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Japanese Gender Role Expectations and Attitudes: A Qualitative Analysis of Gender Inequality

By Melanie Belarmino[1] and Melinda R. Roberts[2]

Abstract

Due to current technology and the third wave feminist movement, gender inequality in other countries now has a global, socially aware platform. However, due to non-reporting, the voices of women experiencing violence and inequality in Japan are largely unheard. The purpose of this qualitative study is to investigate the gender role expectations in Japan that lead to inequality and victimization inflicted on Japanese women. Data was obtained through interviews with all available and consenting bilingual speakers at a Japanese University, and findings reveal that there are very specific expectations for Japanese women in the home, at work, and in society. For example, women were and are still expected to have children after getting married, to quit work after such a life event, and are treated differently under the law. This research adds to the existing literature by confirming previous findings while providing more in-depth and qualitative explanations of gender expectations and inequality.

Keywords: Gender roles, Attitudes, Culture, Japan, Qualitative research, Gender-based violence

Introduction

Despite the plethora of available research on gender role expectations in Eastern and Western cultures, it is vitally important to understand the lived experiences of those who are marginalized in these cultures such as how young women in Japan interpret and understand gendered expectations. Gendered inequality results from long-standing patriarchal societies where women have more expectations placed on them and fewer freedoms than their male counterparts do; Japan is no exception. However, studies often either focus on very specific gendered aspects, as opposed to nuances within Japanese society that could contribute to the normalization of differing gender treatment, or they are confined to quantitative methodologies (Nagae & Dancy, 2010; Uji, Shono, Shikai, & Kitamura, 2007b; Yamawaki, Ostenson, & Brown, 2009; Yoshihama, Horrocks, & Kamano, 2009). Through interviews on gendered experiences of inequality among college-aged Japanese women, this study aims to fill the gap in the research regarding gender role expectations and the treatment Japanese women may receive as a result. Moreover, this research allows Japanese women to have a voice concerning issues that not only affect their country, but the world as a whole.

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Literature Review

The role that Japanese society ascribes to women has changed over the course of time, reflecting the trends of respective eras; ultimately, though, the current expectations of Japanese women are founded on these historical norms. Before the Meiji era at the end of the nineteenth century, women were expected to stay within the home, as opposed to their husbands, who were expected to seek out jobs; this served as the foundation of the government and Confucian ideas, as each home represented a building block for the culture (Borovoy, 2001; Valutanu, 2011). The purpose was to allow conformity and balance in accordance with Confucian teachings, which influenced the workings of the government. Furthermore, this built an identity for both men and women that could be shared, but it allowed women less freedom than their male counterparts. Change occurred during the progression from the Meiji era to the twentieth century modernization. Rapid cultural changes and the integration of Japan's economy with the rest of the world affected the traditional and Confucian-inspired domestic sphere. Aside from the changes in consumer culture and the modernization of Japanese industry, more emphasis was put into the upholding of the patriarchy, particularly to the adherence of familial roles and structures, contributing to an intensification of gender roles (Ochiai, 2005; Robertson, 2005; Silverberg, 2006).

In order to replace the old Confucian roles, the "good wife and a wise mother" ideal–or *ryosai kenbo*–focused instead on a more modern portrayal of women as homemakers who raise children and care for their in-laws, but who also have the option of seeking outside work in order to contribute to the country's economy and structure (Dalton, 2013; Goldstein-Gidoni, 2005; Lebra, 2007; Koyama, 2012; Takahashi, 2011). In further implementing this role, girls and women could attend schools where they would learn skills to care for the home and children, but sexual health and higher education was extremely hard to access if they desired to pursue a career path other than homemaking (Frühstuck, 2000; Otsubo, 2005; Silverberg, 2006). In short, the "newly" tailored idea fit the changing economy, but the idea that women belonged at home persisted in mainstream society. At this time, Japanese women had little political power, with no right to vote or to legally participate in politics, regardless of whether the issues discussed concerned women or not (Goldstein-Gidoni, 2005; Hayakawa, 1995; Tomida, 2005). Many studies focus on cultural developments after World War II and how they informed gendered treatment and expectations in Japan (Izumi, 2011; Muta, 2016; Kuki, 2013; Muramoto, 2011; Quataert & Wheeler, 2014). Before the heavy influence of Western forces in World War II that led to Japanese women's suffrage, separating women from politics further enforced their role as homemakers and mothers (Dalton, 2013; Kuo, 2015; Quataert & Wheeler, 2014). To this day, women continue to be separated and many times discredited for their political movements, efforts, and contributions (Yamaguchi, 2005). What little political traction Japanese woman attained has been thankfully attributed to Western influence, as it was during the post-war era that women gained more rights (Lebra 2007; Kelsky, 2001). The political gains of Japanese women in the mid-nineteenth century, however, did not deter society and the men in power from pushing motherhood onto women and treating them unequally to their male counterparts.

Despite the role changes that Japanese women underwent during the aforementioned wartime and thereafter, approximately 200,000 impoverished women and women of other marginalized groups both willingly and forcefully served as "comfort women" for Japanese military men (Izumi, 2011; Muta, 2016; Ueno, 2003). Many governments and feminists consider this practice a form of sex slavery rather than prostitution simply due to the unpaid and forceful nature of "comfort women" and their dirty living conditions (Kitagawa, 2011; Kuki, 2013; Muramoto, 2011). In fact, the severity of this sexual violence has led to several ongoing lawsuits

in the last few decades initiated by different marginalized groups of women against Japan for these past war crimes (Muta, 2016; Kuki, 2013; Muramoto, 2011). The history and politics surrounding comfort women and sex workers result in differing responses, such as empathy and calls for apologies by feminists in Asia, or on the other end of the spectrum, a stronger sense of nationalism and ignorance by Japanese people and scholars, which leads to the victimization of these women and the erroneous belief that only the impoverished were affected (Izumi, 2011; Kiyosue, 2000; Mackie, 2005; Ryang, 2005). The reaction to the crimes committed by the Japanese government against so many women reflects different societal treatment of the sexes, and the Japanese government has yet to announce a legitimate apology.

Japan's cultural climate has undergone many changes in recent decades, but the gender disparity remains not only in the treatment of post-wartime victims in Asia, but also within Japan's everyday society. When discussing gender roles, Dalton's (2013) research exposes that there is still a significant trend towards traditional gender role expectations in Japanese society such as women being homemakers or, even more importantly, mothers, despite procuring outside employment or even positions in the Japanese government. This reflects what is referred to as the "M" shaped curve, signifying when women leave the workforce to care for their children, as motherhood is prioritized over employment (Lebra, 2007). Not every Japanese woman chooses to have children and would rather pursue opportunities in Western countries for both financial gain and escape from enforced societal traditions (Kelsky, 2001). For the women who do choose to stay in Japan, they have to contribute to the economy via paid work alongside their male counterparts as well as conform to these extremely traditional gender roles; therefore, the role of a modern woman is difficult in Japan as women try to balance personal, traditional, and community values (Akazawa, 2011; Goldstein-Gidoni, 1999; Kitagawa, 2011). Goldstein-Gidoni's (1999) research asserts that in order to properly obey traditional values, Japanese women push their efforts to uphold the status quo by taking classes that teach skills perceived to be traditionally feminine – such as flower arranging or how to don a *kimono* for ceremonies and holidays. By wearing their *kimono*, these women present themselves as proper Japanese women who uphold the role of the "good-wife, wise-mother," an appropriate cultural image of Japan's values, especially when standing next to Japanese men wearing western suits (Goldstein-Gidoni, 1999; Robertson, 2005). This negatively affects adult women and young girls as they try to navigate different gendered expectations as women and as productive members of Japanese society.

This navigation grows more complicated by the sexual values in Japan, blurring the interpretations of female sexuality. Sexualization and fetishization of youth in women and girls resulted in the coining of the word "loliconization," which according to Naito and Shockey (2010), not only portrays sexual desire in Japanese men, but also strips young women and girls of their sexual agency. Loliconization is further exemplified by the fetishization of the "girl" subculture in Japan, wherein cute and feminine things enjoyed by younger females become tools to infantilize and sexualize them (Yano, 2013). Despite the anti-prostitution laws established in 1958 (Kiyosue, 2000; Muramoto, 2011), Ueno (2003) exemplifies this sexualization through "enjo kosai" or the prostitution of young girls. Men will seek out girls who are sexually explorative or want money for myriad reasons to exploit them for sex or to merely have their company (Ueno, 2003; Yano, 2013). Underage prostitution and the sexualization of young women has put girls in a position to experience more violence than prior years (Nonoyama, Nagai, Kato, Ogasawara, & Emori, 2008). This leads to more discrimination against the female population in Japan, as it portrays women having no value unless they are "good" at playing sexual roles set by men rather than expressing their own female sexuality (Naito & Shockey, 2010; Yamawaki et al, 2009). Moreover, this serves

as a contradiction of expectations; women must exemplify submissive yet sexual traits in an odd balancing act to display proper femininity. If women are not young and past marriageable age, then they lose worth according to these societal expectations, further adding to discrimination against women and the contradictory standards that women must endure (Lebra, 2007). Expression of female sexuality is also taboo; displays of affection and other actions are not reciprocated and even looked down upon, leaving women feeling shamed (Frühstuck, 2006; Lebra, 2007). Men do not receive this treatment, as their lack of expression is often romanticized and praised (Lebra, 2007).

The difference in treatment towards women extends beyond the culture, taking root in the domestic relationships of Japanese women. Within the relationship itself, a woman's worth in society is based upon the status of her husband or male partner, leaving much of the power in his hands (Lebra, 2007). Such disparity in power does not end with the status of the man. In Yoshihama, Horrocks, and Kamano's (2009) study of emotional abuse in intimate partner violence, they stated that emotional abuse, whether coupled with physical or sexual abuse, occurs in 43.9% of heterosexual relationships in southern Japan. Women in these situations exemplify typical behavior associated with abuse victims, such as not reporting, post-traumatic stress, and depressive symptoms (Kamimura, Nourian, Assanik, & Francheck-Roa, 2016; Nagae & Dancy, 2010; Yoshihama et al., 2009). Domestic and intimate partner abuse is not the only gendered violence Japanese women face, as they experience sexual assault as well. 70% of women in Tokyo have been molested on a train (Konishi, 2000), and sexual abuse and rape occurred respectively at 69.0% and 64.3% amongst young Japanese girls in urban areas who already had sex in prior relationships (Nonoyama et al., 2008). According to Nonoyama et al.'s study (2008), they found that based on the 85 Japanese girls interviewed, sexual violence was more often perpetrated by strangers 70.4% of the time. The remainder of sexual assaults were committed by friends (18.5%), acquaintances (14.8%), and family members (3.7%). Another study by Uji, Shono, Shikai, and Kitamura (2007b) came to the same conclusion, which establishes a trend that sexual violence typically occurs after young women enter elementary school. This relates to the aforementioned "loliconization"– sexualization of young girls–which puts them at risk for sexual violence or exposure to sexually violent behavior.

Disparity in regards to treatment comes when the individuals and groups of women are blamed or criminalized for their trauma. Traditional gender roles require that women be supportive and submissive in romantic relationships in order to be classified as "good" by societal standards. Society classifies women as the lesser partner and marks them as unimportant, but they must nevertheless stay virtuous and modest in their actions. As a result, women are negatively perceived. York (2011) found that patriarchal theories related to traditional gender attitudes are actively linked to violence against women. Violence against women is used as a punishment and a method of shaming those who do not follow these roles or live within prescribed gendered expectations (Nagae & Dancy, 2010; Yamawaki et al, 2009). According to Nagae and Dancy (2010), women tend to blame themselves for their victimization rather than place the blame on their perpetrators. In situations where women should seek help, most women would only reveal their abuse to peers or family, rather than consulting professional guidance or legal recourse (Uji, Shono, Shikai, & Kitamura, 2007a). In another study conducted by Uji, Shono, Shikai, and Kitamura (2007a), doctors and nurses were found to blame rape victims if they were less educated than their peers, practiced in rural areas, and held intolerant views regarding women's independence or rights. Another study by Uji, Shono, Shika, Hiramura, and Kitamura (2006) also found that less educated, male health professionals in rural areas were opposed to the idea of egalitarian gender roles or

changing traditions, especially if the changes diminished the male power dynamic. As such, perceptions of victims could put them in a position of poor treatment since seeking help could be non-beneficial in a culture that minimizes or ignores violence against women in the first place. Furthermore, due to lack of financial resources, local governments could only provide counseling or shelters for victims of abuse if efforts and funds were not already directed at other community issues (Yamaguchi, 2014). This reinforces cultural attitudes that normalize gendered violence by silencing the victims and downplaying the problems.

The previous research has focused on the role of Japanese women in society and the expectations that follow. It explores the treatment of women in Japan and certain attitudes toward the issues these women endure, such as motherhood, sexual violence, and other contributing factors within the culture that could encourage or normalize such treatment and enforcement of gender roles. Such factors prove more nuanced within societies where tradition and subtle sexism influence the general outlook on women. Therefore, this study examines normalized views that are, in fact, harmful towards women. Interviews with young Japanese women reveal the expectations they feel they must adhere to as well as acts and/or threats they have experienced throughout their lives. This research not only gives a voice to these Japanese women, but it provides firsthand accounts of their own culture that will shed a light on traditional Japanese gender roles. Specifically, this research seeks to answer the following questions: 1) How do Japanese women perceive their role in society? 2) What are the expectations of women in the family, intimate relationships, employment, and education? 3) To what extent has gender role expectations changed over time?

Methodology
Participants
The participants in this ethnographic study are a random sample of ten young adult women ranging from 18 to 22 years of age from Chukyo University located in Nagoya City in Japan. Their socioeconomic status, relationship status, and employment status varied. All participants have a proficient understanding of the English language in terms of reading, writing, and speaking.

Data
Interviews with participants were recorded and transcribed after they signed a consent form. The interview guide had fourteen questions. The first question asked what the individual thought about being a Japanese woman, ten of the questions dealt with role expectations in different areas of Japanese women's lives, and another question addressed if there was one singular role for women. The thirteenth and fourteenth questions focused on gender inequality in terms of current and historical treatment to determine prevalence. These questions cover individual nuances that women may experience depending on their backgrounds. The questions were purposefully designed to be non-invasive and to allow the interviewee to expand upon personal experiences that could provide more context and understanding. Due to the language barrier and despite the interviewees' language proficiency, the transcribed interviews were translated and put into coherent English without altering the answers. This research aims to identify and provide a cultural context for future research.

Procedure

The design of this study was qualitative as it involved the interviewing of Japanese women within their cultural context and understanding. Furthermore, it is a content analysis, observing patterned themes that could contribute to gendered violence in Japan. After initial contact with interviewees, emails were sent out to each member to set up a time, date, and public place, in order to conduct the interview. During the meetings, two consent forms – one for the researcher and one for the participant – were given alongside a list of the survey questions. The researcher then went on to explain the informed consent form, outlining the purpose, risks, benefits, confidentiality, and option for the participant to withdraw from the research at any time without any consequences. After gaining consent, the participant then read over the questions, determining if they were capable of answering all of them. Once they finished looking over the questions, the interview was conducted to completion, with the researcher pausing or stopping the recording if the participant asked. The optional question was asked at the end of the interview with no obligation of an answer from the participant. The researcher then reaffirmed the confidentiality of the interview and the interviewee's ability to withdraw from the study.

Results

Interviewees' Perceived Gender Roles

Seven of the women interviewed felt that being a Japanese woman meant having to complete traditional gender tasks, including marriage and child-rearing. Furthermore, two women said they were not expected to work after getting married, and as such, would quit their place of employment. Two more interviewees stated that women play a more subordinate role towards men, meaning they were expected to care for the needs of the men in their lives and that it is expected for "women to try to support the men." In one of the participant's interviews, she stated, "[Japanese women] are supposed to support the men rather than being women. So I felt, I'm not very comfortable like that." Another interviewee said, "It's a little hard for me to be a Japanese woman." Two other interviewees stated that being Japanese women meant keeping up their appearances to portray feminine traits, i.e. looking cute or beautiful. One unique occurrence was when one participant stated that being a Japanese woman simply meant that they were born in Japan and was determined a female.

Overall, the interviewees provided answers as to what they felt were the expectations, if any, that Japanese women had to fulfill in their lives. Two interviewees went on to say women have to quit their jobs in order to complete their role as women and as supporters for men while one stated that, to support men, they had to marry. Only one interviewee felt that Japanese women were supposed to be modest and explained that modesty was to support the men in society. However, two women felt that there were no ultimate expectations for being a Japanese woman and that it differed depending on the order of their birth as well.

Furthermore, when prompted about the one singular role expectation Japanese women are required to fulfill, four interviewees said women were expected to be wives, and another four stated that women were expected to be mothers. As one interviewee said:

> To be a wife… Some people don't want to get married, to have children and it is a
> problem for old people. Falling birth rates and longevity – there is a change
> despite tradition. They can't work if they get married, and that means no children.

> The number of children decrease. If customs changed, the women may get married–if the system changed, some women will get married or want to.

Three women stated that it was expected that they stay supportive in their relationships with men, which corresponds with their responses to what being a Japanese woman meant to them; however, one interviewee said that women still have to be independent, whereas the other two women stated that they still felt more dependent than men. Four of those interviewed said that women had to quit their jobs if they were within a family unit, especially when children are involved.

A few of the interviewees shared that their roles were related to their behavior or appearances. One interviewee said that expressive behaviors are acceptable, but another stated the opposite–that Japanese women are expected to be lady-like by looking cute and in the way they sit. "Women, as I told you before, are expected to be cute. Really cute, especially in Japan. And the way they sit down, too, like they can't sit down with their legs open." Unlike the others interviewed, one stated that there were no role expectations of women.

Expectations of Japanese Women
Familial Expectations

Five of the women interviewed felt that familial expectations centered on marriage. Of these five, four said becoming a mother was part of marrying a man. However, one interviewee outside of these five stated that women were expected to marry, but did not mention how marriage and child-rearing were related. In the words of one participant, "I think they expect for them to marry a nice guy, like rich guys. And basically, stay near their house, so not to move too far away or overseas… And to have babies." A single participant also brought up that it was important for a woman to continue the family line by having children. Three interviewees said that after marrying or having children, women had to quit their jobs.

For some of the women interviewed, familial expectations were related to marriage, but four of the interviewees felt that outside of that commitment and simply as daughters, women were expected to do housework. Two stated that this all revolved around supporting or respecting the men, with one saying that, "Japanese [society] expect(s) that women have to respect men more than men do so to women." Two interviewees said that there are familial expectations on a woman's behavior as well, with femininity being the focus.

Three of the women interviewed stated that families would expect their daughters to earn high grades in school or simply require them to finish schooling. Two participants felt that families would expect their daughters to pursue a career and bring in a good income. However, most interviewees focused on marriage and child-rearing.

Intimate Partner Expectations

When it comes to romantic relationships, four interviewees felt that women had to play a supportive role as a girlfriend or as a wife. Two interviewees stated that one way of being a supportive or proper girlfriend was adhering to the courtship expectation that women decide where dates occur and the men pay for the date. Four interviewees also stated that proper conduct meant behaving passively or like a lady. One woman said, "I think most of the Japanese guys expect their girlfriends to be like really passive, you know, not expressive." This participant went on further to say, "But never like really, not like business woman, but like really independent women. So I think

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being passive means being more attractive to guys." Four women felt that appearances mattered most in a romantic relationship as opposed to anything else, with one interviewee articulating that there is a saying Japanese men use, "Face matters only."

One participant said that men were the ones to initiate romantic relationships. In order to begin a relationship and get to know one another, a man and a woman must go on a group date. "Men are supposed to ask [for a] date, and women are not supposed to ask, and they're kind of waiting for that. And it's not [to] start immediately. They have conversations or take their time and probably [the man] asks to hang out with a group as a start for dating." This dating process satisfies cultural expectations for romantic development. One interviewee stated that men also have to propose, and another participant said that dating ends in marriage. Two believed that women had no significant agency in regards to a romantic relationship.

Employment Expectations

Regarding employment, six of the interviewees stated that men's and women's roles differed. According to four interviewees, this involved appearances, as all four said that companies more often than not prefer women to wear skirts or feminine work attire rather than pantsuits. Three brought up that wearing simple black skirt-suits on the job hunt is preferable as well. When it came to hiring, three said that men were more desirable than women. One of the interviewees elaborated by saying, "If they have the same ability to work, the company will want to hire men. It's because they can work longer than women." Upon questioning why this may occur, the participant provided the following explanation:

> I mean like, men do not have a life event. And the women are supposed to have a kid when they get married–have a baby and… It might mean taking a leave so they need to have a flexible work time. But [companies] are not capable to–to adjust to them. So, for them, the men are more suitable for work rather than women.

Two other interviewees agreed that women have to plan for life events, such as having children, which results in different expectations of women in the workplace. Two interviewees discussed how having children interferes with women being full-time workers. One interviewee explained the way companies respond to women who take maternity leave, the scarcity of daycares, and how women quit work to care for their children rather than pursue their careers:

> They need to stop working in order to take care of children. If she's working, she doesn't have the time and there is no facility around the house to take care of the children. Few companies are establishing it near offices–they are very few. We need companies to assist but also the government to help.

Three of the women interviewed said that women at work are also expected to serve tea to their coworkers and bosses according to tradition. One said that, women need to be "supporting men to work well, like women–for example, women served tea to men, like, 'Here you are,' to everyone." Another said that, "It is kind of a stereotype, but women have to serve tea or coffee to her boss or coworkers." One interviewee stated that, at work, mannerisms mattered as well, so being polite or passive is the preferable behavior for women. A participant also said that women are paid less than men too.

Education System Expectations

In the educational sphere, four of the women interviewed felt that Japanese women do not have expectations placed on them. However, others felt differently or altered their responses after further questioning. Four stated that girls are required to wear uniforms with skirts, and schools differed in strictness. One participant described her high school experience:

My high school was very strict. We had to wear our uniform very correctly; we have to keep the length of the skirt under the knees and also, our school was a very old school, so the uniform was also a traditional uniform. So we had our shirt, and how can I say it, vests, and jackets. It was very hot, especially in summer, but we had to wear it. […] But for men, they could wear short sleeve shirts. We had to wear long sleeve shirts even though it was summer.

Other than their uniforms, four of those interviewed stated that they were treated differently than their male peers, as exemplified by separating into single-sex classes or serving subordinate roles. Three said that they took formal speech lessons separately from their male classmates. Two others said they had entirely separate classes from boys, and one said that this separation seemed natural since men are placed first and deemed more important in the educational setting. Through the short description of one participant, there is a "hidden curriculum." Regarding clubs and student organizations, one interviewee explained that girls would be expected to be managers of boys' teams. She stated, "Girls always had to be not on the playing side; she has to care about the player, like clean their uniforms. Women always have to do it." Employment in education is also male-dominated. One participant noted that men are always in higher positions such as the principal or professors in higher education. Another single interviewee discussed how high school and higher education are optional since the government pays for the first twelve years of education for a child.

Socioeconomic and Older Adult Expectations

Two interviewees had difficulty answering the question concerning expectations Japanese women have based on age and socioeconomic status. Aside from those two interviewees, others were able to discuss several age and social class expectations women face. Three, however, did not know the expectations for older women or poor women since they are neither old nor rich. Two interviewees stated that older women played the subordinate, traditional gender role that was historically expected of Japanese women. However, two felt that older women could not fulfill the female societal role, such as having children or working outside the home, and as such, strayed from the traditional role. One explained, "If Japanese women get old, they cannot do what they should do, but if they are young, they can do it." The older a Japanese woman is, the more unable she is in fulfilling her expected gender role. Another two of the interviewees felt that they had to treat older women with respect, such as standing off to the side when they pass or giving their seat to them on the train. However, one of these two interviewees felt that older women were prideful and looked down on the younger generations.

In regards to socioeconomic class, two interviewees felt that rich women are not expected to work outside of the home and this was considered "an ideal" lifestyle for women. Two women agreed that wealthy women had more strict regulations on their behavior and that they had to

emulate what Japanese society felt was lady-like. When it came to lower income, one participant discussed that women are expected to work two jobs to provide for themselves and their families.

Standards for Physical Appearances

Japanese women have conflicting standards for beauty and appearance. Five of those interviewed stated that women need to be fashionable or cute while two others discussed how women had to display a traditional or modest look, especially when it came to wearing uniforms for school or work. Another five agreed that part of the appearance expectations for Japanese women involved wearing make-up, with one describing its importance by saying, "In Japan, if they–if we don't wear make-up in the work place, then it means being rude and the boss… I think they'll say, 'Please put on a little make-up.' Make-up is very important for Japanese women." Alongside make-up, four interviewees discussed hairstyles as well, with one mentioning the preferred Japanese look of long, straight black hair and another talking about how women cannot have short hair if they want to be feminine.

One brought up how Japanese men do not have to abide by beauty standards in comparison to their girlfriends and how it was important for women to look good by societal standards to get boyfriends or male attention. This same participant also brought up the issue of plastic surgery and the stigma against it because it seems like a desperate way to live up to societal expectations. Another single participant discussed how being skinny was part of being fashionable, and one other interviewee discussed how women were expected to wear high heels.

Gender Inequality

Historical Context

Seven interviewees stated that, traditionally, women were expected to do housework, and the same seven further said that this included child-rearing. Women were to stay home and take care of the house, the chores, and the children. One interviewee said, "Women were supposed to take care of all the housework so that the men can work outside of the apartment, outside of the house. So I think, yeah, in terms of cooking, cleaning, taking care of kids–these were all traditional expectations for Japanese women." Three said that men were able to work, and one stated that women could work together with men on a farm. Another two brought up that women were expected to marry. When it came to schooling, two said that women were not allowed to pursue education.

Six interviewees felt that these strict expectations have changed, with three stating that Japanese women are now more independent than before, and another two noted that expectations of women in Japan are less controlling than they were before. One woman said that women nowadays are not as pressured to have children, and another interviewee said that women are allowed to exhibit more self-expression. Alternatively, four of those interviewed did say that the genders are still not equal and that women still have fewer rights than men.

Treatment Based on Gender

When asked about preferential treatment between men and women, interviewees shared a variety of answers. Three stated that, in an educational institution, boys are preferred by teachers. Furthermore, one woman stated that men are called on to answer questions before their female classmates were. In describing a hypothetical situation, "If the teacher asks a question and nobody

replies, men are supposed to answer first before women." One of the women interviewed also stated that men are more likely to pursue higher education than women are.

In the employment context, three women stated that female employees receive lower salaries then their male counterparts. Women, as one interviewee said, are less likely to be hired than men, and another said that women are more likely to be part-time workers: "Their payment, for example, as you can expect, men are paid more than women, and the system–the Japanese hiring system–it's those factors that affect that. Like full time workers–most of or more than half of full time workers are men. And part time workers are women, usually."

Two interviewees stated that men are usually asked to do harder work than female employees, and another two said that men are more likely to get promotions. One also stated that male employees are more likely to treat women poorly, and another interviewee went on to explain that some men still use the derogatory term "*gusai*" or "stupid wife" in the workplace. According to three interviewees, these differences are permissible due to the biological differences between men and women.

However, when it comes to taking time off work, one of the women interviewed stated that it is harder for men to request vacations. One said that it is quite rare for men to have paternity leave, whereas women can more easily take maternity leave. Two stated that after giving birth, women are likely to be allowed to return to work.

Historical Differences in the Treatment of Women

Regarding the historical treatment of women, two interviewees said that women were not allowed to go to school. "Women were considered just stupid, like not as intelligent people at all because… To control women the way the guys wanted to, it would be much easier if women didn't get enough education because they couldn't think by themselves." One interviewee stated that women had no laws protecting them either, and another said that, despite historical contributions made by women, men were usually credited for the solutions of the past in Japanese society. Men, according to one other interviewee, were allowed to join the military, but women were not.

Three of those interviewees stated that women were expected to stay in the home and do housework, and one said that men were expected to work outside the home. However, this differed when it came to farm work, as one woman stated that within her family, both the men and women had to work in the fields. Two interviewees stated that women played a subordinate role to the men as well, and one interviewee shared that, in the past, women were supposed to walk behind the men to show deference.

"Gendered" Laws

In regard to Japanese laws, one woman gave an example of a gendered law that allows women to marry at the age of sixteen while men are allowed to marry at the later age of eighteen. Two women mentioned divorce laws that allow men to immediately remarry while women are still required to wait one hundred days or three months before they can remarry:

> So women have to wait three months or 100 days just in case they have kids of their ex-husband. So, things would be really messed up, right? So that's why they have to make sure they don't–they need proof–they have to wait to prove that they don't have their ex-husband's kids. So yes, they still cannot get married again.

This law attempts to deflect conflict over paternity, should the woman show signs of pregnancy. This same interviewee said that single mothers are able to get help from the government but that men could not. Another three interviewees said that maternity leave is legal for women to pursue and that more companies are allowing this option.

Two women stated that these laws are changing, but another two believe that the law is not changing. One interviewee believed that the laws are equal and could not think of a law that is based on a person's gender.

Gender Inequality of Japanese Women

Five interviewees stated that there is perceivable gender inequality between Japanese men and women. Out of these five, three stated that in the workplace, women are paid less than men. One interviewee stated that there is a difference in marital expectations between men and women. Another three interviewees stated that there are differences in sexual assault as well:

> That the victim is only women is taught a lot in school that, what I heard in gender class is that many men as well suffered from rape and domestic abuse. But we don't really hear about it, it's because, men feel very embarrassed to talk about or even they talk in public, no one will care. It's because based on the social expectation of men and the women.

Two of the women interviewed went on to elaborate that men did not talk about their assaults because they will face male victimization or shaming as a result. However, there are differences between how men and women experience sexual assault, with another interviewee recounting her own experience by saying:

> The train line has a women's only car to avoid "chikan" or molesters. I experienced it, and it's not too bad, but it is very creepy and gross. An old man touched me inappropriately. I moved to face him but did not tell anyone–I did glare at him. The system at this line–it's not good because it does not stop them. The system is not the best way to stop it.

When talking about gendered violence, one of the interviewees also brought up domestic violence and mentioned how the topic served as a lesson in gender studies. Students learn about how domestic violence affects people and who the victims are while analyzing statistics in Japan and other countries.

Five women explained that familial systems contribute to gender inequality. One difference described by an interviewee is that, in accordance with family expectations, "Japanese families tend to write their father's name first." Three women brought up how in school, there are nuances of gender inequality, with one interviewee saying that, due to Japanese families using their fathers' names, other families would know if a family is fatherless or not. In regards to pursuing a study abroad program, one stated that it is more readily acceptable for men to apply than women. Two interviewees stated that the laws have gendered differences within them, and one of the women interviewed simply stated that gender inequality is embedded in every aspect of Japanese society. Two interviewees believe that there is a movement to address these inequalities, whereas two believe that, despite such changes, they are not enough. Another two interviewees believe that there has been no change at all.

Discussion

Although significant attention has been given to gendered issues in Japan, this research builds upon scholarly literature by providing in depth qualitative explanations of the effects of traditional gender roles on young Japanese women. These interviews confirmed the existing gender literature and illuminated the gender inequality women face on a personal and societal level, as well as the roles they personally believe society requires of them in different spheres of their lives. The results show differing experiences with gendered violence and expectations, but similar patterns regarding gender roles exist. This research sought to answer the following questions: 1). How do Japanese women perceive their role in society? 2). What are the expectations of women in the family, intimate relationships, employment, and education? 3). To what extent has gender role expectations changed over time?

Initially, the majority of the interviewees felt that the pressures of traditional gender roles were pre-established within their nation. This mainly included having children, getting married, and focusing on housework or chores, or as one interviewee said with irony, "Be a good baby-maker and maid." Japan, as a country, is known for being more conservative than its Western counterparts, and women display conservatism in their lived experiences, which are defined by motherhood and becoming a wife (Lebra, 2007). The older adults in their nation, their families, their employers, and the government share these traditional beliefs, so rather than merely feeling subjugated individually, women feel it as a community (Akazawa, 2011; Goldstein-Gidoni, 1999; Kitagawa, 2011).

The women interviewed found that traditional expectations appear to affect other aspects of Japanese women's lives as well, especially their employment and the treatment they receive in other institutions. This could occur on their way to work when they have to take a women's only train because the threat of train molesters is rampant and real. As one of the interviewees noted, the fact that there is a separate cabin does not provide a plausible solution to sexual assault since the molesters tend to go unpunished, merely discouraged from performing such acts. Moreover, it places the responsibility on women to not get molested as opposed to the assaulters being sent the message that they should not molest. In addition, the normalization of assaultive behavior and victimization of women leads to a society where these issues are not discussed. Domestic violence and abuse is not widely talked about either (Nagae & Dancy, 2010; Yamawaki, Ostenson, & Brown 2009). As one interviewee said: "More information is open now. So it means more men–I don't think they feel comfortable to say, but men–or maybe a little bit–can go to the hospital or police to talk about their story, about the suffering. But I think it's still difficult to confess in public."

The stigma of sexual violence affects both men and women. As aforementioned, one victim stated that men do not report their trauma due to the shame affiliated with being a victim of sexual crime; men are further stigmatized for being victim to a crime typically associated with women. Another interviewee disclosed that she had never thought about this issue until she entered college where classes on sexual violence and gender studies are accessible. This relates to the studies of Nagae and Dancy (2010) and Yamawaki, Ostenson, and Brown (2009) which demonstrate how women choose not to talk about their experiences with domestic and sexual violence due to societal pressures and potential punishment via victim blaming.

Another recurring trend the interviewed women consistently disclosed was that women are supposed to take on lesser roles than their male counterparts. This was evident in their discussion of families, employment, school, and treatment by peers and authority figures. As aforementioned, women were and are encouraged to fulfill traditional gender roles from their school days onward by having children after getting married and by quitting work after having said children. There is

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also the claim that women are treated differently legally, having different laws applied to them despite the image of equality in the Japanese government (Goldstein-Gidoni, 2005; Hayakawa, 1995; Tomida, 2005). These laws and the lack of discussion about their inequality represent the interviewees' perceptions of being treated as lesser than their male counterparts. Although there are seeds of change, the pattern of women playing subordinate rather than egalitarian roles is consistent with the literature that there is still pressure from Japanese society to recognize that their worth is not equal to that of the men in their lives (Uji, et al., 2006; Frühstuck, 2000; Otsubo, 2005; Silverberg, 2006).

Limitations

This study addresses the cultural context of traditional gender roles derived from the perceptions and experiences of college women; however, there are limitations. The focused sample of interviewees consists of young women between the ages of 18 and 22 who attend a university and are of middle or upper-middle class. Each of these interviewees was also preparing for or already on the job market when they graduated and had only worked part-time leading up to the interviews, if at all. Therefore, this study reflects the views of younger, educated Japanese women and reports their experiences of gender role fulfillment and discrimination. It does not reflect the views held by Japanese women with differing characteristics or positions in life. Future studies should ask these same questions to a variety of women for comparison i.e. women who are older, less affluent, or employed full-time.

The language and cultural barrier between the researcher and interviewees also served as a limitation, as there may have been unique topics of gendered violence in Japan that the interviews could not cover. In order to address these limitations, future research should be conducted with a more fluent understanding of the Japanese language, especially in how it relates to both modern and historical Japanese gender expectations. The sample of Japanese women should include women from different age groups, economic classes, employment statuses, and marital/parental statuses.

Regardless of these limitations, this study provides important insight into a culture that holds conformity to a high standard. This study reveals young women's views, concerns, and obstacles associated with Japanese culture and provides an intersectional pathway for furthering the international research being conducted in Japan regarding gender issues.

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