions there was a pervasive interest in the notions of 'coming home', 'arriving' or a sense of 'belonging'.[3] Yet these positions are neither occupied nor accepted uncritically. When I talked with Mitsu about what influences her understanding of the term 'lesbian community' or networks and her relationship with other lesbians, the notion of *nakama* (group/circle) emerged.

> I feel that lesbians are my *nakama*. For example, with [lesbian] weekends, I tell my straight friends that over a particular period I'm going off to be with my *nakama*. That's how I use this word … at least in present Japanese society, it [saying you're going to a lesbian weekend] is not something you talk about to people whom you don't know. Saying that you consider yourself a lesbian, that you belong to the lesbian community, tends to have a negative image. It's difficult to overcome that sense even in myself. But anyway, to me *nakama* has a very important meaning.

Mitsu goes on to explain her present relationship to her lesbian community.

> It has had a lot of positive influence. There are lots of things I enjoy about it. For example, I've always liked singing, but it's only been since I ran into the lesbian community that I've wanted to write songs and to sing in front of other people. And it was also through the lesbian community that I met Yoshiko. To sum up, the self that I feel is most like myself is my lesbian self, and I can express that lesbian self within the lesbian community. Being able to express myself is not only very pleasant but gives me a lot of energy and positive feelings. If it weren't for the community I might have become someone quite different. I probably wouldn't have been able to accept myself as a lesbian and would have lived my whole life in fear.

For Mitsu, the existing networks provided her with the connections she needed to implement a whole series of changes. The assumption and acceptance of one's own heterosexuality automatically gives one access (although not necessarily unchallenged acceptance) into kinship, education, hetero-social and paid and unpaid work communities. However, lesbians are simultaneously at best pigeonholed into a 'sub-culture' and at worst totally ignored, while that sub-culture is not

sustained or maintained by any forms of institutional structures, other than the very structures that exclude them both as lesbians and as women. Indeed, lesbians must self-create spaces for 'belonging', even though these spaces are limited and may not always address their individual requirements.

In the above narrative, Mitsu also alludes to an ethics of reciprocity as a feature of 'community'. O'Connor asserts that while 'mutual helpfulness is most central to female friendships … shared activities and similar interests are most central to males' (1992: 29; Walker 1994: 250). This distinction is further validated by research on men's friendships (Wellman 1992). O'Connor also contends, based on her data collected from Euro-American sources, that friendship is primarily located and accepted within the private sphere and is perceived as 'a privatized, equal and voluntary relationship' (1992: 23). However, to what extent do these definitions apply to Japanese forms of friendship? Does the fact that there is a more pronounced demarcation of male and female social, economic and political worlds in Japanese society necessitate a shift in definitions? And how do these issues affect the construction of heterosexual female friendship, lesbian friendships/relationships and lesbian/(female) heterosexual friendships in terms of reciprocity within Japanese society? Given the importance of friendship within lesbian and gay relationships in other contexts (Weston 1991: 118), this area is integral to any understanding of how lesbians in Japan interact both within what they refer to as their own communities and in relation to wider heterosexual socio-political environments.[4] For example, insofar as there is no academic literature written on Japanese lesbian relationships/friendships,[5] how appropriate are the existing descriptions of heterosexual female friendships for understanding Japanese lesbian connections? And to what extent, if any, can or should lesbian relationships/friendships be subsumed under the category of 'women's friendships'?

One of the major differences between Japanese and Anglo-European constructions of female friendships is the different cultural emphasis and divisions placed on gendered spheres, as well as class distinctions (Smith-Rosenberg 1975). It has been noted that in societies, and within particular ethnic groups, women have more opportunity and access to developing stronger female bonds when there is greater support and encouragement of gender segregation. Thus, Anglo-European representations of women eating, sleeping, working and spending leisure time together are usually perceived as negative if a male is not at the centre of these activities (Raymond 1986: 3), but this should not be interpreted as the universal norm. Moreover, the assumption that sex-segregated societies are necessarily more oppressive than cultures that culturally promote gender-assimilation[6] is also debatable (Hidalgo and Christensen 1976–7: 112; Ahmad 1982: 528; O'Connor 1992: 12–13). In fact, the competitive search to find the 'most oppressive' culture obviates the more significant issue of what forms particular oppressive practices take and what effects they produce.

> Peer pressure is very difficult to deal with, especially at school when everyone else likes such and such a boy and you're not interested at all. Even when you enter a company the groups of women there too are focusing on men. So

it's not like the West where heterosexual couples are expected to spend a lot of time together and where a gathering of only women is a special occasion, forcing (Western) lesbians to be very obvious. Western lesbians probably have to set out more purposefully to make their own environment. In the case of Japan, women are supposed to stay with other women until they marry, and if they suddenly realise after they marry that they've made a mistake and that they're lesbian, it's very hard for them to escape that marriage. Therefore we're in a particularly bad situation.

(Kakefuda)

As Kakefuda points out, causal explanations that simply equate sex-segregated cultures as more liberating in terms of women's friendships, particularly when they are read as a stage that women go through towards marriage, are problematic. Indeed, while this 'stage' can open up emotional spaces for women to develop close friendships, the fact that women's friendships are relegated to and maintained primarily within the domestic sphere serves to both depoliticise and individualise women's affective connections with each other. Finally, Kakefuda suggests that the motivations for change or the politicisation of lesbian issues can be demobilised or diffused because lesbians can use these spaces as camouflage to obscure both their sexuality and sexual practices. Or can they?

How, for example, is an ethics of reciprocity enacted within a framework of private, equal and voluntary relationships among lesbian and female heterosexual friendships? As reciprocity is grounded in 'the principle or practice of give-and-take'[7] based on an implicit understanding of equality, to what degree do these values affect these kinds of relationships? The responses to these questions were on the whole similar, that is, that these relationships are grounded within different socially prescribed power positions.

My lesbian friends are very important to me. I have heterosexual feminist friends but there are limits as to how deep the understanding can go. It is with my lesbian friends that we can help each other out, encourage each other, and discuss our problems.

(Sachiko)

So what are these limits and how do they affect not only lesbians' access to heterosexual friendship networks but also, in broader terms, their daily lives and interactions with others?

Lesbian and female heterosexual connections fall into one of the following categories: first, that heterosexual women do not know about their friends' sexuality, second, that they do know and, third, that they think they know but that one or both parties choose not to discuss it. Regardless of the category, however, heterosexual women, with conscious intent or not, and whether the issue has been discussed or not, are in a position of power over lesbians because it is their reaction or lack of response/interest that primarily frames the possible continuation or withdrawal of the friendship. The point is, that because heterosexuality is

assumed, it is the lesbian who has to decide whether it is helpful or harmful to expose her difference. Or, put another way, because of the social and self-silences that surround their existence, lesbians are often located within hetero-socio-sexual situations, and thus have more to lose. Indeed, there is often an underlying fear of how the information may be used – whether it is kept confidential or not – that has the potential to place them at risk. I do not mean to suggest that lesbians are placed in a position of perpetual 'victim' in such relationships but the amount of emotional energy put into lesbian–heterosexual friendships is inherently unequal and can leave lesbians feeling extremely vulnerable.

> My lesbian friends have the same sexuality as me, whereas my straight friends can't understand me from a lesbian point of view. They have male lovers and husbands, and they talk about me to those people. And that's why I've gradually come to dislike talking to those straight friends. I don't like my friends' male lovers knowing about me. It's none of their business. The women are my friends. They might understand me, but their lack of delicacy, the lack of consideration they show in that respect, is enough to put me off.
>
> (Toshiko)

Setting aside Toshiko's claim of a universal 'lesbian point of view' for the moment, the effect of her friends divulging private information without consideration for the ramifications of such disclosures is to open up the risk of social exposure. Not only are Toshiko's children and partner placed in danger of discriminatory practices but Toshiko's livelihood (which relies on her reputation within the local heterosexual community) is also potentially placed in jeopardy. Moreover, Toshiko's withdrawal from conversations that may implicitly or explicitly refer to the differences she experiences as a lesbian within Japanese society precludes her from full participation as a 'friend'. This results in a situation where heterosexual friends are able to discuss both their personal/social problems and, just as importantly, the enjoyable and fulfilling parts of their lives, while lesbians often become the listeners (Ettore 1981: 66).

Therefore, to fit in, to be seen as the 'same' in terms of gendered and sexual behaviour seems to be integral to the concepts of reciprocity and equality within Japanese heterosexual discourse. Moreover, those who adhere to heterosexist norms express their disapproval by labelling different gender and sexual choices as 'inappropriate'. Consequently, the person who is being disapproved of, that is, the lesbian, is positioned and conceptualised within a heteronormative context, a more powerful reality in terms of institutional advantages and support mechanisms, and so lesbians can be made to feel threatened and isolated (Walker 1994: 262).

> I've virtually stopped talking with my heterosexual friends about details concerning the children. If it is only a comment on the most superficial aspects of the children's behaviour, for example, that recently they have had a bad attitude, or that they're behaving selfishly, I can still say something to my het-

erosexual friends. But I can't tell them that I'm secretly worried that the children are behaving badly as a result of my separation from my husband and the way I'm living now. If I told them that, I think they would try to see it from the children's point of view. But I don't know whether they would really still be affirmative toward me as I am, as a lesbian. So I've given up talking to them about that kind of sensitive issue.

(Toshiko)

Married heterosexual women's access to socialising with other women is generally centred around their children's and to a lesser extent their husbands' activities (Perry 1976: 176; Imamura 1987). Moreover, as previously stated, in contrast to Japanese heterosexual men's friendships, heterosexual women's friendships are not directly supported by social, political or economic institutions. Since the Meiji Restoration, married women have been idealised as the moral and public guardians of the family, often within the language of nationalist rhetoric, in order that they too would embrace the economic and social order to become valuable producers/consumers of society. In so doing, a highly competitive atmosphere exists in so far as their status as 'good mothers' is to a large extent premised on and judged by how effectively they present their homes through their support of present (husbands) and future (primarily sons) workers. Indeed, heterosexual married women, in order to maintain sexual status as desexualised, even if they know of or have lesbian friends, are often hesitant to acknowledge these connections to others (Fushimi 1994: 4). Furthermore, women's friendships, unlike men's, are unlikely to give women access to independent financial or political resources and so are less likely to change institutional structures (O'Connor 1992: 20).

The limitations inherent in institutional support systems for women not only serve to reinforce women's images of themselves, but also work to side-step or divert attention away from the effects of the structures that maintain them (O'Connor 1992: 33). Such a situation is also affirmed by the existing literature on 'Japanese women' which tends to concentrate on the – albeit changing – function(s) of urban and rural family life (Beardsley 1959; Bernstein 1983; Bestor 1989; Moeran 1985; Nakane 1967; Smith 1978), marriage and divorce (Bryant 1988; Cornell 1989; Hendry 1981; Kumagai 1983; Wagatsuma 1977), housewives (Imamura 1987; Ueno 1987), women's lifecourse (Brinton 1992; Long 1987b), women in the paid workforce (Hunter 1993; Bernstein 1988; Cook and Hayashi 1980; Ogasawara 1998; Lo 1990; Brinton 1993) and motherhood (Bankart 1989; Fujita 1989) while autonomous adult female friendships are often read as insignificant and generally ignored.[8] Therefore, because many heterosexual women rely on a limited reference point, that of the male-headed heterosexual family unit, their comments and advice more often than not understandably reflect their own position(s) and thus serve to reinforce mainstream cultural values.

Within the above context, Toshiko's withdrawal from particular kinds of conversations with heterosexual women can be interpreted as a protection mechanism that shields her from criticism in which women often represent themselves and give advice based on their own understandings of what constitutes

'correct' or 'normal' socio-sexual precepts. For example, when issues dealing with personal problems arise, particularly in relation to children, there is often the implicit assumption that if a man/father were around, albeit often in name only within Japanese heterosexual families, there would be no difficulties (Allen and Harne 1988: 183). Moreover, contemporary Japanese women's friendships are arguably competitive in nature because kin-*kazoku* ties are set up in opposition to friendships, the classic example being that of the mother and daughter-in-law who are in constant competition for the son/husband's loyalty. Thus, the conceptualisation and importance of female friendships differ significantly for lesbians and heterosexuals, and can be motivated by very different needs and supports.

> I couldn't do without my lesbian friends. They're the most important people in the world to me because they share my joy, my sorrow and my worries in the midst of a heterosexual society where as a lesbian I have to watch my every step. They're the people I can talk to, and if they didn't exist I would be totally cut-off and alone, I couldn't do without them.
>
> (Mitsu)

> I worry about what would happen to us if everyone found out. What would happen to the children? When I talk to my friends, though, they affirm the way we're living and the happiness we're trying to build. They give me confidence and the courage to keep on going. They also give me the strength to be able to rebut pressure from those friends who still don't know about my sexuality – heterosexual society, I suppose.
>
> (Toshiko)

Socialising among lesbian mothers is often initiated by the women themselves rather than as an adjunct to their children's needs, for example, through friendships with other neighbourhood children, school or sports activities. The motivations for socialising are therefore stimulated by the mothers' needs rather than solely 'for the sake of the children'. Needless to say, the benefits for women and children are imbricated, for if lesbians want to discuss issues or require support from other lesbian mothers, the children will also be affected by these contacts. For instance, reciprocal childcare arrangements may be organised. Consequently, when the children play together they become aware that the composition of their households may be similar which gives them an opportunity to see and discuss among themselves their own kinds of 'familying' contexts. Moreover, the children are exposed to a different worldview in which the hierarchical social structures among and between mothers and children tend to be minimal.

> [m]y daughter is much older now, and I've made sure that both my children, and especially my daughter, have had a lot of contact with other lesbians and their children. All of those lesbians are wonderful people, the sort of people I would want her to have as role models.
>
> (Kumiko)

The time that is invested in women's friendships is also based on social prescriptions about where friendships should take place. In the case of women the notion of intimacy is relegated to the domestic sphere, because this is where women have the space to meet and talk without men being physically present. In contrast, given women's more precarious position in relation to Japanese employment practices, women have more at stake in divulging personal information to other workers within the public sphere. This is partly due to the inherently competitive nature of advanced capitalism where the relationship between workers, workers and management, and rival companies are set up against each other, epitomised in the familial phrase *uchi no kaisha* (my/our company). Although competition also exists among men, the privileging of masculine socio-economic structures within their work environment, such as assumptions about incremental wage rises, promotion and mobility within the company as well as other 'official' or 'work relationships' known as *tsukiai*, are institutionally supported (Atsumi 1979: 64). For example, drinking sessions and company 'sports' activities create formal and informal spaces in which men are given permission to let out their 'frustrations' and to discuss personal problems. These activities and conversations are sanctioned and any transgressions are conveniently 'forgotten' by the next working day (Allison 1994: 115–16).

Consequently, while men's friendships are constantly validated within the public sphere, women's friendships are relegated to the domestic and generally devalued (Kakefuda 1993: 23). Reinforcement of these divisions is not only maintained from the top down, through the various discourses that structure both the workplace and home space, but also by workers themselves (both paid and unpaid) who accumulate (or forfeit) benefits, whether that be in terms of peer dis/approval or material gains and losses.

Lesbian friendships

In previous chapters I have described the make-up of Japanese heterosexual spousal relationships as being primarily based on economic and social security (although in different ways for women and men), in which friendship is not necessarily a prerequisite for the marital relationship. Lesbian relationships, however, are more often than not constituted through friendship (Vetere 1982: 54; Hidalgo and Christensen 1976–7: 77). The depth of these friendships is further indicated by the fact that it is not uncommon for former lesbian partners – and gay men (Bolton 1995: 146) – to remain close friends after the sexual relationship has ended, albeit after some time has elapsed (Lewin 1993: 117). In contrast, heterosexual married couples often terminate their communication after divorce.[9] In this section, I want to explore how the dynamics of erotic and non-erotic friendships and relationships among lesbians are both maintained and relinquished at different times. Given the precarious and transitory nature of the concepts of 'community' and 'identity', to what extent do both these notions facilitate or impede connections on an individual level?

> I don't really have any expectations of my [kin] *kazoku* in terms of recognising me for what I am … . What I expect from my lesbian friends, of other lesbians, is that I can show a younger self, the side of me that I can't show around my parents where I try to make myself look good. Around my friends I just want to be myself, and for that reason I suppose a lot of my friends are lesbian. I'd also hope that a lover would help me relax, and in fact, those expectations have been fulfilled.
>
> (Fumiko)

Fumiko's descriptions of her expectations of her lover and of her friends appear to be similar. Can one therefore argue, as both Vetere and Weston have, that while the distinction between heterosexual friends and lovers is grounded in contrasts, lesbian friendships and relationships appear to be situated on a continuum (Vetere 1982: 62; Weston 1991: 122)? While my research tends to corroborate the view that friendship is an integral, often primary factor in all forms of lesbian relationships, I am also wary of endorsing patterns of behaviour that, in attempting to represent difference, reinstate dualisms. Rather I would argue that lesbians and gays, as heterosexuals and other groups, are neither inside nor outside culturally specific patriarchal discourses and structures, and the only reason lesbian identity practices exist is because of their inter-subjective connections with direct and indirect regimes of sexual difference (Grosz 1994b: 77).

   This issue came to the fore at the outset of my introductions to a number of Japanese lesbians. In Japan it is fairly common practice when being introduced to someone to be asked if one is single or to be informed of the other person's present spousal status. Of course to some extent this is just a way of contextualising each person's position within a social setting, but, as Asako explains, it also elucidates the inter-relatedness of Japanese heterosexual–homosexual discourses. Asako argues that this performance is based on the Japanese socio-familial system in which the *kazoku* unit is taken as 'an unquestioned part of our everyday lives'. This, she says, is hard to leave behind even when entering a lesbian community.

> That's the same thing as the Japanese custom of introducing yourself as so and so's wife, with your husband working at such and such a company, isn't it? You're not an individual, are you? I want to make friends with people on an individual basis, but that's not what happens. Instead, for example, let's say that we meet while you're in a relationship with so and so, but while I like you I dislike your partner. It's almost impossible for us to develop a friendship under those conditions. If I want to become friends with you I have to become friends with your partner as well. That's very complicated.
>
> (Asako)

In Japan, women and men often introduce each other and are introduced in terms of their specific relationships to others, denoting both their location(s) of 'belonging' (*uchi–soto* as horizontal) as well as their hierarchical positions within various

socio-economic sites (vertical). Combined with the production of language, women, in particular, tend to be identified in relation to their gendered and (de)sexualised familial positions, even though those are rarely the only spaces they occupy. For example, the Japanese character *onna* (woman) is incorporated into the language of the home and marks women's relationship to the private domain. In fact, a variety of vocabulary exists where *onna* is linked with other *kanji* (Chinese characters) to produce words that are distinguished by their negative implications and/or meanings. In contrast, the *kanji* for man (*otoko*) is rarely used in combinations with other characters. The most obvious example in relationship to women's friendship is the meaning of the *kanji* that represents the three symbols of 'woman' together. This word is read as *kashimashii* (noisy, gossipy) and clearly serves to replicate and reinforce hierarchical sexed differences between men and women which privatise, trivialise and minimise the importance of women's friendships.[10] As Irigaray (1993: 32) succinctly asks, 'How could discourse not be sexed when language is?'

In addition, women and men after marriage, and especially after having children, generally spend little time together socially, and married Japanese women often welcome this situation. Government and private surveys often canvass popular opinion on this issue and are regularly published in newspaper articles (The *Daily Yomiuri*, 10 November 1992: 2).

> There is no need for women to make impossible efforts to fit in with men, and as far as men are concerned, it is easier to communicate in an all-male society, with women around only when it suits … . Marriage satisfies those expectations, and then within that, men and women aren't supposed to be able to understand each other. A lot of people seem to feel that. Men don't think that women are that smart, so they aren't really interested in what women think. A lot of men are very surprised when later in life their wives turn around and divorce them.
>
> (Toshiko)

As previously discussed, men tend to socialise within the context of their workplace, and wives tend not to take part. Therefore, there are few opportunities for women to be introduced to their husbands' friends, other than on formal occasions. The difference in lesbian relationships is that as two women in a relationship (assuming monogamy) they are able to socialise in the same spaces. Even when this is in the context of performing *tachi/neko* (butch/femme) roles, these are always played out, in Lacanian terminology, in *imago* which at times seem to mimic that of romanticised heterosexual monogamy, but which in fact can never be fully realised whether they be heterosexual or lesbian. Thus, there sometimes appear to be crossovers of heterosexual cultural norms into lesbian contexts but with completely different results.

Other same-sex attracted women with whom I spoke also emphasised the significance of lesbian friendships as a sounding board for difficulties that are connected with their relationships.

> They [lesbian friends] give me courage. Also, when you're living with your partner, stress tends to boil up, like soup in a pot. Because I can talk to my friends at these times, I become able to see the relationship from various angles, and that's very useful.
>
> (Toshiko)

Toshiko's comments define not only a major role of lesbian friends as support systems but also the role of establishing close networks, which provide general emotional balance. Nevertheless, depending on one's participation within various communities, along with the sensitivity and intensity of the issues being discussed, the act of supporting can produce its own set of pressures.

> [T]hinking about my lesbian friends, especially Japanese lesbian friends, they are very close, sometimes too close. Sometimes I just want to get away from everyone and just be with people whom I don't really know so I don't have to think about a lot of things, not that I have to, but I compel myself to think about their problems and I like to get away and think about myself for a while.
>
> (Fumie)

Some women are better listeners than others, and the pressures of listening, hearing and safeguarding personal confidences, and giving advice, can be simultaneously physically and emotionally satisfying and exhausting. As O'Connor explains, 'To maintain an extensive personal network requires engagement, time and attention' (1992: 19), but because of the lack of social support systems for Japanese lesbians, these networks must be self-created and self-sustaining and as such are particularly susceptible to both internal and external tensions and strains.

Possibly the starkest example of this form of tension is found among lesbian mothers. They find themselves constantly negotiating inside and outside positions, embodying both complicity and transgression. On the one hand, the spaces they occupy as Japanese mothers are symbolised by the transcendent sacred 'motherbody', while on the other hand the association of motherhood and lesbian is assumed to be conceptually, socially and materially incongruous and thus in opposition to autonomous female (heterosexual) desire.

Lesbian mothers

The Meiji era, along with the institutionalisation of the concept of *ryōsai kenbo* (good wife, wise mother) saw the introduction of the concept of the mothering instinct (*bosei honno*). This ideology was a mixture of European, samurai and Confucian moral precepts and developed into a middle-class essentialist conceptualisation of Japanese womanhood grounded in 'warm' harmonious family relationships. Through this process, the idealised Japanese woman became inextricably linked with reproduction, reproduction with the domestic sphere, and women

as 'natural' nurturers within the domestic sphere (Lock 1993: 69–70). The Japanese government, at this time, was intent on 'catching up' with other industrialising countries and as a result some commentators asserted that heterosexual monogamy was a major factor in the process of 'modernisation' (Hayakawa 1995: 32).

In the contemporary political climate, there appears to be a strong return to a similar rhetoric, to a large extent grounded in the shift from state to private welfare, that is reflected in Eiko's understanding of the Japanese parent (specifically the woman–child relationship).

> Japanese women don't really live with their children so much as for them. They have to be constantly giving to their children, doing something for their children. When I became a lesbian, I was able to feel much more relaxed and at ease about my child. I could be myself, not just playing the social image. I could loosen up. Well, I'm usually fairly loosened up, I suppose, but I felt that particularly strongly at that time.

If, as Lock suggests, 'replication' and 'continuity' are the focal points in discourses on Japanese kinship relations (1993: 62) and if, as Parker (1993: 328), Weston (1991: 168–9) and Hitchens (1979–80: 89) assert, the term 'lesbian mother' is represented within heterosexist discourse as 'the antithesis of procreative sexuality', how are these concepts discursively constructed within particular kinds of sexually institutionalised practices in Japan? The fact that women give birth is not the issue, but rather that this activity takes on 'varying degrees of cultural recognition and elaboration' within particular historical contexts (Moore 1988: 29). Or, as O'Laughlin states, 'Human reproduction is never simply a matter of conception and birth' (1977; Mohanty 1988: 68). However, in (post)modern capitalist societies the terms 'motherhood', 'womanhood' and 'the family' tend to be conflated under the ambiguous phrase 'reproduction' (Yanagisako and Collier 1987: 24) which not only restricts women's identities to one function, but also assumes that this function is primarily carried out by one person: the wife/mother; in one particular space: the domestic sphere; by one universal pattern of kinship: the monogamous heterosexual family. Iwao, for example, contends that in Japan 'a good mother is measured by how much a mother does for the sake of her child', and she defines 'how much' by the degree of involvement she puts into her children's education (Iwao 1993: 138). How, then, if 'lesbian mother' is discursively constructed as an oxymoron, do Japanese women who identify as lesbians, mothers, lovers, friends and workers construct their relationships with their children within the Japanese socio-political arena?

From being registered on the *koseki* (household registration system) to education, entering the workforce and marriage, a child's legitimacy is checked and assessed accordingly. Remnants of the system of primogeniture found in the *ie seido* (household system) – officially abolished after 1945 – still pervade the *koseki* system in relation to social and legal recognition of those children considered 'legitimate'. While in 1995 there were changes to the system to equalise all children's birth status, 'legitimate' status is still only recognised 'if the child

is acknowledged by the household head – namely the father' (Yoshizumi 1995: 197). Social status and the construction of full citizenship for women is there-fore still closely bound to institutionalised marriage and reproduction through a heterosexualised body. Bankart claims that marriage is the first stepping-stone towards becoming a 'real' woman, while the subsequent bearing of children and becoming a mother consolidates the process and completes a woman's initiation into adulthood (1989: 60). Lebra concurs with both Iwao and Bankart and argues that a woman's priority is her relationship with her child and that this facet of her life determines a woman's *ikigai* (life's worth) (Lebra 1984: 162). Only at this stage does she become a 'whole person' (*ichininmae ni naru*). This image is further consolidated by the stigma attached to single mothers (*mikon no haha*).[11]

> Unwed mothers aren't recognised as women. People have some image of what a woman is, right? And since unwed mothers don't fit that image they are either ignored or harassed.
>
> (Chiho)

This being the case, then arguably lesbian mothers are more likely to be socially accepted than lesbians who have remained unmarried, as they have a greater chance of remaining invisible. As the majority of lesbian mothers have been mar-ried at some point, they are perceived to have passed through what is seen as a universal 'lifecycle event' for women. For Eiko it was the decision to have a baby that precipitated her decision to get married, rather than the other way round. Marriage was a means of being able to 'legitimise' her desire for children in every sense of the word. Legitimisation of her children's status as well as self-legitimi-sation as a wife and mother – not so much for herself, but rather so that her child would be accepted as part of Japanese society. Given the discrimination that exists towards unmarried mothers, there appears an almost natural inevitability about her decision.

> The thing that I remember the best right now is the time that I decided to have a baby. At that time I was running my own shop. I made the decision when I was thirty-two. And because I had my own shop I had plenty of savings, and I had a fair amount of self-confidence. Rather than wanting to be married, I felt that I wanted a child … . In order to have a child I decided to get married. And that was a big departure from my previous way of thinking.
>
> (Eiko)

Although many women give economic disadvantage as the reason behind choos-ing to marry in order to have children, this was not the case with Eiko. Rather, she was more concerned about the socio-legal stigma that her child would feel when entering and growing up in a society in which knowing where one fits in and fol-lowing accepted form hold such privileged status. These privileges manifest themselves both in relation to the law where, for instance, 'illegitimate' children

only receive half of the inheritance to which 'legitimate' children are entitled,[12] and in a conservative political environment which is exemplified by former Prime Minister Miyazawa (November 1991 – August 1993) and Justice Gotōda, who were publicly noted as saying that 'discrimination against children out of wed-lock, in order to promote respect for legal marriage, is a reasonable distinction to make' (*Fuemin* 10 December 1993: 2).

Lesbian mothers, therefore, by way of their invisibility, with the associated assumption of heterosexuality based on their ability to procreate, are included in the heterosexual archetype, whether or not inclusion is overtly sought. This exter-nal image of 'Japanese motherhood' displayed in lesbians' public lives can act to legitimise their social status as women. Thus, although divorce impacts signifi-cantly on women's lives economically (Lock 1993: 74; Skov and Moeran 1995: 41; Yoshizumi 1995: 192–3), the fact that some lesbians have been socially recog-nised as a whole (female) person (*ichininmae*) because of their participation in marriage and childbirth creates the potential to counter some of the more overt stigmatisation which lesbians who have not married or do not have children may encounter. This reading presumes that heterosexual boundaries are fixed. But les-bian mothers also transgress these boundaries through their complicity with – whether with intent or not – outside presumptions of their insiderness.

In contradistinction to this former model, Eiko decided to allow her child to live with his father. This disrupted the 'naturalness' of the mother–son dyadic relationship proffered in much of the literature on Japanese mother–child psy-chology. In crude terms, it is argued that because Japanese men spend little time with their children, the child (particularly the male) becomes inextricably linked both physically and emotionally to the mother, in a perpetual state of dependence (*amae*) (Doi 1973). Eiko, on the other hand, rejected the inevitability of this claim and now lives with her lover and her two children, where she has chosen to take on a caring role towards the children, but is firm in her decision not to be a co-parent. Thus her affective ties are chosen bonds, whether they are in relation to her own child, lover, lover's children, friends or kin-*kazoku*. They are based neither on gender-specific sexual hierarchies nor on 'replication' and 'continuity'. For Eiko, 'becoming a lesbian' has freed her up from social expectations and her home space has changed from one grounded in gender differentiation based on a sexual hierarchy to one founded on autonomy, trust and relaxation. This in part is due to the fact that her affective ties shifted from her position as mother within a bounded *kazoku* unit to a set of relationships that rest primarily on associations with her peers. As such, a deconstruction of primary relationships and a decen-tring of reproductive activities also mark the influence on her child and her lover's children.

A further presumption is that while heterosexual parents may or may not have straight, lesbian or gay kids, lesbian and gay parents will bear lesbian and gay children. However, the lesbian mothers I talked with were only concerned that the door be left open so that their children could choose. Those choices are opened up because, whether the children knew their mother sexually identified as a lesbian

or not, they are growing up within a different kind of 'familying' process while also as members of Japanese mainstream society. In so doing, the women and children who make up these households are challenging the 'naturalness' or homogeneity of 'the Japanese family' and the associated assumptions: that a male and female parent are necessary for the production of a 'normal' family, that children socially legitimate a parent's role, or that children are supposed to fulfil an important function of heterosexual procreation by becoming heterosexual, and carrying on the family name.

> As for my children, that's not an important relationship at all. I trust them and want them to do as they see fit. My children are adults now, with even the youngest child over twenty. So they are becoming more and more independent, renting their own apartments and that. I wish them well, and while I can't say I'm not worried about them, that's my own problem and in the end I have to trust them to work out their own problems.
>
> (Chiho)

> With my children, as blood relations, they'll grow up and have their own households and their own ways of life. They're a different generation. I don't know whether they'll grow up heterosexual or lesbian or homosexual, but I do know they have to have different lives from me. I wouldn't like them to live just like me, and I certainly can't imagine living together.
>
> (Kumiko)

In these two narratives Chiho and Kumiko not only express their desire for their children to make their own decisions – and research increasingly suggests that the children of lesbian and gay parents tend to be more independent (Koepke, Hare and Moran 1992: 228) – but in doing so they also reflect their respective philosophical positions in relation to Japanese social values. Implicit in their comments is that their children have the opportunities to choose/change their sexuality without feeling obliged either to meet their parents' expectations or replicate their sexual choices. Studies on lesbian and gay parenting also show that children of lesbian and gay male families are *not* likely to be lesbian or gay-identified. While I understand that research into this issue is a reaction to the claim that children growing up in lesbian and gay male families may be gender and sexually confused, this hypothesis has been shown to be completely false. However, the significance of testing this hypothesis in itself also presumes that if it were true this would be a negative outcome for children. Yet this issue has generally remained unchallenged (Falk 1989: 945).

   Nevertheless, Chiho and Kumiko, like other lesbian mothers, while satisfied with their own sexual choices, are more than aware of how the moral precepts that define the idealised 'Japanese family' and 'motherhood' might affect their children. Issues such as their ability to choose whether they come out to their children, let alone anyone else; how they appear as heterosexual because of the above-mentioned presupposition that lesbianism is incongruent with being a

'mother'; how this might affect child custody; and the fact that a lesbian mother may be the primary wage earner and may be supporting other '*kazoku*' members are never far from the surface, although they may not be conceptualised or expressed within a political context.

The above views notwithstanding, most of the women I talked with were concerned and hesitant to introduce the word 'lesbian' to their children and I was asked on a number of occasions not to mention the word 'lesbian' in front of the children. In fact, many of the interviews took place either during school hours or after the children went to bed.

> Yuriko's [my daughter] going around telling various adults that when she grows up she wants to live together with her best friend, but I worry about what will happen if she goes a step further and says she wants to live with that friend as a lesbian. The word '*rezubian*' (lesbian) is very sensational in Japanese society, and I worry that if we tell her that the word is a secret, she'll feel under pressure at having to keep that secret. Even if she understands from the atmosphere … . Should we or shouldn't we tell her it's a secret?
>
> (Toshiko)

Toshiko's uneasiness stems from the understanding that sexuality is far from a private matter. The ramifications of Yuriko declaring her future living arrangements has the potential inadvertently to 'out' both Toshiko and her partner to the education authorities and other families in the neighbourhood. Of course, the notion of 'future' to children can change on a daily basis, and young children often dream of living with their close friends when they grow up. However, it is the sensational and anti-familial values associated with the term *rezubian* that place it outside the confines of gendered and sexually appropriate dreams. For example, within most local communities there are associations called *kodomo-kai* (children's neighbourhood associations). These groups hold meetings at the local schools and mothers often visit each other and are visited by their children's teachers in order to discuss child safety and behaviour. Thus, as Allison's research demonstrates (1996) the relationship between mothers and their children and by extension the children's roles as future Japanese citizens are kept under strict surveillance by the all-consuming demands that are placed on them by the school regime.

Many women with children also tend to work within the local area and so disclosure can influence their access to paid employment. Thus, Toshiko is in a no-win situation. On the one hand she does not want to lie or cover up an important part of how she identifies herself, but on the other hand she is scared that her children may suffer the repercussions of her decision.

> What I'm worried about is that at her overtly heterosexual school she'll suddenly announce that she's just come back from visiting some lesbians or whatever – that the word *rezubian* will suddenly pop out. I'd like her to understand, but I'm afraid that if the word manages to spring out before we've had

a chance to explain to her, she's going to get a very rude shock at the response.

(Toshiko)

Peak argues that the Japanese education system is highly influential in forming 'a group consciousness' and that this begins from the time a child enters pre-school. Moreover, a significant part of this enculturation is learning to differentiate between *uchi* and *soto* (Peak 1989: 93). Because Toshiko's daughters attend a mainstream school, the consequences of responding to a system that assumes a particular household structure, which is reflected in the curriculum, places them in a position full of unanswered questions. There are few problems if one lives in a household that corresponds to accepted notions of *uchi–soto*, and where the status quo remains unchallenged. But for the children, Yuriko and Hanako and other children like them, it is one thing to differentiate between *enryo* (restraint in expressing one's own feelings) outside the home space and another to silence and keep secret the daily reality of their emotional and familial bonds.

   Hence, these children and their caregivers often find themselves in an untenable predicament. Given that the pressure for 'group orientation' or group living (*shū dan seikatsu*) is so strong within the education system, Toshiko is concerned that the children will be ostracised from their school *uchi*. This could take the form of being ridiculed by other children and/or their parents, being told that their mother's 'lifestyle' is unnatural (*fushizen*) by teachers, or their children being denied access to their friends. This may appear an over-reaction, but because of the emphasis on institutional conformity, allowing the children to oppose or disrupt the status quo, depicted by the word *wagamama* (selfishness), may not be worth the risk. Even if the ramifications are not so overt, Peak (1989: 123) describes the reaction to challenging or defying accepted behaviour at school as follows.

   Japanese children soon learn … that to seriously resist the system is to battle an army of friendly shadows. Authority resides with no one and to change the collective habits of the group requires an insurmountable effort. To escape or rebel is to sever social contact with those who provide daily companionship and the warmth of social life.

It should be noted that it is no coincidence that the government discourse discussed in relation to the privatisation of welfare founded in 'warm harmonious family relationships' is remarkably similar to that characterised in terms of 'the warmth of social life' within the classroom and school as a whole, and which is employed to justify conformity. This 'harmonious family' rhetoric, in the case of female children and their status within a group is by extension then linked to appropriate gendered behaviour.

   Even in the case where Fumie's daughter, a lower high school student, had known for some time that her mother was lesbian, and the fact that she had been living with her mother's lover for some years, when faced with explaining their relationship to her friends, 'form' prevailed.

> She's [Miiko, Fumie's daughter] gone to weekends since she was small, and gone to Regumi Studio. She's always come with us to that sort of thing. And we explained to her from when she was very small that we were having sex together, and why Fumie had broken up with her father. She seems to have understood why the situation is as it is and accepted it. So while she knows our lifestyle is different, she also knows why, and therefore doesn't tend to ask. But recently when her friends at school thought I was a maid, and commented how good I was at the job, she didn't try to tell them that I wasn't. It probably seemed too much effort to try, because after all it would be hard to explain.
>
> (Chie)

The fact was that Chie could not be situated within a nuclear-extended structure, that is, Chie was too old to be Miiko's sister and too young to be her grandmother, yet Miiko already had a mother, thus confusing her friends as to her status. Moreover, as Chie was tidying up the house when Miiko's friends saw her and because she was female, they presumed her function and status was that of maid. However, not only did Miiko not say anything, neither did Chie, confirming their assumptions and sustaining the impression of a 'normal' heterosexual household.

In a similar vein, Toshiko's children also put pressure on her to assume an appropriate 'feminine' gender role when dealing with other parents or their school. Requests range from asking Toshiko to wear lipstick, iron clothes, and wear nail polish, to dying out her grey hairs, which on the odd occasion she acquiesces to for their sake. In contrast, Fumie's decision to come out to those in her life 'who were not in a position of power over me' was motivated by an attempt to break down the double-oppression that these Japanese women face, as assumed single mothers and as lesbians.

> [H]aving a child really makes your lesbian presence invisible. And it's very difficult if you don't say it … . But I didn't want my friends to see me as a heterosexual. I didn't want Miiko's father to see me as a heterosexual, and I didn't want my family to consider me heterosexual … . I didn't mind being considered a single woman, but if I was seen as a heterosexual woman with a child that means that you need a man.

As Fumie suggests, the notion of an 'authentic family' in Japan is centred not only on the existence of children, but also on the presence of a male spouse. From both a functionalist and Freudian position the male figure complements or completes the female. Without this complementarity, based on essentialist notions of biological and gendered difference, the female remains characterised by a lack, or is seen as less than a 'real' woman (*onnarashikunai*). Conversely, but premised on the same rationale, there is the presumption that lesbian equates with the absence of family. Thus lesbian mothers who work in mainstream companies and who are not 'out' (the overwhelming majority) are reacted to as heterosexual unmarried or divorced women. This then presumes that these women are available to men, but

more importantly that they do not have other forms of dependants, such as partners, friends or perhaps other biological family members. From the perspective of a lesbian mother's partner, her position within the workforce and in relation to family obligations both within and outside her household is completely obscured. While sex education is supposed to be taught in Japanese schools, detailed explanations are often glossed over, leaving the students more confused than they were to begin with. One report describes the problem as a general embarrassment by adults to discuss sex among themselves let alone with children (*Fuemin* 29 January 1993: 3). Kakefuda Hiroko stresses that the inability to communicate about sex and sexuality stems from the fact that such issues are considered 'private' and that this is a fundamental problem not only for lesbians but also for Japanese women in general.

> But how do you create an environment where people can discuss their relationships and their sexuality? When you start to talk about these things, everyone shuts up; they're embarrassed. I used to find it very difficult to talk about myself. It was hard to say the word 'lesbian', and especially to come out nonchalantly with it at work. People are so shocked, although they get used to it. It's important to get used to things, to get used to talking. You start to realise that not just among lesbians but all women, issues concerning their bodies haven't been discussed at all.
>
> (Kakefuda)

Linked to the earlier point about the desexualisation of the home space is the social prohibition of open physical intimacy between sexual partners, particularly in front of children. This issue for lesbian mothers, however, is further complicated by whether or not they are 'out' to their children. Generally Japanese heterosexual parents show little outward affection towards each other, and verbal communication, let alone discussions about sexuality, is minimal (Coleman 1983: 138; *Fuemin* 29 January 1993: 3). Explanations for this include the amount of time men and women spend separately, along with suggestions that when they do meet up they have little in common (Coleman 1983: 129–30; Iwao 1993: 16–17), rationalisations that men do not want to be concerned about 'family problems' when they come home from a long hard day at work and just want to be able to relax (Coleman 1983: 153), and different social expectations on physical intimacy in front of others.

To some extent the socially sanctioned taboo of not discussing sex and sexuality within the home space, as Chiho and Eiko explain, strongly influences and is used by lesbian mothers as a tactic of subterfuge.

> Japanese people believe that they can't talk about sex, and I think that protects me a lot. No matter what they [her children] are thinking, they don't say it to me, so I'm protected by this consciousness of sex as a taboo subject.
>
> (Chiho)

I think probably with Japanese children there's this strong socialisation that sex is dirty. So I think that children feel that talking about sex is taboo. They would be really embarrassed to talk about it. So they don't ask directly.

(Eiko)

It is important to note, however, that lesbians themselves are also implicated in reifying the heterosexual/homosexual divide. This distinction has surfaced in terms of a certain antipathy or perhaps more accurately, silencing by some lesbians who have set up a separation between lesbians who do and do not have children. The result has been extensive discussions, a reappraisal of both attitudes and childcare arrangements at lesbian events and the establishment of regional Japanese lesbian-mother support groups. These groups provide support and information for lesbians and their children who in multiple ways occupy and constantly navigate those spaces in between both living as a Japanese mother but more problematically living as a lesbian and a mother.

9   Cultures and communities

The necessity for new possibilities

Embodied spaces or lesbian culture? Both at once!

In 1993 at the Japanese Gay and Lesbian Film Festival Kakefuda Hiroko, a prominent and publicly 'out' lesbian (see Chapter 1), gave an address in which she made the somewhat contentious statement that she did not believe Japan had developed a lesbian culture. This sparked off a discussion from which a number of questions emerged: Can we talk about a 'Japanese lesbian culture'? Is the concept of 'lesbian culture' based on the acceptance of a homogeneous lesbian community? And, in the broader context of Japanese society, how do the (e)motions of 'belonging' to particular communities affect the potential or help to enact new possibilities in which self-identified lesbians can live with, rather than in fear of, internalised homophobia? According to Kakefuda's definition of 'culture', socio-economic institutional supports are necessary to promote and maintain the specific needs of lesbians. She argues:

> Ah, here's where I get told off for saying and writing things like that! But for example, there are lesbian poets, painters and potters, and that's one culture, isn't it? One means of expression. But someone who can paint or read or write can't create a culture just with that, can they? I think culture includes the everyday, all parts of your everyday life, and in that sort of wide definition, there is no culture. Women can live as lesbians at the moment only inside lesbian communities, and even these communities are a matter of 'weekends', or perhaps a meeting on Sunday at a bar, or a few circles organised here and there. So if you've had a problem with your parents or your lover, there's not a single support centre to help you resolve the problem and clear things up. Well, there are a few, but for example, it isn't enough to provide only one centre for the whole of Tokyo. Really there should be a place nearby that you can go if there's a problem … . It shouldn't be just evenings, but also afternoons. Not just weekends but weekdays that you can live as a lesbian.
>
> (Kakefuda)

Kakefuda's sexual politics, through most of the 1990s, were grounded in public actions that were directed specifically at *rezubian* (lesbian) visibility. These

included writing books and articles, appearing in the mainstream media and giving talks among various lesbian and gay communities.

> In my book I wrote about lesbians, but until then there had been nothing. So when I appear on TV, a lot of lesbians will see us and say, look, there's someone calling herself a lesbian. TV has a huge amount of influence.

Kakefuda's choice to continue to use the word *rezubian* (lesbian) publicly was based on her belief that the reclaiming of language is a political strategy (Frye 1990: 311). Moreover, due to her public position during the first half of the 1990s she became the 'token lesbian' whenever the mass media called on a 'lesbian' perspective. 'Nobody had ever seen us before, we'd never appeared before, there were no books about us'. This decision to be publicly visible was not only for the sake of appearing before a heterosexual audience, but just as importantly to be visible to other lesbians, who feel uncomfortable with using the word lesbian because of its connotations with androcentric pornography. In doing so, she encountered a variety of reactions from other lesbians, ranging from acclaim for her bravery to criticism for presuming to represent all lesbians. Kakefuda herself was more than aware of the political implications of one person seeming to represent a large disparate group of women, but countered this critique by arguing that:

> I am trying to make myself visible in a big way so that people who are trying to figure out who they are can see a real live lesbian and know that they are not the only one in the world.
>
> (Kakefuda 1993: 2)

In the same speech she also made it clear that:

> I don't want to be your representative ... . I don't like being the only one, and I can't continue to be the token open lesbian forever.
>
> (Kakefuda 1993: 1)

Kakefuda is therefore very clear about her position *vis-à-vis* her representing other lesbians. This she articulates both in relation to the erroneous assumption that the notion of 'lesbian' as fixed, but also, and leading on from the former point, that the term 'lesbian' can and does include a multiplicity of experiences that same-sex attracted women face on a daily basis. In a way similar to Carlston's discussion of Audre Lorde's notion of 'positionality', in which '[s]he acknowledges the need for occasional retreat into one, stable position, but insists that this can only be a temporary construction' (1993: 233; Sawicki 1988: 1834), so Kakefuda reconstructs her position according to specific situations. For example, it was only after her book *Rezubian de aru to iu koto* (Being Lesbian) was published that Kakefuda self-identified as a lesbian. Prior to this she saw herself as bisexual and part of her decision to redefine her identity was to directly engage publicly with heterosexuals in order to challenge the systematic discrimination

against lesbians (Saphir 1994: 23). Furthermore, it was not until after the book's publication that she became more involved in engaging with various lesbian communities.

> I actually came out after writing the book, not just in terms of society, but in terms of the people around me, the community around me … . So you could say I had written a book for my own sake, not for the community or the Japanese lesbian movement, but because I wanted to get myself in order, by myself.
>
> (Kakefuda)

However, even though Kakefuda balks at being 'the lesbian representative', her presentation of herself in the mainstream media as 'just like other women' except for her sexual orientation is somewhat problematic and could be read as an attempt to assimilate lesbian sexuality into the mainstream, thus positing difference as the negatively connoted antithesis of sameness or 'normality'. Whatever her intent, the way she looks, the body she inhabits and how she identifies sexually, produces multiple readings. When discussing her appearance on television Kakefuda says:

> because I was the only one who showed up, I had to be careful to dress properly and that sort of thing, aware that people were going to see me as a representative lesbian. I even wore a skirt [something she rarely did].

On one hand, it is possible Kakefuda's decision to wear 'appropriate' clothes was an attempt to dispel and disrupt the dominant Japanese stereotypes of 'lesbian', that of the butch (*tachi*) or of those involved in same-sex pornography. On the other hand, in attempting to do so, she shifts from her usual appearance in an effort to be taken seriously. That is, real women 'dress properly'! In so doing she plays into a discourse of gendered cultural homogeneity in which she tries to align herself as 'the lesbian' who is just like any other Japanese woman and where 'her sexuality constitutes only an accidental difference' (Calhoun 1995: 29). Indeed, a contradiction emerges in which the disruption of one image reifies the stereotypes of another. If we are to use the vocabulary of 'lesbian', 'woman' or 'culture', however, it can only be under the condition of perpetual 'becomings' and this needs to be articulated in conjunction with other configurations of resistance (Irigaray 1985: 165–6). These moments of becomings and resistance, as Grosz asserts, are simultaneously grounded in the 'concrete and specific', while 'becoming something momentary, provisional, something inherently unstable and changing' (1994b: 80). Toshiko characterises some of these other forms of resistance in her analysis of Kakefuda's comments in terms of both conscious and unconscious responses to lesbian marginalisation.

> I don't think it's so much that there's no [lesbian] culture as that it isn't recognised … . I think that while lesbians that you'd describe as political get

together at a weekend as an expression of lesbian culture, a lot of lesbians who aren't political get together without thinking that it is connected with culture. But culture has a very broad meaning. I thought Kakefuda's comments were very interesting, but saying there's no culture, well … she came out publicly, and has written a book and deals with the mass media. She wants to create a culture that can be seen.

Despite their different interpretations, there are at least two points on which Toshiko and Kakefuda do agree. First, although one cannot talk about any kind of homogeneous lesbian culture, one can speak of the multiple positions and changes in how lesbian subjectivities are expressed. Second, for both of them this means a conscious effort and ingenuity in creating the spaces from which to speak. For Kakefuda this is through publicly explaining and lobbying for the socio-economic support mechanisms that provide spaces that offer everyday services specific to different lesbians' (and male gays') requirements. These include the creation of social spaces, health centres, informal and academic seminars, and education about HIV/AIDS and homophobia. In contrast, Toshiko actively engages on a more personal level through constructing a multi-purpose space that caters not only to her individual needs and goals but also to the general local community, women and, often, specifically to lesbians.

Lesbian spaces open up

The concept and creation of a women's space was the brainchild of six lesbians who decided to experiment on a collective level to establish their own business and offer a space for other women to use and network from. One of their primary motivations was a response to their experiences of attempting to fit into conventional Japanese workplace practices. For Fumie, the (hetero)sexist assumptions that she feels dictate her social involvement and presumed loyalties to a company are based on a systematised pattern of generally adhered to trade-offs that determine not only formal but also certain types of informal socio-sexual communications. However, she was not prepared to accept these constraints. Rohlen, in his discussion of the role of work-related events in the general status of a Japanese employee, explains that:

> Full participation in the voluntary and informal events of the groups is thus a major goal in itself, since participation is the measure of acceptance, openness, and satisfaction. *It is part of a reciprocal arrangement*, the individual's contribution to the whole. Not joining in, on the other hand, is a rejection, *an act of defiance, and a sign of alienation*.
>
> (1989: 29, emphasis added).

Hence this situation also challenges the so-called 'voluntary' nature of friendships for lesbians in their daily interactions with both workers and management in the conventional workplace.

> But here [in Japan], where you work, the workers around you, the boss, who-ever you work with start coming into your life. And if I happen to like that person it's fine but if I happen not to like that person it's torture. It's like an unwritten rule that you can do it … sort of meddle into other people's lives … that's how it operates. But I don't have the time or I don't want to spend my energy doing that. I had already helped start this [lesbian] community and I'm more into my lesbian friends. So when I don't have the time to socialise with them [company colleagues], the more curious they get. And so I feel like I can't receive money from them and depend on them for my living because sooner or later they're going to come into my whole life.
>
> (Fumie)

The transference of the ideal of heterosexual family harmony based on the values of paternal obligations and duties maintained by the Japanese employment system limits women's participation in the workforce to particular types of work. It also sets lesbians in subordinate positions – as both women and seemingly unmarried – in relation to male workers and employers. Fumie's objections to working within the mainstream employment system are also reflected among the other women who committed themselves to this new business venture. However, it was not simply a matter of entering into a new job, but actually building a new kind of space and work ethos that drove them to initiate their alternative vision.

   Once these six women had decided what kind of business they wanted to establish, which meant the designing and renovating of two spaces for different purposes – which worked separately and at times in conjunction with each other – the physical component of building began. Due to extremely limited finances, friends and contacts among various lesbian and women's networks were called on for help in cementing, painting, carpentry and I soon learnt how to plaster walls. All of the labour was donated. The upstairs was run by two women and converted into a small space in which various, primarily women-only and sometimes lesbian-only activities would take place. Since opening in 1992, this space has been used for art exhibitions, workshops, second-hand sales, lesbian 'pub' nights and as a party space.

> It was started up last year, with the painting of the space. Now once a month a lesbian event of some kind is held, such as a performance, music, any kind of expression, and we thought we could promote these. There's also a gallery. A lot of lesbians write poems, draw and make things. Gallery space is extremely expensive at the moment; in Ginza, it could cost tens of thousands of yen to show. Our gallery is very small, but when there's an exhibition we get huge numbers of people coming to look. We got involved by thinking it would be great if we could help out with a place like that, which has been set up to allow women to express themselves.
>
> (Toshiko)

   The downstairs area sells 'Asian' clothing but also incorporates a tiny kitchen and a table and chairs so that visitors can sit down for a chat over a cup of tea or

coffee. The kitchen is also used to prepare food for primarily lesbian social events and at these times the upstairs and downstairs areas are combined for joint purposes. Through calling on a multiplicity of skills and ideas, these women have constructed a space in which they can attempt to earn a living. Moreover, they have also established a physical location where lesbians and heterosexual women are encouraged to meet, relax and network. However, all the women supplemented these earnings with other self-employment strategies, for example teaching and marketing arts and crafts, selling insurance or doing translation work.

> I am very satisfied with the shop at the moment. I feel a lot of motivation in running it. It is a shop but not just for profit-making. It's one part of making a community, like a market, where people get together, and I myself get to meet a lot of people. It pays for its upkeep, to an extent. On top of that, because the four of us, six including the two upstairs, are running it, there's a sense of solidarity, of having solid links between us, which I think is great. I've never been involved in anything like this before. Of course *Regumi Sutajio* (Regumi Studio)[1] is also involved in community activity, but people didn't seem to be working completely in harmony and I didn't feel at ease there at all. This shop began with exchanges between people, and that's what I like about it.

> (Chie)

The main means of advertising the shop's community events is through the extensive *mini-komi* networks[2] and word-of-mouth such as the *daiku-denwa* (lesbian telephone-tree). Chie's assertion that the running of the shop, as opposed to *Regumi Sutajio* (Regumi Studio), works in 'complete harmony' is a little romanticised, for problems of communication and decision-making have also arisen during the process of establishing and running this project. However, the fact that this is a smaller group with more specific goals also makes it easier to negotiate most concerns that arise. In contrast, *Regumi Sutajio* is an organisation and space that was established in 1989, which acts as a contact point for lesbians and the space also houses other women's organisations. It advertises in both the women's and lesbian *mini-komi* newsletters informing lesbian and bisexual women of different groups and activities taking place. It is also used as a social meeting place and produces the national Japanese lesbian newsletter *Regumi Tsūshin*. Indeed it is through this newsletter that word is disseminated among Japanese lesbians about what have now become known as 'lesbian weekends'. These weekends have developed into a 'lesbian institution', a place where same-sex attracted women can meet other women in order to discuss and explore their sexual choices while for others it is simply time out from their daily lives.

Lesbian weekends

'Lesbian weekends' are held about three times per year and are within a few hours train travel from central Tokyo. They began in 1985 and today other lesbian groups

around Japan also hold similar weekends. They usually run from a Friday evening to Sunday afternoon but are sometimes held over longer public holiday periods. The weekends are generally made up of a mixture of Japanese and non-Japanese participants, although over the last few years there have been Japanese only and bisexual weekends. Across this range of events are those who identify as lesbian, bisexual, and queer, as well as those who do not identify with a specific sexuality. The women span a wide range of ages. The weekends are usually held either in government-sponsored education centres or at places such as youth hostels – the primary requirement being that the facility can cater to a large group of women and that seminar rooms are available for workshops. I attended several of these weekends during my latter two stays in Japan, both in Tokyo and Kyoto. In this regard, what stood out was the fact that the word 'lesbian' (*rezubian*) was not to be used when registering the group. Rather, on a number of occasions the title *Kokusai fujin gurū pu* (International Women's Group) was used. At least one of the more commonly used centres, ironically one that specifically caters to women, also made it clear that they do not encourage women to bring their children. This is despite the fantastic sport, leisure and park facilities offered – a real shame considering the limited space in which most children in Japanese urban areas have to play. Furthermore, the 'rule' of not using the word *rezubian* also applies to notices posted on the doors outside seminar rooms that indicate the group and the particular topic of discussion. Thus despite the money brought to the centres by this group's presence – and participation ranges from 60 to 200 women – the group is only 'tolerated' under certain conditions. There has been some attempt to find more lesbian-friendly places to hold the weekends but these are few and far between.

In contrast, *Akā* (*Ugoku gē to rezubian no kai*, Organisation for the progress of gays and lesbians) took the Tokyo City Council to court in 1990 for banning a group of gay men from staying overnight at the Fuchū Youth Activity Centre (*Fuchū Seinen no Ie*). A representative of the department of education at the Tokyo City Council stated that:

> Allowing homosexuals to stay is against the principle of this facility, which aims to support the health development of young people. (Tsunoda 1992: 217)

After four years, the judge ruled in favour of *Akā* (Fushimi 1994: 4) but this ruling was appealed by the city council and in 1997 the ruling was eventually upheld. However, comparable public confrontations have not occurred at any 'lesbian weekends' despite their longevity. Perhaps the latter group feels that at the moment it is more important to protect the space that they have in order to continue the weekends, while it certainly suits the government to perpetuate the myth that Japanese lesbians do not exist as socio-economic subjects.

My role in the lesbian weekends varied: I was a member of a foreign community, an observer, an interviewer, a lesbian participant and occasionally one of the organisers of the weekends. As in my own case, there was no one reason nor one feeling that encompassed the reasons for any individual's attendance. Depending

on their needs and reactions to their previous experiences some returned regularly while others felt completely besieged by the experience.

> I hated it. I was absolutely terrified. I couldn't feel at ease, and I certainly didn't feel any overwhelming joy. I was worried that someone would attack me. I felt incredibly out of place.
>
> (Asako)

In a similar vein, Toshiko explains her initial ambivalence to the weekends:

> Everyone seemed strange. That's a strange thing to say, but somehow I felt really out of place. I was afraid I guess. I was afraid to see the lesbianism inside myself, and afraid to see other lesbians. And I thought that maybe I was bisexual. I couldn't say positively that I was a lesbian. No matter how much my former lover said, 'you're a lesbian, you've become a lesbian', I always said, 'I'm not, I'm me! I'm a woman. Even though I may love you, I'm not a lesbian.' When I was living with my first [female] lover twenty years ago, there wasn't even the word lesbian. We were together because we liked each other … this was twenty years ago. And there were pretty much no lesbian groups in Japan like there are now. Or they were very small and people like us living in mainstream society didn't know about them … . [When first attending a weekend] I still couldn't admit to myself that I was bisexual, or that while I liked women, I had to think about the social significance because of the children. When I first went along to a weekend, I felt very uncomfortable. I wasn't happy at all. One part of me felt something in common with other people who were there, but another part felt that I was different. Not that I rejected the others or myself, but simply that I didn't belong there. So I felt very tense … . But at that time the bisexual community existed in not much more than name in Japan, and was barely operating at all. The lesbian weekends left me with a very strong impression that I was different, and looking back now when I'm very firmly a lesbian, I think that wondering about going along as a bisexual was actually very rude toward lesbians who were committed toward making a lesbian community. I wanted them to look after the community, while making no contribution toward it myself. That's how it was in the beginning.

Toshiko was initially drawn to the weekends partly because she seemed to want to locate her feelings within some sort of group identity. Indeed, at a minimum the various motivations and emotional energy involved in going to and participating in lesbian events show that these women are interested in, or predisposed to finding some sort of connection or community. On *arriving*,[3] however, Toshiko perceived that her sense of belonging or ability to feel safe were at odds with her internal struggles of change. But although this conflict resulted in Toshiko's uneasiness or feeling of 'outsiderness', in fact, the moment difference is acknowledged sameness cannot help but collapse into crisis whether psychically or

socially, for 'identity politics is predicated on denying the difference that is already there in "the same"' (Fuss 1989: 103).

As Toshiko continues, however, it becomes apparent that her hesitancy to identify her sexual desire is not so much a reaction to her recognition of affectional ties towards women but rather to the internalisation of mainstream discourses about lesbianism that equate and conflate culturally accepted gender norms on to what it is to be a 'woman' or a 'man'. The phrases she employs such as 'I was afraid to see the lesbianism inside myself' and 'I'm not. I'm me! I'm a woman' reflect what Foucault refers to as an 'artificial unity' made up of 'anatomical elements, biological functions, conducts, sensations, and pleasures' based on an etiology that produces 'an omnipresent meaning, a secret to be discovered everywhere' (1978: 154). Thus, it seems that the 'lesbian' that Toshiko is referring to and rejecting is the pervasive image of the butch/femme, a denial of 'the invert'. Again, she declares, 'I am a woman', 'people like us didn't know about them' and 'we didn't see them anywhere', the assumption being that one should know what 'they' look like. This is further confirmed by her alluding to the types of lesbian networks operating in Japan twenty years prior. Of course, the dominant stereotypical image of the lesbian was consolidated by the only public place lesbians could meet outside their homes (where meeting was often impossible), the bars, where butch/femme (*tachi/neko*) lesbians could congregate and butches in particular were visible.

Another feature of Toshiko's anxiousness was due to the unknown social and political expectations that were required within a lesbian context with which she was as yet unfamiliar. Toshiko suddenly entered a community[4] without knowing what the etiquette of participation required from her was and what she was expected to give back. Probably even more confusing was that these socio-political expectations no longer depended on, nor revolved around either her husband (male head of the household) or the children as her *ikigai* (life's worth). 'Until very recently I (Toshiko) lived in a very socially acceptable comprehensible situation with my husband … but suddenly and in his place there was a woman living with us.' In other words, it is not merely a change in deciding one's sexual partner but the loss (or benefits) of the privileges and institutional supports that go along with that choice.

> [S]exual relationships are contiguous with and a part of other relationships … . The bedroom is no more the privileged site of sexuality than any other space.
>
> (Grosz 1994b: 77)

Thus, choosing to self-identify as a lesbian is not simply a matter of deciding which sexuality one prefers, as the term 'sexual preference' implies. Rather, as Toshiko explains, rethinking one's sexuality also involves a complex rearrangement and recognition of the effects of the differences that, both implicitly and explicitly, emerge in choosing a different life context in which to move. Yet she still chooses to live this difference (Ettore 1981: 36–7).

Generally these weekends acted as a retreat or a kind of a safety net in which women could express their concerns and joys within a relatively protected space. However, it should also be noted that, while I interviewed a variety of women, the fact that they were prepared to talk to me probably indicates that they felt relatively secure about their participation. This is in contrast to the large degree of anonymity that was taken on by some Japanese women who used pseudonyms while attending – a practice not limited to these weekends (Hirosawa 1992: 113). This fear of exposure is not simply paranoia, for at least on one occasion a heterosexual woman journalist pretending to be lesbian gained access to the weekend in order to write up a story without permission, causing considerable distress for many of the participants.

Thus, even though many women described the weekends as somewhere where one could 'be oneself', 'being oneself' for particular women was premised on an intersection of pleasure and fear and perpetually provisional. On being asked of her initial feelings on coming to a weekend, Tomiko explained:

> Because I was really interested in coming I felt quite excited. But at the same time, I also felt quite nervous. I didn't think that there would be any people I knew here … and I did not even tell my parents I was coming. I didn't feel good about lying. So while I was really excited about coming here, I also felt nervous and uneasy for a number of reasons … when I arrived there were still very few people here … so I didn't feel very frightened and by coincidence, there were people here that I knew and so I felt quite relieved. It's not very pleasant to come to something like this and feel apart from the rest of the group. Especially with lesbians, you know, they tend to be part of a large group of people who all know each other well. That made me feel a bit insecure so when I got here and found people that I knew, I was really relieved (*hotto shita*). And I found that there were a lot of other people who had come here for the first time and that made me feel more comfortable.

Tomiko covers a full spectrum of emotions in her description of her 'arriving' and she is by no means alone in stating that she lied or did not tell her parents, friends or work colleagues where she was spending her weekend. The lie, however, highlights the fact that she must live a lie in most of her daily relations. Miyoko explains it this way:

> From morning to night, going to the toilet, eating meals, sleeping, talking in my sleep, no matter what I do, I can do it without lying. I don't have to hide the fact that I like women, that I like so-and-so and that I can be this way for twenty-four hours a day. That's what I like best about being here.
>
> (Miyoko)

The differences that tend to exist even among heterosexual women and lesbians expose the desire or the necessity for moments and spaces of sexual non-integration, whether that be in terms of men and women or heterosexual women and

lesbians. Thus the notion of 'both at once' in this instance suggests that for lesbians to initiate a discourse among themselves they need a position or some form of subjectivity from which to be heard (Hartsock 1990; Miller 1986) while at the same time, to create and make sense of such a space is dependent on to whom one is speaking.[5] Thus the creating of a space in which there is reciprocity in terms of *speaking and listening* is a necessary component of a strategic essentialism. This enables those who participate in these 'weekends' to both discuss issues and be themselves within a discursive location that makes sense to them. Whether it is simply an oppositional reaction to Japanese heterosexism which silences lesbian subjectivities is arguable. Indeed, it is questionable, even to some degree irrelevant, to pose such questions that assume an original or pre-discursive (re)action. What is significant, however, are the implications and effects of 'becoming active or reactive' in that:

> gay and lesbian sexualities and lifestyles can be seen as innovative, inventive, productive, and thus active insofar as they aim at their own pleasures, their own distributions, their own free expansion.
>
> (Grosz 1995: 215–16)

The weekends are one method of shifting, or realigning lesbian subject position(s) for those who take part in the weekends, as well as a symbol of affirmation and validation of Japanese lesbian existence for others who may not be able to participate. Moreover, while some women did lie about where they were going, it was not something anyone enjoyed doing. More often than not this discomfort was converted into a positive – albeit short-term – feeling of release and safety.

> I felt relieved (*hotto shita*). I felt that I had a lot of friends close by and that I was protected.
>
> (Sawako)

The type and number of workshops and activities offered at the weekends depend on the facilities available, the numbers attending, and the energy of the participants in wanting to facilitate them. Generally, there are a variety of workshops running concurrently throughout the day. The workshops cover a wide range of lesbian-related issues, music and sports activities. Moreover, because of the inclusion of the 'foreign lesbian community' primarily constituted by English-speaking lesbians, workshops can be facilitated exclusively in Japanese or in English or, as has happened more often recently, are bi-lingual.

> There were many language problems between the Japanese and the foreigners in the beginning so we could not understand each other. But recently, the number [of foreign lesbians] who speak Japanese has increased and so in this respect, things have changed considerably. In addition, the number of young people has increased dramatically. Well, I guess we have all gotten older [laughs].
>
> (Sachiko)

The 'language problems' have for some years been a serious and sometimes divisive political issue not only at the weekends but also within the wider communities. Issues relating to who translated, what was, and often more significantly, what was not being translated, the level of translation and thus misinterpretations (both cultural and linguistic), and who decided what was to be discussed and by what process, all worked to produce tensions which centred on concerns about cultural, racial and linguistic imperialism. While many of these issues have been discussed over the years, they continually resurface and constantly need to be addressed both separately (within the Japanese and foreign communities) and sometimes together. Thus the umbrella term 'lesbian weekends' opens up a space that also allows for a large degree of heterogeneity from which issues of diversity and the diversity itself can emanate.

The Asian Lesbian Network is a case in point. The Asian Lesbian Network (ALN) is open to all same-sex attracted women who identify as 'Asian'. The first ALN conference was held in Thailand in 1990 while the second one was hosted by Japan in 1992 and the third took place in Taiwan. For the Japanese participants the ALN has been a space to analyse Japan's historical and contemporary complicity and responsibility in racist colonial and post-colonial attitudes and actions toward other 'Asian women'.[6] Of major concern within the present-day context are questions dealing with Japanese economic domination particularly in relation to the transfer of Japanese industries off-shore to other Asian countries, sex tours to the Philippines and Thailand, and Asian brides being brought to Japan,[7] not to mention the huge prostitution trade in Japan that is maintained through the exploitation of thousands of primarily Filipino and Thai sex workers (Buckley 1997a: 133–55; Matsui Yayori 1995: 309–22). At these meetings non-Asian lesbians are requested not to attend, although they have been requested to act as translators on occasion.

Apart from language, a further difference between the Japanese and non-Japanese community is the socio-political context in which Japanese lesbians live and participate in lesbian events which inevitably produces a different set of needs in their articulation of 'identity' and 'community'.

> Foreigners seem much more political. In their own societies in America and England and wherever, they're used to asserting their lesbianism. They regard it as part of their daily life. On the other hand, perhaps eighty per cent of Japanese women have always believed that being lesbian is something special, something embarrassing and something that has to be hidden. For people in this situation, what matters most at a weekend is that for a while they don't have to have a guilty conscience. They haven't got as far yet as thinking about their position politically, studying the situation. I think most people [Japanese] still feel that if a weekend provides a brief respite from the stress of daily living, that's quite adequate.
>
> (Toshiko)

Toshiko's definition of political development or maturity in terms of public expressions of lesbian sexuality sets up a notion of cultural convergence based on a linear historical progression. While exchange of information is always useful, these 'exchanges' are not always reciprocal, but rather set up Japanese lesbians as somehow behind or backward. It should be said, however, that over the past few years, Japanese lesbians are much more vocal in their challenge to the eurocentrism often implicit in the 'advice' given by Anglo-European lesbians in particular. This advice is not only based on Western notions of sexual identity, as articulated for example in the primacy of the 'coming out' narrative, but also simply by virtue of the plethora of information and literature that is available in English. In some ways, Japanese lesbians' lack of access to those English sources is surprising given the high status of English, along with the large number of publishing companies that operate in Japan. More to the point, however, this lack of information reflects Japanese lesbians' lack of access to the production and dissemination of knowledge within mainstream institutions. For example, I know a number of women who worked within the education system but were unable to mention issues around sexual difference.

One of the difficult moments of the weekends is when it is time to leave and return to one's daily life, no longer protected by the energy and to some extent false intimacy of a transitory community, one which could probably not be sustained in the long run. When I asked a number of women how they felt on leaving the weekends, a complex variety of feelings emerged. For example, a number of women travel long distances at great expense to attend weekends, which is sometimes the only access they have to sharing information and emotions. In the case of women living in small isolated towns, these weekends present a forum where they can network with other women who are in similar situations. Living in emotional, social, and geographic isolation was a serious issue that a number of 'country' lesbians raised.

> First of all, the fact that I participated in such a weekend is of significance. And the realisation that this type of group exists has also made an impression on me. A short period is okay for people who can open up and talk about their feelings right away but there are some people who just can't do that. So having a gathering where there is more time where people can stay overnight and gradually open up, I feel, is good. People who come from distant places wouldn't under ordinary circumstances be able to participate in short one or two hour sessions, so in these circumstances they can really get to know one another.
>
> (Kaneko)

The weekends can have numerous positive effects on the women who attend, including (re)establishing friendships, and having a space and a group of peers with which to explore and challenge diverse ideas. Women can also gain confidence through facilitating and participating in workshops as well as informal chats, laughing, crying, singing and dancing. There is also a concerted attempt to

develop all activities in a non-competitive, non-hierarchical atmosphere. However, when returning to one's daily life these attempts at non-traditional practices are often thrown into dramatic relief when re-entering a system which relies on hierarchies within hierarchies to operate.

> I feel very sad because on the following day I have to lie to people – not everybody, because I don't hide the facts from everybody, just a certain group of people … . And I am rejected by some people, this is also painful. I don't mean just the problem with my sexuality. I feel strong discrimination against me in the workplace simply because I am a woman. I feel that male superiority (*danson johi*) is deeply entrenched. Having to live in a reality where I experience these things makes me sad and it's hard for me.
>
> (Akemi)

In contrast, some women cannot wait to go home, feeling overwhelmed and sometimes threatened by the emotional intensity the weekends inevitably produce, while at the same time there is a reluctance to forgo the intimacies that have been established.

> I feel relieved I can go home now, and at the same time sad that a weekend has finished and that I won't be able to see everyone for a while.
>
> (Eiko)

The weekends are just one avenue where the notion of 'community' has been developed in contemporary Japanese lesbian practices. Whether they continue or not will depend on both the individual and collective needs and desires of the women themselves. Nevertheless, irrespective of their endurance, they have become historically significant for two major reasons. First, they have filled a cultural void for both the women who attend and for those who simply employ the knowledge of their existence as a reference point. And as a result of this, a second generation of lesbians has emerged who already have a loose network in place, or what Pérez refers to as 'separate spaces to inaugurate their own discourses' which she argues is integral for marginalised groups to articulate their different positions (1994: 109). However, do these cultural spaces enacted by lesbians constitute a Japanese lesbian culture?

The loose networks that offer various forms of support such as Regumi Studio, the *mini-komi*, weekends, bars, lesbian businesses, lesbian mothers' groups, exhibitions, workshops, the annual Japanese gay and lesbian film festival, and lesbian, gay and bisexual organisations should not be interpreted as simply a reaction to Japanese heterosexist oppression. Although marginalised, Japanese lesbians are neither inside nor outside Japanese society but rather work in a variety of inter-locations within mainstream discourses. Indeed, just as dominant discourses cannot contain and define 'Japanese culture', no one lesbian discourse can constitute a transhistorical 'Japanese lesbian culture'. However, they do have the

potential to produce, both on a broad collective and individual level, different cultural expressions and possibilities grounded in particular sexed and sexualised bodies and spaces.

10 Bodies of knowledge

Lesbian subjectivity in Japanese society: emerging voices

> Up until now the existence of homosexuals has been treated according to three categories. Homosexuals are looked at as *hentai* (abnormal), controlled by the institutions of psychiatry. They are treated as *o-warai* (comedy) within the entertainment media. Or, they are ignored.
>
> (Fushimi 1994: 4)

The silences that surround Japanese self-identified lesbians' daily reality are both socially and self-enforced from the inside: a situation which results in the perpetuation of heterosexual privileges that actively consign lesbians discursively to the outside. These benefits primarily advantage and serve heterosexual men while concomitantly working to 'protect' and benefit heterosexual women. While acknowledging these privileges, I have argued that lesbians are constantly transcending and renegotiating their positions through the creation of spaces which are largely invisible to mainstream society. This is done in various ways from refusing to accept the margins that work to secure and protect heterosexual hegemony, to taking on the appearance of heterosexual norms in order to remain invisible.

In doing so, I suggest, lesbians are able to move relatively freely precisely because there are no discourses to immobilise them in a fixed 'identity politics'. It is not a game they choose to participate in but rather methods of social, political, economic and emotional survival. What emerges however is a paradox, indeed, a double-edged sword. On the one side these actions allow for the 'delightfully and deviantly diverse' (McLean 1994: 68) creation of spaces while on the other side aiding both in the concealment of their sexuality and the perpetuation of the dominant heterosexual social system.

Throughout this book I have also argued for the need for provisional claims of essentialist subject positions, 'strategic essentialism', in order to act toward a self and/or group articulation of oppression, complicity, negotiation and resistance. This is not merely for the sake of producing more constraints by way of a 'struggle for freedom' (Grosz 1995: 227) but rather, as the Japanese lesbians in this account have consistently asserted, to be constructed as abject is to be no subject

at all. On its own, this latter position has a tendency to serve 'a fantasy from everywhere' relativist politics which does little to explain how specific power relations work toward the silencing and oppression of lesbian subjectivities in Japanese society (Bordo 1993: 39–40; Kennedy and Davis 1996: 174). While I agree that deconstructing the notion of an origin and its assumed centrality is integral to avoiding simplistic misrepresentations of the unidirectional nature of power, to what extent is this line being achieved at the expense of depoliticising (inter)subjectivity? Does this position merely reinstate the individual – albeit a gendered, sexed, racialised individual – as a more complex problem, yet still a secret to be unravelled, and in doing so re-centre a notion of multiple undifferentiated selves?

Japanese conservative political discourse with its emphasis on relational subjectivities where no one should stand out, epitomised by the phrase 'the protruding nail is hammered down' (*deru kugi wa utareru*), may be read in similar ways. Although the Japanese government has been consistently pressured to open up its borders to internationalisation (*kokusaika*), predominantly achieved through foreign market advertising campaigns, there have also been counter-movements aimed at re-centring the *Nihonjinron* (theories about the Japanese) debates.[1] As Iwabuchi notes, in the 1980s the government established an academic centre in Kyoto to examine the essence of 'Japaneseness' as well as tourism campaigns which beckon both foreigners and Japanese alike to 'discover' the real Japan through a re-invention and romanticisation of rural community 'traditions' (Ivy 1993: 251–3; Iwabuchi 1994: 61; Lock 1993: 45–6; Anderson 1983).

These political endeavours rely on, indeed are sustained by, academic and popular explanations which assert that Japanese society would fall apart without fixed hierarchies and individuals who know their place. This is despite the many minority groups in Japan who strongly counter such claims and who bear the brunt of these functionalist explanations. For example Smith argues:

> The major implication of the diffuseness of hierarchy in Japanese groups is that the person who holds authority is no more or less autonomous than those over whom he theoretically wields power.
>
> (1983: 49)

To assert that Japanese institutional and non-institutional power relations are rendered impotent, or abrogated through a constructed diffuseness of hierarchical relational positionings which 'theoretically' wield control, is androcentric and does not account for the real effects of unequal power relations. First, Smith assumes that all dominant positions of power are inhabited and distributed by men. And, second, although this argument acknowledges multiple differences, it reduces political subjectivity to endless constructions of relatively powerful or powerless positions, and thus as Hartsock contends, 'in a sense no one is responsible' (1989–90: 23). Rather, Japanese hegemonic social relations, through normalising and standardising specific hierarchical arrangements, create an impression of group harmony and balance while silencing dissenting voices.

When Toshiko talks about advertising and the construction of (women's) body image, she explains the ways in which notions of belonging to particular groups are used to encourage sameness.

> I think that in Japanese society the construction of body image is felt to be very important. It makes it much easier to classify people. For example, there are a surprising number of people who feel insecure when they look at people dressed very freely (casually) the way Eiko does. People look at other people's clothing and guess at that person's job, the way they think, the type of category the person might fit into. You can look at people's clothes and say, ah, that person is a white collar worker, that person works in a factory, that person is a student … . I think that kind of outer image is a way to allay your own insecurities over which group you yourself belong to. Prime Minister Hata[2] is always talking about 'ordinary' (*futsū no*) at the moment. 'Ordinary' words, 'ordinary' politics, 'ordinary' everything. I think that is a frightening word – people can be divided into tidy groups and be the same as everybody, so that everyone can feel secure. It also means forcing one pattern of behaviour on everybody, and that means having freedom is very frightening. I think body image in Japan is a way of slowly but surely impressing on people exactly how frightening it can be to insist on one's freedom, and that's why body image is considered important … . He [Hata] talks about wanting to conduct 'ordinary' politics, and at first sight that seems to mean that he doesn't want to set himself above us, that he's on the same level, a very relaxed image. But the reverse side of that 'ordinariness' is that everything *not* ordinary has to be swept away, that kind of very fascist thinking. As long as everything is 'ordinary' anything goes. That's the general mood in Japan at the moment. If you're ordinary, you can hide yourself.

Toshiko's discussion works at a number of levels in revealing the ways in which homophobia in combination with other oppressive practices (for they rarely if ever stand alone) such as sexism and racism is enacted in Japanese society to effect what Grosz refers to as the separation of 'being from doing'. That is, being a (male) homosexual in Japan can be tolerated as long as it is contained within a notion of the quintessential homosexual, within the parodic in popular entertainment, or within the Anglo-European-looking effeminate in *manga*. In contrast, lesbianism is acceptable and tolerated if it is contained within pornography for men. Under these circumstances, as Toshiko says, 'anything goes'. Clammer observes a similar situation:

> What one *does* and what one *is* [in Japan] are to a great extent the same and it is thought very desirable to present a rounded or 'total' and consistent image of oneself. … . The key is appropriateness: not so much being tidy as dressed for one's role.
>
> (1992: 198)

However, this is only applicable, as both Toshiko and Clammer point out, if you are who you appear to be, and if who you appear to be constitutes an appropriate and acceptable role within 'diffuse hierarchies'. Otherwise, as Clammer asserts, 'it [the Japanese self] is liable to disintegration' (1992: 211).

This form, partly enacted through the implementation of *tatemae* (surface appearance) also assists lesbians in Japan to disguise their outward 'being' from the actual 'doing', the latter more associated with *honne* (real feelings). It is important, however, to understand that this does not set up an 'authentic self' in opposition to 'a surface presentation', but rather both are part of how social communication is experienced within contemporary Japanese culture. To cover up one's true feelings can be difficult, indeed in the case of Japanese lesbians the effects are often oppressive, but the portrayal of contrary inner and outer feelings in itself does not elicit a self-consciousness of deceit or dishonesty. This can obviously affect the decision-making process of to whom and under what circumstances 'coming out' is necessary or desired.

> About a year and a half ago, a lesbian activist rang me and said that at last she'd been able to come out. I was amazed that even someone like her hadn't come out to her parents before that. She said that she'd finally done it after listening to me and thinking about it for a while. She was very happy and that's good. But it made me very aware of the degree to which lesbians in Japan are discriminated against and the fear with which they are forced to live.
>
> (Chiho)

The 'fears' that Chiho talks of are primarily those of exposure for the vast majority of lesbians who are not 'out'. However, physical violence is also a real threat. An incident in which two lesbians were attacked on a very public thoroughfare took place while I was in Japan. The perpetrator assumed they were lesbian and yelled out pejorative names. When they challenged his behaviour they were assaulted. This situation is rare in Japan, or at least remains unreported and undocumented, but it is naïve to think that as lesbian visibility increases that there will be no homophobic backlash. The incident above was precipitated by the women's refusal to back down in face of his aggressive behaviour, not because they did anything to suggest they were lesbian, but because of the assumption also pervasive in Japan that female (sexual) autonomy = man hater = lesbian.

Although there are occasional snapshots of lesbian visibility in Japan (for example, gay and lesbian film festivals and pride days) it is hardly surprising that resistance, particularly by lesbians, is often more covert than overt. Moreover, for the very reason that the regulation of (hetero)sexuality does permeate all sectors of Japanese society, I would at the very least question the desirability of any form of state regulation of same-sex attracted sexuality. As previously argued, the moment sexuality is institutionalised there is, first, an assumption of knowing what, in this case, lesbian sexuality is and, second, how, where and by whom it should be practised. As Grosz asserts:

> To submit one's pleasures and desires to enumeration and definitive articulation is to submit processes and becomings, to entities, locations, and boundaries, to become welded to an organizing nucleus of fantasy and desire whose goal is not simply pleasure and expansion, but control, and *the tying of the new to models of what is already known, the production of endless repetition, endless variations of the same*.
>
> (Grosz 1995: 223, emphasis added)

Nor am I suggesting that the development of 'a politics of articulation' (Hammonds 1997: 152) is an either/or project, but rather that resistance needs to take on multiple forms. One method that has hitherto been remarkably effective is the differing degrees to which lesbians in Japan have subverted and negotiated the very structures that work to contain them, in order to open up multiple gendered and sexualised spaces. Fine (1992: 229) and Lal (1996: 200) refer to this strategy in terms of 'working the spaces' or hyphens across which we already move. Eiko articulates this capacity to shift across multiple in-between spaces as:

> being able to choose between a number of ways to spend your time gives you much more emotional space. I think that's very important. Heterosexuals have only one path to choose from. Lesbians have a number of paths, a number of possibilities which they hold on to very strongly. That's a very relaxing way to live, I think.

Yet, these 'possibilities' are never separate from dominant discourses and power is always 'exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of non-egalitarian and mobile relations' (Foucault 1978: 95). Thus, whether one is discussing power in relation to orientalising, self-orientalising,[3] or lesbian practices, two points must be kept in mind. The first is that dominant power relations are always already changing in their very attempts to re-constitute their central dominance, and the second is that in so doing they oppress 'others' in the process, even though there will inevitably be reactions. A good example of this is the adoption system.

   The potential of the acceptance of diverse Japanese kinship practices and their subversive quality permits lesbians to 'pass' as kin for each other. However, it is the very dominance of the Japanese kinship system and its limited definitions of socially acceptable subjects that motivate a search for these legal loopholes. While the adoption system has appeared to be an innovative approach to extending notions of kinship throughout Japanese history, it has also been used as another method to contain 'the Japanese family' within a fixed patriarchal form. A number of women with whom I talked suggested that the use of adoption in heterosexual society was a way of keeping the 'unmarried mother' figures low. That is, so-called 'illegitimate' children can be adopted into another branch of the extended family and registered under their name (a common occurrence) or are adopted out to other families in order to avoid any scandal.

A woman who was teaching in a kindergarten in Fukui Prefecture became an unwed mother, and this was reported in the newspaper. So the education commission – kindergartens are under the jurisdiction of the education commission – had her transferred from her post. This was far off in the countryside in an area where there were only two kindergarten teachers. So even though the newspaper only gave the name as Ms A, it was easy to figure out who it was, and the story was picked up and placed in the national edition of the newspaper. We [a feminist group] felt that it was awful and we all protested that she should be put in such a position, but the woman herself was unable to protest, and her child was given away for adoption to some place unknown to the mother soon after it was born. That's how bad it is.

(Chiho)

In this case the dominant familial discourse was enunciated and bolstered by the education department and media. This was achieved by setting up a common representation of 'Japanese womanhood' into two neat entities, the contained (married) woman and the excess (unmarried) woman, in which 'the former marks a successful transition and the latter a failed transition' (Buckley 1991: 178–9).

However, despite the complexity in the ways power and resistance manifest themselves there is still a tendency in popular and academic writings about Japan to contextualise power in terms of formal institutions and processes, in which discussions of women's equality are invariably framed in relation to either 'the West' or Japanese men. Skov and Moeran argue that,

Such figures [the very low number of women in local and national politics] indicate that in terms of political power Japanese women are not about to 'catch up' with the type of gender (in)equality found in western countries, even less with Japanese men. It is clear, therefore, that the perception that Japanese women's power is increasing is not directly related to the formal political institutions.

(1995: 38)

Alternatively, when Japanese women's power is considered 'real' or legitimate the rationalisation is consistently predicated on their central role within the home space. This latter explanation, in particular, relies on a culturally relativist rhetoric that asserts that women's social position *vis-à-vis* Japanese men, and often Western women, is equal but separate or different. The rhetoric of complementary gender roles is then employed to emphasise the uniqueness of Japanese social relations (Buckley 1997a: 280–1). Such explanations inevitably lead to homogeneous constructions of Japanese women in which they are represented as both oppressed and submissive or as all-powerful (for example, controlling the purse strings). The latter point is regularly proffered by Japanese men who foreclose discussions by claiming 'Western' feminists cannot hope to understand Japanese women or Japanese society. Yet Japanese women have articulated similar criticisms throughout this text.

The range of narratives that have been presented throughout this book are as much a critique of compulsory heterosexuality and institutionalised marriage practices in Japan as they are about the thoughts, actions past and future possibilities of the Japanese lesbians with whom I talked. I have also tried to begin a more complex analysis, until recently particular to Anglo-European lesbian-feminist and queer scholarship, on the importance of examining how bodies are the 'stuff' that both receive but just as importantly act as living matter. In Best's words, bodies are 'an active signifying substance' (1995: 190) to which other historically specific social individuals and systems react. As such, bodies are not docile. I have argued the significance of how different bodies are no less constructed than gender, indeed the very notion of constructing or becoming is in itself a politically discursive process that has the potential to foreclose as much as to open up different analytical and conceptual possibilities (Butler 1990: 9). Japanese feminist writings throughout the 1980s and early 1990s have generally failed to distinguish between the concepts of sex, sexuality and gender and as such have often been read as interchangeable categories (Buckley 1997a: 156; Ueno 1997: 88–9). While in recent years a more sophisticated analysis has emerged there is still a tendency to conflate 'female', 'femininity' and 'heterosexuality'. Miya Yoshiko, one of the few Japanese feminists who has written specifically on issues of sexuality, states:

> It's really only been in the late 80s that we have started to even grapple with the need to make the distinctions and … there is still not real agreement on the question of gender. I believe that it is not the fundamental biological differences but the culturally enforced differences, which create the gender gap. Sexuality is the individual's sense of a self-identity that extends to one's body and links that body to one's sexual drives. This sense of self is not limited to a heterosexual model.
>
> (Buckley 1997a: 162)[4]

Miya's explanation is similar to other social constructionist feminists who argue that gender is a set of socially prescribed roles based on notions of appropriately defined 'masculinity' and 'femininity'. The acceptance of gender as the building blocks on a prediscursive contained entity – and in the case of women's bodies, with all the associated metaphors of the feminine as 'natural' – remains fixed, a *tabula rasa*. The biological sexed body, that is, whether one is born male or female, and by extension the subsequent presumption of heterosexuality, remains analytically separate from discussions of gender. The consequences of maintaining the sex/gender, mind/body distinction as Butler points out, is that:

> 'the body' appears as a passive medium on which cultural meanings are inscribed or as the instrument through which an appropriative and interpretive will determines a cultural meaning for itself. In either case, the body is figured as a mere *instrument* or *medium* for which a set of cultural meanings are only externally related.
>
> (1990: 8)

Butler argues that 'the body' on to which gender is ascribed depending on biological sex is neither neutral nor a blank slate. Instead, she poses an alternative question, 'to what extent does the body *come into being* in and through the mark(s) of gender? and in so doing problematises and, indeed, challenges the assumption that bodies are pre-cultural and ahistorical entities prior to and separate from gender identification (Butler 1990: 8; 1993a). By way of considering these ideas I have explored the notions of 'form' and 'toleration' through an analysis of *uchi–soto* (inside–outside) as a site of embodied contestations, where subjects simultaneously employ resistance, complicity and negotiation.

Japanese lesbians have learnt to be creative both in responding to, and working within the spaces and places that surround them. In so doing they are able to develop culturally specific ways of expressing sexualised difference, and, as can be seen from the following narrative, this can occur simultaneously in the most private and public ways. At a lesbian weekend Eiko organised a music workshop in the *o-sento* (public bath).

> That workshop left a very strong impression, it was very interesting. I was a bit tense as obviously being in the bath I was completely nude! I was embarrassed, and while I had been worried how the sound of the *taiko* [Japanese drum] would fit in with the *shakuhachi* [Japanese flute], I was more worried about being nude. We had a great time, everyone singing and humming and clapping together. There was a terrific rhythm … . There were a lot of people that time, about thirty in the *o-sento* [the women's public bath]. And then there were another fifteen or so people standing in the area where you get undressed. A lot of people were very happy and I was happy too.
>
> (Eiko)

Lesbian bodies in Japan both resist and acquiesce to specific gendered, sexed and sexualised realities, yet lesbians are always mindful of the differences in taking up those social spaces. The creativity of how these embodied subjects 'work-the-hyphens' in the constant renegotiating of their own and others' intersubjective positions in relation to work, families, notions of community, friendships, children, motherhood and leisure is what I found so fascinating, given all the institutional constraints that exist. There are many examples, both historically and in contemporary Japanese society and popular culture, of female gender ambiguity. These different forms can be seen from the 'new woman' (*atarashii onna*), the political activists of the 1910s, the *moga* (modern girls) of the 1920s, to the long history of the Takarazuka Revue, the *tachi* (butch)/*neko* (femme), Banana Yoshimoto's *Kitchen*[5] to Club Marilyn in Tokyo, which provides 'masculine' (*otokoppoi*) women as hostesses to serve women customers.[6] It is this vast range of gender-bending that has hitherto perplexed and complicated discussions of gender, sexuality, appropriate form and the very nebulous term 'tolerance'.

However, as I have demonstrated throughout this book, lesbian sexuality is not dependent on gender ambiguity, even though it can include it. As such, while gender relations are an important site from which to understand Japanese society, on its

own it does not explain sexed and sexualised differences. Rather by deconstructing Japanese heterosexuality in combination with gender, 'race', class and national identity a more complex and nuanced approach to understanding Japanese social relations emerges.[7] This being said, the recent approach of adding an 's' onto the end of words to designate a plurality of differences, what Jagose calls 'feminism's new magical sign' (1993: 273), can also work to obscure further analyses, while neutralising and standardising those very differences into sameness. This 'neutralising and standardising of differences' is what Toshiko refers to as 'the ordinary' and its associated 'dangers', including the relinquishment of a politicised inter-subjectivity. Thus, as Butler asserts, 'those markings [the final "s"] have to become a point of departure', rather than the answer (Braidotti 1994: 33). In terms of interrogating sexed and sexualised positionings, what makes the difference is the specificities regarding who one loves and is loved by, the various ways female desire is constituted, to what extent the desired and desiring body is accepted or legitimised as a social agent, and how all of these knowledges are represented and circulate throughout society (Waldby 1995: 268). These issues need to enter contemporary debates about Japanese society both from within and from outside academia.

Bodies of knowledge: concluding remarks

Over the past ten years there have been a number of references that allude to the paucity of literature dealing with female same-sex attraction outside of the Anglo-European, in particular the US context (Vance 1984: 17; Weston 1993: 345; Williams 1993: 119). In some way I hope I have worked toward addressing this gap. Moreover, I have also tried to open up the very limited representations of lesbian sexuality that have appeared throughout modern Japanese history.

As stated in Chapter 1, the age of the women I interviewed is significant, spanning from those in their early twenties to those in their fifties, with the majority of narrators being in their thirties and forties. This is important because the impression in the texts that do mention lesbian sexuality in Japan is that a self-conscious lesbian identification has only surfaced over the past ten years or so. However, as a number of the women have explained, they are now part of a second generation of self-identified lesbians in Japan. Sachiko, now in her fifties, laments the lack of role models available to her:

> I wish there were older people here [at a lesbian weekend]. There doesn't seem to be anyone older than I am. It has been hard always taking the role of a pioneer. I would have found it easier if there had been a lesbian older than me who, even if she made mistakes, she would have served as a teacher by showing us the way things should not be done. From seeing these mistakes, I could have said, 'Okay, we won't do it that way because we know it doesn't work … . I would have been able to make decisions in that way, but I have had to try everything from scratch. I try something, realise it won't work and then go back and start over again and then I go and tell the younger ones. This sort of role has been very hard for me to maintain.

Sachiko had to deal with different socio-political constraints that she, both on a personal and political level, has constantly worked towards changing. As a young woman in the 1960s she felt extremely isolated and limited to the *tachi/neko* (butch/femme) dichotomy, although at the time she seemed to fit in. Sachiko describes a different moment in history where notions of female same-sex identity were primarily dependent on a binary (male/female) reading of sexual difference. With a different strategy, but the same constraints, Fumie cut her hair to appear *tachi* and was able to recognise and subvert the roles according to her specific needs. Her decision to take on the *tachi* (butch) role to allow herself the privilege of initiating communication with another lesbian was a self-conscious act. Thus, *tachi/neko* (butch/femme) is not a static construct but one viable way of structuring lesbian relationships while with the passing of time different options have also opened up.

Today in Japan lesbian voices are beginning to emerge and a few women are able to march in the streets[8] and appear as political subjects. For example, some Japanese lesbians have become active within the ALN (Asian Lesbian Network). Issues discussed within this group include what 'coming out' might mean in various Asian societies; critiquing Anglo-European post-colonial practices; and listening to demands by other Asian lesbians that Japanese women take responsibility for their government's past and present complicity in the global capitalist circulation of sexual labour, an industry in which Japan has played and continues to play a central role.[9] These shifts notwithstanding, for the vast majority of Japanese lesbians the risks in 'stepping out' are still too great in terms of being publicly recognised.

Finally I would like to return to where I first began, a consideration of the research process itself. My ability to cover the issues that I have explored has in part been through our common identification as lesbians. However, as I explained, this did not make for smooth sailing nor does it mean that research cannot occur independently of such identification. It obviously can and does. Nevertheless, my personal experiences as a lesbian were able to assist me in making contacts, discussing sensitive issues and being attuned to similarities and differences in experiencing female same-sex attraction both within a Japanese context and outside it. This, to some extent, led me to ask on the whole relevant questions that forestalled a certain level of defensiveness.

> If you had been straight, I don't think I could have felt at ease and been able to launch into discussions about particular issues. If you had been straight, I might have eventually been able to relax and talk with you after we had met many times and I felt I understood what kind of person you are, but it would have taken a very long time and any number of interviews.
>
> (Mitsu)

It was also made clear that my familiarity with the language, Japanese history and contemporary issues were also critical factors. For the vast majority of the time I spent in Japan many close friendships were made, fascinating conversations had

and generally I experienced fun and interesting times. Yet it is equally significant to recognise that while there were times when I felt confident, indeed, considered I had passed through into an insider position, there were other times when I felt, and in fact had, completely lost the plot, feeling and acting like the quintessential 'foreigner' (*gaijin*). For the women who dropped out of the research, the space between insider and outsider could not be bridged. I made particular decisions that were not always liked or acceptable and in the process alienated certain people.

At the micro level there were many situations in which I was not the only one to have the power to determine how situations might play themselves out. As a result I often felt isolated, exhausted and distressed. However, doing research is not just about personal experiences but what one does with them on a broader level, that is, how my position as a researcher, arriving and departing with all my cultural baggage, is understood within a global framework of socio-political and economic systems. In this respect I ultimately have the power in how I have chosen to represent and construct the very different bodies of knowledges I have presented here. As Kumiko succinctly stated, 'I think the image received by people reading your work will depend very much on the way you describe it.'

This project has undergone significant shifts since its inception and so have all the participants, myself included. Yet the one issue that has remained constant in working with diverse theories/methodologies is that they do not hold meaning unless those of us who draw on both their tried possibilities and future potential uses are also prepared to expose ourselves to their vulnerabilities. This means being in a constant process of change through an active critique – always influencing and being influenced by different psycho-social, material and, as I have argued, corporeal practices that in reality make a difference (Buckley 1997a: 257; De Lauretis 1986: 10; Braidotti 1994: 47; Butler 1997: 2; Scott 1988: 33). Kumiko articulates how exposing her own vulnerabilities has opened up new possibilities in her life:

> We've done three personal interviews and I also took part in a workshop. Going to the workshop was a major event for me, because it wasn't just me talking about myself. I was able to listen to what other people had to say too. For example one of my major themes throughout these interviews has been that of telling my children about my sexuality. I was embarrassed at the first interview to have to say I couldn't bring myself to tell my children. I wanted to become the sort of person who could say to you that I *could* tell them. I was afraid you might judge me. That's how I felt when I compared my way of living with that of a lot of other Japanese lesbians. But then at the workshop there were a lot of other lesbians who couldn't tell their parents, and so on. Listening to them I realised whether or not you were able to 'come out' was not just a matter of whether or not you have the courage to do so. It is a matter of the concrete and particular circumstances of each individual. There are both good and bad sides to coming out. So I've become able to talk about it in front of you and in front of other lesbians without being embarrassed. For the last four or five years thinking about how to tell my children is something

which has really weighed heavily, but speaking so frankly with you bit by bit I've been able to face my fears and speak about them. If I hadn't had a chance like this, I don't think I could have told anybody else. So I'm really glad we've talked.

Notes

1 A moment in time

1 I am using 'discourse' in the Foucauldian sense in which ways of knowing crosscut with power, and thus render all discourse unstable and co-extensive in its various representations and effects. Sara Mills' discussion of discourse is also useful as it explains that no one discourse can be read or presented on its own for it relies on other discourses for its production, language, practices and effects. In other words, discourse or the power of any discourse does not reside in any one place or with one person or group (1997: 17).

2 Grosz states, 'Bodies are always irreducibly specific, necessarily interlocked with racial, cultural and class peculiarities. This interlocking though cannot occur by way of intersection … but by way of mutual constitution.'

3 I decided on employing the term 'narrator' rather than informant, interviewee, subject or interlocutor. 'Informant', 'interviewee' and 'subject' are often used in sociology and psychology texts and tend to imply an object of analysis to be examined in isolation from other socio-political contexts. Interlocutor, on the other hand, does evoke the kinds of complex relationships I am attempting to portray. Nevertheless, I have chosen not to use it because it is cumbersome and tends to depersonalise the women's individual voices. Thus, I have decided on the term 'narrator' as it evokes the image of a story-teller, a person who has authoritative knowledge along with the implication of the possibility of engaging with others in dialogue. It is important to note however that no one word is adequate to describe the complex relationships that exist among different speaking positions within any text.

4 The only academic work in Japanese, as far as I am aware of, is 'Rezubian/Gei Sutadiizu' (Lesbian/Gay Studies), *Gendai Shisō* (May 1997). While *imago* did publish a series on homosexuality in the early 1990s there were few analytical discussions and primarily focused on works published outside of Japan. See *imago* 1991a; 1991b; 1995.

5 This is in contrast to a genre of gay and lesbian 'coming out' stories that have been produced over the last ten years. See for example Sasano (1995), *Bessatsu Takarajima: Onna o aisuru onnatachi no monogatari* (1992), Summerhawk *et al*. (1998); Itō (1992),Yajima (1999), Itō & Yanase (2001), Fushimi (1991).

6 *Kaleidoscope Kyoto*: Bi-monthly Journal on Kyoto and Japanese Culture, Special Women's Issue, September–October(16), 1985.

7 Initially I covered myself in case these warnings proved to be too difficult to overcome by examining 'women-headed households in Japan'. In this way I could include self-identified lesbian households as part of a larger project. I soon realised that this latter project was too large and indeed I was able to go ahead with my original idea.

8 Throughout the text the term lesbian will be commonly used and a discussion on the language of female same-sex attractions follows in Chapter 2.

9 The narrators referred to the women with whom they were having relationships in a variety of terms, and as in English, which term is used depends on the context. The following are the most commonly employed words. *Koibito* (lover) is used when a relationship was about to start or had begun, however, it does not always mean the physical part of the relationship has been initiated. It may mean someone whom one is seeing (dating) or someone with whom one is already living. *Gārufurendo* (girlfriend) refers to an already initiated relationship but one where two women are living separately. *Kanojo* (her) is an understood or indirect reference to the woman with whom one is involved. *Pātonā* (partner) indicates a relationship in which there is an impression of permanency and long-term goals. The most commonly used terms were *koibito* and *gārufurendo*.

10 In the case of the workshop, tapes were only sent to those who requested them, approximately half.

11 Carol Warren gives an example from her fieldwork in which one of the male gay participants wrote a letter after publication of her research *Identity and Community in the Gay World*, explaining that he had had to completely redecorate his lounge room after reading her description (Warren 1977: 99).

12 For further discussion on the issues surrounding the relationship between concepts of insider/outsider, Japanese/Western and researcher/researched see Chalmers (2002).

13 The most obvious examples of this in anthropological works are those carried out in the same places but which result in very different representations. Compare for example, John F. Embree, *Suye Mura: A Japanese Village* (1939) and Robert J. Smith & Ella Lury Wiswell, *The Women of Suye Mura* (1982). Note that despite the significant difference in dates of publication the research was carried out during the same period. Also see Annette B. Weiner's reanalysis of Malinowski's accounts of Trobriand society (1976).

14 There was one exception towards the end of my stay when I did come to their home and interviewed them together.

15 Nakasone Yasuhiro was Prime Minister from November 1982 to November 1987.

16 The program was established in 1987 to encourage and improve English as a spoken language within Japanese schools. The participating countries are Australia, the US and Great Britain.

17 Interestingly, there is now a strong move to educate children when overseas in 'Japanese schools' 'where they are educated to acquire "Japaneseness."' According to Iwabuchi (1994: 76) 40 per cent of children living outside Japan attend 'Japanese' schools.

18 Martin & Mohanty argue that: '"Being home" refers to the place where one lives within familiar, safe, protected boundaries; "not being home" is a matter of realising that home was an illusion of coherence and safety based on the exclusion of specific histories of oppression and resistance, the repression of differences even within oneself' (1986: 196).

19 These are my own definitions of sex, gender and sexuality. However, I have read extensively in this area and my position has been strongly influenced by the prolific work of Susan Bordo, Judith Butler, Elizabeth Grosz, Moria Gatens and Biddy Martin.

2 Lesbian in/visibility in Japan

1 Gilbert Herdt (cited in Duberman *et al*.) describes accepted homosexual practices among boys of the same age in Melanesia and man-boy sexual relations among the New Guinea Keraki peoples (1991: 10). Jackson (1997) also argues for the diverse nature of male-male sexual practices in Thailand where rather than stigmatising a boy or man's status it may actually enhance it.

2 Similar moves, that is, the classification of women's sexuality, also became more visible both in 'scientific', educational and popular literature in Anglo-European societies

along with increased urbanisation and industrialisation (Lamos 1994: 87; Smith-Rosenberg 1991; Stevens & Hall 1994: 240; Vicinus 1991: 213).

3   There are numerous critiques of Rich's position. For example, see Cameron 1990: 35–7; Ferguson 1991; Jagose 1993.

4   At this time translations of Havelock Ellis could be found in *Seitō* (a feminist journal of the 1910s) (Mackie 1997: 84). It is interesting to note that while Freud and Krafft-Ebing did not consider female same-sex practices as an illness, Ellis, in contrast to his conceptualisation of male homosexuality as 'congenital and harmless', condemned female homosexuals as 'diseased or criminal outlaws' (Herdt 1997: 41; Krafft-Ebing 1892).

5   Hiratsuka Raichō published the first women's rights journal *Seitō* (Blue-stocking).

6   Waged labour for women in the late 1800s and early 1900s created the possibility of a separation or at least a de-emphasis on reproduction within kinship systems not only among Anglo-European nations but also within China and Japan. This led to the opening up of spaces for female erotic and non-erotic same-sex relationships (Truong 1990: 77). In relation to China see McGough 1981: 185–6; Raymond 1986; Topley 1975; Tsukiyama 1991.

7   Marilyn Ivy notes that by 1924 newspaper circulation had reached 6.3 million (1993: 242).

8   The theatre troupe was originally called The Takarazuka Girl Opera (*Takarazuka shōjo kagekidan*) and the Music Academy was established in 1918.

9   Aoyama makes a similar point in her discussion of the portrayal of male homosexuality in girls' comic books (*shōjo manga*) in the 1970s and 1980s (1988: 195).

10   For a detailed discussion of the sex/gender distinction, see Gatens (1983).

11   Sachiko says that the term used for homosexual in the psychology books she read was *dōseiai*. Thus in more contemporary discourses there seems to be less differentiation between *dōseiai* and *ome no kankei*.

12   This passivity is also indicated in mainstream explanations of the femme in Anglo-European representations as replicating the docile female or 'feminine' body within heterosexual relations (Charles 1993: 61).

13   This hierarchical social setting is also presented in Kennedy and Davis' work on working class lesbians in the Buffalo area in the 1940s and 1950s (1993: 79). They also make the point that, like Fumie, some members of the bar community were not comfortable with a static gender division despite the fact that they complied in order to adapt (251).

14   Stephen Murray makes the same case in his discussion of male cross-gender mannerisms and dress. He states 'Wanting to attract a man is not the same as wanting to be a woman' (cited in Herdt 1997: 40).

3 Identifying the lesbian in contemporary Japan

1   Watanabe also discusses the way rape is constructed subconsciously as desired by women (1992a: 3; Nishiyama 1989: 401–8), while Funabashi discusses the ubiquitous violence against women portrayed in comic magazines for men (1995: 257).

2   *Neko* also means 'cat'.

3   For example in 1913 Hiratsuka Raichō confronted issues including a woman's right not to marry and to have access to an independent wage as well as criticising the *ie seido* (institutionalised patrilineal family system) (Mackie 1997: 82–4; Rodd 1991).

4   I am using 'self-identified' here as a self-conscious rather than a public or open identification.

5   Hornstein also makes the point in reference to the US where the 'women's health movement initially excluded lesbians and lesbian motherhood as essential components of reproductive rights' (cited in DiLapi 1989: 106) and to some extent still does so.

6   Frye makes a similar point in terms of claiming a language that can be recognised and used by lesbians themselves (1990: 311).

7   The English word 'dyke' originated within the 1950s and was often used by middle-class lesbians as a pejorative term in their descriptions of working-class lesbians who met at bars. (Kennedy & Davis 1993: 68). Gilmartin in her work on middle and working-class lesbians in the US beautifully illustrates the distinctive class values associated with the terms through one of her narrator's explanations. 'They [working-class lesbians] wore the leather jackets and they almost chewed tobacco, they were so dykey. They were real low-down homosexual.' Conversely she describes her friends as 'artistic', 'intellectual', 'well-educated', 'top-notch people' (1996: 34). Also see Card (1995: 21). Since the 1970s the negative connotations of the term are also used, particularly by heterosexual men, to insult women (McNaught, 1993: 55). Despite this, over the past ten years at least, some lesbians have reclaimed the word and it is used commonly *among* many lesbians. Nevertheless, it still carries with it certain class nuances, and is rarely used in public heterosexual spaces by lesbians themselves.

8   The notion of the 'male gaze' developed out of feminist film theory which was and continues to be concerned with how meanings are constructed by film-makers (usually male), the protagonists in the film (usually male) and the audience to whom the film is supposed to libidinally appeal (usually men) (Mulvey 1975). Kaplan also distinguishes a further issue of how that gaze is constituted and then enacted, that is, who holds the power to act with that gaze. This is important because it reconceptualises the makers, actors and spectators as (re)active rather than merely as neutral receptors of socio-political and sexual messages (1983). Wilson similarly asserts that 'visual attention is not just a bodily engagement, it is a powerful symbol of dominance' (1995: 268–9). In the case of the use of dildos within male erotic (pornographic) art, Creed convincingly argues that the pleasure attained through the male gaze is grounded in 'unattainable desire' through simultaneous exclusion (physical distance) and possession (male visual dominance). Thus, the act of female same-sex sex is perceived by men as the ultimate exclusion (Creed 1995: 101).

9   The *per capita* dwelling floor space in Japan is 25.2 square metres (1988) compared to 60.9 square metres in the US (1985) (Japanese Ministry of Labour 1993).

10   The M-shaped curve is used to represent the stereotype of the female worker who enters the workforce as a full-time worker after school, college or university, works until marriage or childbirth and then resigns, usually to re-enter the workforce after the age of thirty-five as a part-time worker and then resigns in her fifties to take care of elderly parents-in-law or parents.

11   In contrast, as the M-curve implies, part-time women workers fit into a representation of the 'good mother' by virtue of organising their work lives specifically around the family's needs and providing a supplementary wage for the family.

12   Research based in the US and Australia covering different areas of lesbian health care argues that when disclosing their sexuality to their doctors, lesbians have generally encountered negative physical and pathologising treatments. Therefore most lesbians are very guarded and selective about where they seek health care (Stevens 1993; Lehmann 1998; Draper & Hall 2000).

4 Negotiating boundaries

1   The term kin-*kazoku* refers to those family members who are legally acknowledged as *kazoku* within the present Japanese legal framework. Although I am primarily referring to biological family nuclear kinship, within Japanese kinship relations this is not exclusively the case, for example adoption. At times I also use the phrase 'nuclear-extended' to indicate a nuclear family form which has extremely close both geographical and dependent relationships with other kin-*kazoku* members, most often parents and parents-in law. To simply refer to a 'nuclear' or more traditional 'stem' family ignores the way these two systems have become interconnected in particular ways over the past fifty years.

2 There are of course a few exceptions to this view among Japanese feminists: for example, see interview with Miya Yoshiko (Buckley 1997a: 161) where she states '[w]hat has always been denied and silenced is the woman's right to express a self-determined sexuality'.

3 I am not suggesting that all 'Western' lesbians are solely concerned with coming out to their biological families and indeed many are not 'out'. However, there is a great emphasis on the binary oppositions between truth/lie, honesty/deception and intimacy/distance in what constitutes 'close' family membership.

4 The aim of adopting a son into a family is to secure and perpetuate a household/family through a male.

5 I am using the word 'strategic' in terms of a politically short-term plan in which the aim is to effect a response that will lead to a change in attitude or actions.

5 What's in a family?

1 The Edo period is another name given to the Tokugawa period. Edo (now Tokyo) was the capital of Japan during this era. Tokugawa refers to the ruling shogun dynasty at this time.

2 Masako-sama is the Crown Princess of Japan, the wife of the Emperor's eldest son, Crown Prince Akihito. Prior to her marriage she studied and worked overseas and as such she has been represented as the consummate Japanese woman of the 1990s.

3 Tanaka Keiko refers to the same style as 'intelligent fashion' (1990: 83–9).

4 Thus, as Rosenberger is correct to point out, the power of the media and its intent in presenting particular images does not only reside with the media itself, but also depends on how different audiences interpret various images, and how they are then applied to their lived reality (1995:144).

5 The ways this aestheticism has been depicted can be traced back and found in some of the earliest literature where the erotic is played out through written messages surreptitiously passed between lovers and conversations through drawn curtains where women's bodies remain undisclosed, unknown, a mystery. See for example, Murasaki Shikabu (trans. Seidensticker 1976); Sei Shōnagon, (trans. Morris 1967).

6 Yoshida Kenkō was a Buddhist priest from 1282 to 1350.

7 Of course the question of how race interlocks with other factors such as gender, sexuality and class are not exclusive to Japan. For example in the Australian context, it is only over the last ten years or so that the media have attempted to integrate non-Anglo-European people into positive images within both advertising and mainstream programming, although representation is still limited in terms of numbers and kinds of images.

8 Funabashi states, 'A survey conducted in 1988 and 1989 by the Ad Watching Project, a committee established by the Women's Studies Association of Japan, found that a common device used by advertisers was to picture women in swimwear or in the nude without any relationship to the product advertised' (Funabashi 1995: 259).

9 Barbara Creed analyses the differences between the 'female body in general' which signifies 'other' and the lesbian body. She states, 'The active female body disturbs cultural definitions of gender and collapses the inside/outside boundary that constitutes the social division into female and male… [T]he offending body challenges gender boundaries in terms of the active/passive dualism, a dichotomy which is crucial to the definition of gender in patriarchal culture' (1995: 87–93).

10 My use of the term *kazoku* encompasses the meanings of a family unit or relationship whereas my employment of the term *ie* describes the extended patriarchal system of inheritance and obligations. It should also be noted that to use the term 'family' in English does not come close to explain or equate with either *ie* or *kazoku* in Japanese and so I will only refer to the word 'family' in English when the women themselves use the word 'family', which is usually in some kind of interpretive comparison in order to

explain cultural differences; when I am specifically referring to Anglo-European family structures; or when I am using a universal stereotyped notion such as 'the Japanese family'.

6 Consolidating heteronormative practices

1 In 1991 the birthrate was 1.57 per household and it is forecaste that this will drop to 1.32 (figures cited in Lock (1993: 55–6). In 1993 and 1997 the birthrate had decreased further to 1.46 and 1.39 respectively.

2 This debate came to the fore in the 1980s by the controversial action taken by a well-known television personality, Agnes Chan, who took her baby with her to work and became known as 'The Agnes Debate' (Fujieda & Fujimura-Fanselow 1995: 175).

3 Also see Tipton for a discussion of procreation and motherhood as a public duty prior to and during World War II (1995: 31–40).

4 Uno Sosuke was Prime Minister from June to August 1989.

5 The extreme of this situation, although not unusual, is when men are sent to either another city or country by their company – overseas assignments were fairly common particularly during the 1970s and 1980s economic boom years. Although some families move together, it is generally thought to be better for the children not to disrupt their schooling and so mother and children usually remain behind.

6 Miya for example explains that there is still the belief that 'if a lesbian could just meet the "right man" she would "get well"' (Buckley 1997a: 163).

7 In the discussions that I held with lesbians, they used *ren'ai* extensively, as Kumiko does, to describe their intimate sexual relationships. This is in contrast to Lebra's definition of *ren'ai* which she defines as '[h]eterosexual love in general; specifically, love marriage as distinguished from *miai* marriage' (Lebra 1984: 338).

8 Even when compared to gay men, who may also be socially silenced, lesbians are subjected to different forms of discrimination. This disparity is primarily because lesbians are also discriminated against as women due to widespread sexist workplace practices both at the level of financial and status discrimination.

9 On current exchange rates (2001), 1 million yen is around AUS$15,300 and US$8,300. For a detailed discussion on the Japanese tax system in relation to the incentives for married part-time women workers, as well as the disincentives that apply to married women who wish to enter full-time employment, see Higuchi (1997).

10 Japanese workplace agreements which assume women are either single or dependent on a male bread-winner also affect the heterosexual sole mother's economic position significantly. Sole-mothers' groups have called for changes in spousal deductions and so-called 'family protection' benefits (*Fuemin* 4 March 1994: 1).

11 'LDK' refers to 'lounge-dining-kitchen' and 3LDK usually refers to three Japanese-style rooms with *tatami* matting.

12 The strong influence of the media on appropriate forms of mothering was also confirmed through a number of interviews I carried out with full-time women workers in 1989 (Chalmers 1990: 70).

13 According to 1998 statistics Japan's divorce rate was 1.94 per thousand, which for the first time is reaching levels close to the US, Australia and Europe.

14 For a reading of the Canadian experience of lesbian child custody and access provisions see Leopold & King, (1985) and Rand, *et al*. (1982).

15 Yoshio Sugimoto has pointed to the manipulative nature of this system. He argues that, 'These twin institutions serve as powerful deterrents to non-compliance and have been used to discredit minorities, dropouts, and deviants' (1986: 69). Valentine also suggests that greater restrictions on access to the *koseki* has only produced an alternative method of checking on background and social status through the use of detective agencies (1994: 51). In addition there are some concerns by women's groups that the

computerisation of household registrations will open up greater possibilities for this system to be abused (*Fuemin* 11 March 1994: 2).

16 Also see the Japanese Ministry of Health and Welfare Survey on the Life of the Nation (*Kokumin Seikatsu Kiso Chōsa no Gaikyō*). Household structures were divided as follows: Single person, Nuclear families, Three generational families and Others (1993: 18).

17 This practice apparently also occurs among Japanese male gays (Bauchemin 1996).

18 Steinhoff points out that another motivation for adoption has been to create a family for New Left prisoners on death row who have been estranged from their former families. This secures access to visitation rights in prison. It also ensures, in the case of the death penalty taking place, that their adopted next of kin will be notified, thereby making it possible for prior burial arrangements to be carried out (1996: 312).

19 Recently there was the first legal registration of a 'joint living arrangement' in Japan between a same-sex attracted couple (Izumo & Maree 2000) but as yet it has not been tested out in court.

20 The most publicised case of a lesbian partner being refused visiting and legal guardianship rights was that of Sharon Kowalski and Karen Thompson in the US. After a car accident in 1983 Sharon's partner was denied guardianship and barred from seeing Karen for years by Sharon's biological family and this was only overturned after seven years of court proceedings.

21 Yoshizumi points out that according to the Civil Code there is no reason why people with different surnames cannot be listed on the same tombstone, but she argues that those in authority tend to discourage it (1995: 194).

7 Re-creating families

1 I use the term 'familying' to emphasise the historical and active aspects of constructing close personal relationships.

2 In 1989 Denmark introduced the 'Act of Registration of Partnership' that gives gay and lesbian couples similar rights to heterosexual marriages. However, gay and lesbians are not granted the same rights as heterosexual married couples in relation to adoption and child custody. Yet they must go through the same divorce proceedings if the partnership dissolves. In Sweden, gay and lesbian partners have the same rights as de facto heterosexual relationships (Henson 1997: 3–4).

3 This took the form of a legal challenge by the US House of Representatives entitled the 'Defense of Marriage Act' introduced in May 1996. It states that the ruling in Hawaii is not applicable to other US states under the Full Faith and Credit clause of the US constitution. This law was enacted with the support and signature of Bill Clinton in September 1996.

4 Ong (Director) 1991.

5 See Chapter 9, p. 128 for more details.

8 Female friendships and the nature of reciprocity

1 Cohen (1991: 7) argues that the internal contradictions inherent in the notion of categorising sexual identity as monolithic while simultaneously embracing difference have led to an on-going crisis in 'gay' and 'lesbian' activism in the US.

2 Spivak also refers to this strategy both in the reading of texts and political action. She states: 'In deconstructive critical practice, you have to be aware that you are going to essentialize anyway. So then strategically you can look at essentialisms, not as descriptions of the way things are, but as something that one must adopt to produce a critique of anything' (1990: 51).

3 Weston also found that these notions were highly prevalent within her study (1991: 128).

4　The most notable examples in English that outline some of the informal network struc-
tures among Japanese (heterosexual) women, although not specifically about women's
friendships, are Bernstein (1983), Imamura (1987), Lebra 1984) and the ground-
breaking work of Ella Lury Wiswell whose notes formed the basis of the later
published work *Women of Suye Mura* (Smith & Wiswell 1982).

5　Although not written about Japan, Lillian Faderman's *Surpassing the Love of Men*
(1981) has now been translated into Japanese.

6　I am employing the vocabulary of 'assimilation' to describe cultures which are based
on liberal-humanist discourses that promote the notion of 'equality'. The practices of
equality, however, rely on a framework that assumes a shift by women and minority
groups to a 'better' socio-economic position, while the norm – male activities –
remains intact. This philosophy is grounded on the assumption that 'sameness' is the
desirable outcome.

7　This definition is taken from Sykes (1982) in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of
Current English*.

8　Stanley (1992: 197) makes a similar point in her discussion of Western constructions
of female friendship.

9　The continuance of communication is also dependent on whether there are children
involved or not. However, maintaining this communication is usually based on the
children's needs rather than a desire to sustain a friendship with one's former partner
(Weston 1991: 111, 196).

10　For various discussions on the links between sexism and Japanese language, and the
arguments both for the positive and negative implications of feminine forms of speech,
see for example, Buckley (1997a: 4–5), Ide & McGloin (1991), Kawasaki (1995),
Cherry (1987), Endō (1995), Tanaka Keiko (1990).

11　In 1990 the number of single mothers was 550,000 while single fathers numbered
100,000. Cited in Skov & Moeran (1995: 4).

12　See Japanese Civil Code, Article 400, paragraph 4.

9　Cultures and communities

1　*Regumi Sutajio* (Regumi Studio) is a meeting place and contains a small library for the
Japanese lesbian community.

2　The *mini-komi* as previously explained is an innovative method of distributing infor-
mation by groups who do not have access, or choose not to contribute, to the mass
mainstream media. These informal newsletters are designed and collated by voluntary
labour, and are financed at the expense of the respective groups.

3　The concept of 'arriving' in this context not only means a physical presence but also is
used in various situations to include an emotional release in terms of 'belonging'.

4　Although same-sex attracted women are attracted to these weekends for different rea-
sons, regardless of their motivations, it is literally a sudden entry that places them in
this temporary setting. That is, one literally walks from the street into a lesbian com-
munity. Thus, this is the only time one can talk about 'a Japanese lesbian community'
in terms of a specific geographical location. Moreover, the contentious issue of who is
a lesbian is never far behind any of these gatherings, or indeed in recent texts (Izumo
et al. 1997: 77).

5　This is what Fuss asserts is one reading of Irigaray's notion of *parler femme*. Fuss also
argues in response to Irigaray's critics that rather than re-inventing an essentialist read-
ing of female sexuality through the deployment of metaphors in terms of the female
anatomy, for example 'the two lips', 'for Irigaray, the relation between language and
the body is neither literal nor metaphoric but *metonymic*'. For a fuller discussion on
Fuss's reading of Irigaray, see Fuss (1989): Chapter 4, particularly pp. 62–4.

6　Although I can only raise the issues here, the term 'Asian women' in itself is problem-
atic for the obvious assumed notion of homogeneity as well as the term 'Japanese

lesbian' and the implications this phrase has for lesbians of other Asian cultures for inclusion in the lesbian communities in Japan.

7 For example, one newspaper article claims that these marriages are on the increase and that about 70 per cent of these women are either unable to adapt to a Japanese lifestyle or are abused by their husbands. (*The Japan Times* 1992: 2).

10 Bodies of knowledge

1 For a comprehensive discussion of the history and political implications of the *Nihonjinron* debates see Hata & Smith (1983: 361–88); Iwabuchi (1994) and Mouer & Sugimoto (1980).

2 Hata Tsutomu was Prime Minister from April 1994 to June 1994.

3 Iwabuchi makes the point that the construction of self-orientalism is set within an unequal hierarchy of difference, and as such its position within the hierarchy is no challenge to Western Orientalism (1994: 52).

4 In the 1990s, some publications in Japan started to use the word 'gender' to refer to socially constructed differences, see for example, Hara *et al*. (1994) and Inoue *et al*. (1995).

5 Banana Yoshimoto (trans. Meagan Backus), *Kitchen* (New York: Grove Press, 1993).

6 See the documentary, Kim Longinotto & Jano Williams (Directors), *Shinjuku Boys* (London: Twentieth Century Vixen, 1995).

7 Martin articulates a similar position in relation to queer theory's apparent preoccupation with gendered subjects as a total explanation of 'the whole of psychic life' (1997: 111).

8 Disguises are often used by women when taking part in public events and pseudonyms are regularly employed when publishing about lesbian issues.

9 There is a growing literature that deals with the long history of Japan's intimate involvement with various forms of women's sexual labour and their voluntary and involuntary relationship to the sex industry. Hoffman asserts that the number of Filipino women alone working in Japan in the so-called 'entertainment industry' numbers 150,000 (1997) while Buckley argues that in terms of numbers Thai women have now become the biggest group working as sex workers in Japan (1997b: 266). Also see Tōno (1986); Hicks (1995); Ichioka (1977); Iyori (1987); Matsui (1995); Taylor (1988); Ueno (1994).

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