

**Her Story:
Lesbians in Japan and South Korea**

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Her Story:

Lesbians in Japan and South Korea

Master's thesis, Elise Fylling

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Summary

Lesbians in Japan and South Korea have long been ignored in both academic, and in social context. The assumption that there are no lesbians in Japan or South Korea dominates a large population in these societies, because lesbians do not identify as such in the public domain. Instead they often live double lives showing one side of themselves to the public and another in private. Although there exist no formal laws against homosexuality, a social barrier in relation to coming out to one's family, friends or co-workers is highly present. Shame, embarrassment and fear of being rejected as deviant or abnormal makes it difficult to step outside of the bonds put on by society's hetero-normative structures.

What is it like to be lesbian in contemporary Japan and South Korea? In my dissertation I look closely at the Japanese and South Korean society's attitudes towards young lesbians, examining their experiences concerning identity, invisibility, family relations, the question of marriage and how they see themselves in society. I also touch upon how they meet others in spite of their invisibility as well as giving some insight to the way they chose to live their life. Some may choose marriage because it is considered common sense; others might attempt to stand up to society's expectations and chose a different life path. Ironically however, some of the methods used inadvertently contribute to maintaining their invisibility, consolidating the myth that 'there are no lesbians in Japan or South Korea'.

Acknowledgements

When deciding the topic for my dissertation, little did I know how this work would influence me, both emotionally and intellectually. Some days I read so much that some days I thought my head would explode, others I found myself in a nightclub in Tokyo not giving much thought about anything. During my fieldwork I have met many exciting new people, tied life-long friendship bonds, experienced multiple culture shocks and learned a great deal about myself as a person and as a researcher. While working on this dissertation, I have no doubt in my mind that I have grown more as a person than I ever would have; even if I for some reason became prime minister of Norway. I am forever grateful for these two years, and looking back makes me feel both nostalgic and somehow glad that they are over.

I would like to thank my academic supervisor, Professor Vladimir Tikhonov, for your extensive knowledge, enthusiasm and for responding promptly to my not-always-so-sensible questions. Your knowledge about East Asia, in my opinion, can hardly be challenged.

Next I wish to thank my informants for sharing a very important part of your lives with me. Without you, there would be no dissertation. I am deeply grateful that you trusted me with your information and experiences, and I have the utmost respect for each and every one of you. I would also like to thank all the friends I made during my stay in Tokyo; you made it an unforgettable experience. Thank you all for looking after me.

I also want to thank you, Celina, for traveling to Tokyo with me, and for always believing in me whenever I doubted myself and my work. If I ever lost faith in myself, you were there to help me retrieve it. If sincerely believe that if you had not pushed me forward, I doubt I could have finished this dissertation on time. Thank you for all your help and dedication, I am forever indebted to you.

Lastly, I want to give a special thanks to Ingrid, for your dedicated friendship and support. You always managed to putting my mind at ease for a few moments during my most stressful and intense periods. I cannot imagine what I would do without you. Thank you.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

Imagine living in a society where you had to conceal your true identity from society, hiding a vital part of your life from people close to you. This is the reality many women face in Japan and South Korea; they are afraid to tell people that they love another woman. These women often choose to hide their sexuality from their closest family, friends and co-workers. The sentences “There are no lesbians in Japan”¹ and “there are no gays in Korea”² may seem ridiculous, but hearing them is by no means uncommon. So how can one talk about a subject when they do not discursively exist? In this dissertation I will attempt to highlight the reasons behind lesbians’ invisibility, as well as examine the ways they live their lives.

In Japanese, the word for homosexuality is *dōseiai*, meaning same sex love. Until recently no terms existed to describe only lesbians, or women who love other women. Today, the term *rezubian* is being used to describe female-female desire and women who are sexually attracted to other women. This is a heavily contested term, as it is often associated with pornography or has negative implications – negative sexual connotations in particular. The word *bian*, short for lesbian, is more commonly used amongst lesbians because it does not bear the same negative connotations, and sounds cuter. In South Korea, the word *iban* is widely used in the lesbian community, used by the girls who identify as lesbian or bisexual. *Iban* is meant to be different from *ilban*, meaning normal in Korean. Thus, the girls are identifying themselves as not-normal, or not-heterosexual.³ Japan and South Korea are considered homogenous nations, with heteronormativity (where the ‘abnormal’ homosexual differs from the ‘normal’ heterosexual; often related to homophobia) as the dominant sexual discourse. This means that anything straying from heterosexuality can be considered to be a deviation, or abnormal. In this dissertation, I will use queer theory as my theoretical framework, drawing upon Judith Butler’s work on the construction of gender and identity. There are multiple sub-identities within queer identity itself, including bisexual, lesbian, queer, homosexual, bi-curious, transgender, male-to-female and so on. For the sake of simplicity I have chosen to mainly use the word lesbian when describing women who love

¹ See for example Saori Kamano, “Entering the Lesbian World in Japan: Debut Stories”, *Journal of Lesbian*

² Lebogang Mogashoa, “There are No Gays in Korea”, *News 24* (January 28, 2011), URL: <http://www.news24.com/Columnists/Beyond-Borders/There-are-no-gays-in-Korea-20110128>

³ Ji-Eun Lee, “Beyond Pain and Protection: Politics of Identity and Iban Girls in Korea” in Diana Khor and Saori Kamano, *Lesbians in East Asia: Diversity, Identities and Resistance* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2007), 51.

women in my dissertation. When referring to men, I mainly use the words gay or male homosexual.

1.1.0 Choosing a topic

The reason I wanted to focus my attention on lesbians in Japan and South Korea was because the topic is relatively unexplored in an academic context. This may well be changing however, as it is increasingly put on the academic agenda. Research on Queer Theory is probably of the most rapidly increasing literature today. This literature is mostly based in the Western context, but more and more academic texts on homosexuality in Japan and the rest of South East Asia is emerging. This is indeed a very positive sign, as lesbians and homosexuals need more visibility in society to show that they are not some abnormal outcasts, but normal living and breathing human beings. I want to be able to understand the Japanese and South Korean society better by researching this particular subject. I may also find that I can contribute to the lesbian community by portraying them as something not to be threatened by or frightened of.

1.1.1 Background for my choice of topic

As I spent a semester in Chiba during my Japanese studies in 2007, I noticed that there was little or no talk about lesbians amongst my Japanese peers. Being a lesbian myself, I also felt the need to hide my sexuality. When asked if I had a boyfriend I found myself compelled to answer that I simply did not have the time, or the opportunity to find someone yet. My female Japanese friends were eager to join me when I wanted to go to gay clubs in Tokyo, but only if it meant going to *gay* clubs; not women-only clubs. This sparked an interest to find out more about the lesbian community in Japan, something which I did not know existed at the time. Moreover, when I stumbled upon an article by Jennifer Robertson called *Dying to Tell: Sexuality and Suicide in Imperial Japan*⁴, it intrigued me as she writes about lesbian couples who decide to end their lives because of their sexuality. They were seen as abnormal by society's heterosexual norms, and therefore saw no other solution than to commit double suicide. The article portrayed the problematic lesbian in 1935, so it is fairly outdated. I wanted

⁴ Jennifer Robertson, "Dying to Tell: Sexuality and Suicide in Imperial Japan", *Signs* Vol. 25, No. 1 (autumn 1999)

to find out if such heteronormativity still consists in society today, or if the general attitudes towards homosexuality are changing in modern Japan and South Korea. Due to the limitation of this paper I will not focus my attention towards suicide rates among sexual minorities in Japan and South Korea, although it would be a very interesting topic for another research project in the future.

1.1.2 Topic and research questions

The most consistent issue throughout this dissertation is how lesbians are rendered invisible by society's heterodominant norms and social practices. This invisibility is consolidated in a number of ways, some of which I attempt to shed light upon during my analysis. The importance of family, loyalty to one's parents and the fear of being viewed as abnormal are prominent factors contributing to the silencing of Japanese and South Korean lesbians.

The topic of my dissertation is "*Lesbians in Japan and South Korea*". I want to find out how young lesbians live their life in Japanese and South Korean society, and examine any difficulties they might have in living their lives as lesbians. On the basis of this topic, I have formulated some sub-questions which I attempt to answer to the best of my ability:

- Which factors contribute to the silencing of lesbians in Japan and South Korea?
- To what extent do family relations impact the lives of young Japanese and South Korean lesbians?
- How is the younger generation of lesbians different that the older generation?

1.2.0 Prior research in English on this subject

I found that there is little research in English on the subject of lesbians in East Asia. As my reading-skills in Japanese are limited and I do not know Korean, thus I do not know to which extent there exist sources or books readily available in Japanese or Korean. As opposed to research done on the feminist (and lesbian) movement in Japan during the 1970s and 1980s as well as some information on the Korean movement in the 1990s, I wanted to focus my attention to the younger generation lesbians in Japan and South Korea. As there was limited information available, my dissertation is inductive and based on empirical findings to a large

degree. Although not concerning the younger generation in particular, there are some books worth mentioning.

Although there is limited research conducted on lesbians, there are a fair amount of accessible books about male homosexuality, especially in imperial Japan where homosexuality was thought to be common. Gary Leupp's book *Male Colors: The Construction of Homosexuality in Tokugawa Japan* from 1997 shows how the male same-sex tradition known as *nanshoku* was enjoyed, accepted and even celebrated in arts and literature.⁵ This book mainly focuses on male homosexuality, but is worth mentioning for its detailed description of the homosexual traditions once common in Japan. The book *Beyond Common Sense: Sexuality and Gender in Contemporary Japan* from 2001 by Wim Lunsing focuses on both male and female homosexuality, investigating the social, cultural and political aspects of marriage in the Japanese culture, as well as examining how sexual minorities relate to each other.⁶

One of the most helpful books I encountered when working on this dissertation was Sharon Chalmers' book *Emerging Lesbian Voices from Japan* from 2002. This book focuses primarily on the silencing of lesbians in Japanese society. She also presents an interesting idea about the notion of 'fragmented selves', where one chooses which side of oneself one wished to portray to other people.⁷ Another helpful book concerning male and female sexuality in Japan was *Mark McLelland and Romit Dasgupta's Genders, Transgenders and Sexuality in Japan* from 2005.⁸ The book is a collection of essays which examine how social norms related to sexuality and gender are being challenged.

I genuinely had a hard time finding relevant sources concerning lesbians in South Korea. The articles I found that helped me the most was Ji-Eun Lee's article "Beyond Pain and Protection: Politics of Identity and *Iban* girls in Korea" from 2006.⁹ She describes how young *iban* girls identify themselves in South Korean society and how the South Korean government tries to subdue homosexual influences and information under the guise of protecting the young. This article was featured in the very useful book *Lesbians in East Asia:*

⁵ Gary P. Leupp, *Male Colors: the Construction of Homosexuality in Tokugawa Japan* (Berkeley: University of California press, 1995).

⁶ Wim Lunsing, *Beyond Common Sense: Sexuality and Gender in Contemporary Japan* (London; New York: Kegan Paul, 2001).

⁷ Sharon Chalmers, *Emerging Lesbian Voices from Japan* (London: Routledge, 2002).

⁸ Mark McLelland and Romit Dasgupta, ed. *Genders, Transgenders and Sexuality in Japan* (London: Routledge, 2005)

⁹ Lee, "Beyond Pain and Protection: Politics of Identity and *Iban* girls in Korea".

Diversity, Identities and Resistance from 2006, edited by Diana Khor and Saori Kamano. This book is a compilation of articles concerning lesbian issues in China, Korea, Japan as well as Taiwan.

1.3.0 Structure and layout

The dissertation will focus on lesbians in Japan and South Korea, with main focus on lesbian invisibility and the importance of family relations. I want to look at society's attitude towards the lesbian challenge towards traditional Japanese and South Korean 'womanhood', and explore how they either sacrifices herself or suffers in a heterosexual society where her path in life is being put out before her. I will also investigate how they live their lives and see if they are adapting to the expectations put upon them, of if they purse their own interests and desires.

The first part of the dissertation, chapter 2, will provide the reader with insight to the methodological approaches used when conducting my fieldwork and collection of data material. Chapter 3 presents the theoretical framework used in the analysis, and provides the historical background needed to understand why Japanese and South Korean society places such emphasis on family and marriage. Chapter 4 and 5 will focus mainly on Japan, because it consists of information provided by my informants. Chapter 4 is the first of my three analysis chapters and touches on the lesbian invisibility issue in Japan. It also explains how they meet each other despite the apparent hiding from society. The main focus in Chapter 5 is on family and marriage, and how they relate to pressure from family and friends. It also provides information about alternative lifestyles that may be available to them. Chapter 6 is the last of my analysis chapters, and gives a detailed description about the gay and lesbian situation in South Korea. It seeks to give the reader a sense of understanding as to why South Korean society ignores the gay and lesbian population, as well as provide some insight to how they live their lives. Chapter 7 consists of my closing words about my findings, as well as some proposals for further research.

Chapter 2 – Method

2.1.0 Introduction

It is common to divide between two different methodological research methods in social sciences; quantitative and qualitative research methods. The quantitative approach produces data which can be quantified and is generated through various forms of questionnaires. This data is called hard data. The qualitative approach is largely textual which is generated through conversations, in-depth interviews, observations and document analysis. This data is called soft data.¹⁰ The choice of methodology depends on what the researcher wants to find out. My dissertation' topic is lesbians in Japan and South Korea, seeking to find out how something is experienced, made it natural for me to choose a qualitative approach as a method for acquiring data. The qualitative research method allows for more exploration in a field where there exists a limited amount of prior research. This approach is also a better method for understanding individual experiences and their reality. This was imperative for me, because I needed to find out what it is like to be a lesbian in Japan and South Korea. The term qualitative also implies emphasizing processes and meanings which cannot be measured in quantity or frequency.¹¹

The most commonly used methodological approaches within the qualitative research approach itself are interview and observation. Interviews are best suited for gathering information about people's experiences, thoughts and views. Observation is best suited for gathering information on people's behavior and how they relate to each other.¹² During my fieldwork I spent three months in Tokyo, Japan to collect data for my dissertation. I initially chose to use interviews as my primary approximate method, as interviews would give me a good understanding of how the informants themselves experienced their situation, as well as being able to gain in-depth information. In order to receive good data, it is important that the researcher asks the right questions. The advantage of conducting an interview is that the researcher can ask follow-up questions or ask for an explanation if anything comes across as unclear. As my fieldwork progressed, I found that I also in many ways used observation as an

¹⁰ Kirsten Ringdahl, *Enhet og Mangfold*, 2nd. edition (Bergen: Fagbokforlaget, 2007).

¹¹ Tove Thagaard, *Systematikk og Innlevelse: En innføring i kvalitativ metode*, 3rd. edition (Bergen: Fagbokforlaget, 2009), 16-17.

¹² Thagaard, *Systematikk og Innlevelse*, 13.

indirect research approach. I attended several women-only events, social gatherings, meetings and *off-kai*'s¹³, hence I participated, however unintentionally, in participatory observation. Through observation, I got to experience events with the participant's own eyes, and was able to collect information that does not necessarily appear during an interview. Observation does not allow as much interference with the observed parties as an interview, but was useful because I was in a different country, with a culture which differs from my own. I therefore got to experience the daily life of lesbians in Tokyo as well. The advantage of being an 'outsider' is that it is much easier for me to question topics that the informants largely take for granted.

I realized that because of the limited time and resources available to me at the time, I did not have the opportunity to conduct any fieldwork in South Korea. I therefore concluded that I needed to use document-analysis as well. Document analysis differs from the data collected in the field because they are written for another purpose than what the researcher intends to do with them.¹⁴ I analyzed previously written articles and documents on homosexuality in South Korea, attempting to focus on lesbians. Due to lack of prior research on lesbians in South Korea, this proved to be somewhat of a challenge.

2.2.0 Admission to the field

The first thing I did was send an e-mail to various LGBT-organizations in both Japan and South Korea, seeking help finding informants for my fieldwork. Specifically, the Japanese organizations I contacted was OCCUR and LOUD (Lesbians of Undeniable Drive) together with the South Korean organizations KSCRC (Korean Sexual-Minority Culture and Rights Center) and LGAAD (Lesbians and Gay Alliance Against Discrimination in Korea). I sent these e-mails in April 2011. I was not successful in establishing any contact with them through mail, so in May 2011 I decided to form letters¹⁵ in collaboration with my supervisor to ask about their willingness to help me gain information about the respective LGBT-communities. I did not receive any answer from any of these organizations, and the letters from OCCUR and LGAAD was returned to me some months later. After waiting a few months, I decided to send the same e-mail once again. On July 8th, I received an e-mail from

¹³ An *off-kai* is a group of people who have met online get together for drinks to get to know each other in person. I further explain this form of social gathering later in my dissertation.

¹⁴ Thagaard, *Systematikk og Innlevelse*, 62.

¹⁵ See attachment 1. I only attached the letter I formed to OCCUR, but I sent the exact same letter, only replacing the names of the organizations, to LGAAD, KSCRC and LOUD as well.

OCCUR where they regrettably informed me that they could not help me in my research.¹⁶ They referred me to other organizations, such as LOUD and QWRC (Queer & Women's Resource Center). I did not know about QWRC beforehand, so I tried sending them an e-mail asking for their assistance, or at least establish some contact. Sadly, this attempt also bore no fruit as I did not receive any reply from them. I had also signed up to an online social media site for lesbians, called www.outjapan.com. I realized that I had somewhat of a disadvantage while searching for informants, because I was still located in Norway. When I sent requests to various people through the Internet, it was easy for them to just ignore my message if they did not want to participate in my fieldwork. However, using this site I eventually managed to establish contact with two women, which later would show themselves to become two of my most important informants, Eri and Reina. After I arrived in Japan, both myself and others who were using the site noticed that it had been closed down for some time. Now it seems the site has vanished; so I can consider myself lucky that it was operational when I was looking for informants – after all, Out Japan was my 'way in' to the lesbian community in Japan.

Although I had a disadvantage of having to look for informants outside of Japan, I still had a couple of advantages concerning my access to the community. I have a bachelor-degree in East Asian studies as well as having spent one semester in Chiba, Japan in 2007. This means that I can speak Japanese to a certain extent, in addition to knowing Japanese customs and culture. Another possible advantage I had that I am myself a lesbian, thus being able to relate to my informants in a different way a heterosexual would. An example of this may be what Olav Christensen's experienced when meeting with the (male-dominated) snowboard-culture; he found that he gained entry and respect in the groups simply by being of the same gender as the other members of the group.¹⁷ Perhaps my informants trusted me to a larger extent because of this fact; I am also 'one of them'.

Because the theme of my dissertation was other people's sexual orientation, it was necessary to apply to the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD).¹⁸ NSD is one of the largest archives for research data provided to researchers and students in Norway and internationally. In addition, NSD is "a resource centre, which assists researchers with regard to data gathering, data analysis, and issues of methodology, privacy and research ethics."¹⁹

¹⁶ See attachment 2.

¹⁷ Olav Christensen, "Feltarbeid og metodemangfold i studiet av en subkultur" in Anders Gustavsson (ed.), *Kulturvitenskap i felt: Metodiske og pedagogiske erfaringer* (Kristiansand: Høyskoleforlaget, 2005), 88.

¹⁸ See attachment 3.

¹⁹ Norwegian Social Science Data Services: <http://www.nsd.uib.no/nsd/english/index.html>

Due to the sensitivity of my collected data, an application to NSD was needed in order to ensure that my informants' privacy would be maintained at all times. My research project was approved and I could continue with the preparations for my fieldwork, both mentally and practically.

2.2.1 Establishing contact with the informants

After arriving in Tokyo in early July 2011 I spent a week trying to get accustomed to a very hot Japanese summer as well as ridding myself of my jet-lag. After I could start function properly, I met up with Reina, one of the women I got acquainted with through the social website Out Japan. Reina was keen to show me around Tokyo and join me whenever I wanted to attend any events or meetings for lesbians. When I first arrived in Tokyo, I did not know much about where to start looking for possible informants; the only place I knew of beforehand was Ni-Chōme, the second area in the Shinjuku district in Tokyo. I knew that the area was famous for its clusters of lesbian and gay bars from the semester I spent in Chiba, and Reina was happy to go with me to my first *Panache*-event²⁰ on July 16th. My intention for attending these events was mainly to recruit informants for my dissertation. As this was my first women's only-event, everything was very new and a bit intimidating to me, so I did not have the courage to ask anyone if they were willing to participate. I continued to attend these events on a weekly basis, and I also attended offline-meetings, or *off-kai*'s.

2.2.2 The informants

I received in total eight interviews; six in person and two over the internet. Because my main focus was the younger generations and these lesbians experience their situation, most of my informants were in the same age-group; the youngest was 23 years old and the oldest 34 years old. I chose to focus on the younger women because there is, to some degree, extensive research done on the older generation and how the lesbian movement of the 70s went about.²¹ This makes it difficult to foretell if and how their situation will change later in life.

²⁰ Panache is one of three popular women-only events held the last Saturday of every month. See chapter 4, and visit the Panache website <http://grand-panache.fem.jp/index.shtml> for more information.

²¹ See my explanation of historical events in chapter 3.

Three of my informants has been living abroad; one in the United States for one year, one was currently living abroad and the last had been living abroad for over ten years. This means that their mindset might have been influenced by Western culture and ideals, especially the one who had been living abroad for over ten years. This might have contributed to a more individualistic way of thinking, in addition to their views and meanings being colored by Western liberal thought.

Before I left for Japan to begin my fieldwork, a male friend of mine told me that he had a lesbian Japanese friend currently living in London. This was Yuna. He gave me her contact details, and I sent her an e-mail describing myself and my research, as well as asking her to participate in my research. She happily said yes, but that she had to do it over e-mail because she would not return to Japan that summer. I agreed, and I sent her my interview-questions which she replied to about a month later. I would have preferred interviewing her in person, but at that time I did not know how many informants I could get so I accepted her request to answer by e-mail. At that time I did not know what to expect when I arrived in Tokyo; sexuality is considered to be a sensitive subject in Japan, and I could not know for sure that anyone would actually talk to me about it. I pictured myself having difficulty finding informants, so I was happy to receive her information. My first successful personal recruitment took place when I attended a meeting for lesbian, bisexual or transsexual girls called Peer Friends on July 30th.²² Here I met the organizers, and one of them, Megumi, agreed to become my informant. After successfully recruiting an informant, my confidence received a great boost, and all of a sudden the informants seemed to be flowing in. After attending an event called Goldfinger²³ in August, Reina introduced me to a friend she had mostly talked to online. This was Mitsuko. She currently lives abroad but was back in Tokyo for the summer. She agreed to become my informant, and we decided that we would hold a group interview with her and Reina. To my surprise, when she showed up for the interview she had brought along two friends of hers, Kaori and Yukari. She had told them about my research, and they were eager to help me. In late September, Sei agreed to be interviewed as well. I had met her at the same Goldfinger-event I met Mitsuko, but we only started talking about her becoming my informant later the next month. My very last informant was Eri. She was the other woman I came into contact with by using the Out Japan website. She was from

²² See my description of this group in chapter 4, and visit the Peer Friends website <http://www.peerfriends.jp/> for more information.

²³ See my description of this event in chapter 4, and visit the Goldfinger website <http://www.goldfingerparty.com/top.html> for more information.

a small city in Kyushu, south of Japan. We got along very well over the internet and she also had other friends she wanted to visit, so she decided to go to Tokyo for a short while so that we could get to know each other. This was during my last days in Tokyo however, so she became my informant after I returned home to Norway. We established e-mail contact as well as using Skype. Looking back I realize that Reina and Eri came to be my most important informants. Eri, because she was the last person I interviewed (although not in person) and because I had gained a lot of experience and confidence from my other interviews to know how to ask exactly the right questions; and Reina because she took me under her wing and introduced me to other people – some of whom in turn became my informants. Informants who provide especially important information or who the researcher establishes a personal connection to is called key-informants.²⁴ Today, I consider both Eri and Reina to be my key-informants.

2.2.3 Informed consent and convenience sampling

In every research project the researcher needs the participant's informed consent. Participation is strictly voluntarily, and the researcher should give complete and satisfactory information about the project to the informant.²⁵ All of my informants signed this informed consent²⁶ before the interview started, or in when answering questions via e-mail they signed it electronically. When presenting this informed consent, I told them in detail about my project, informed them about their rights and assured them their full anonymity. I also asked them if I could use a tape-recorder, and told them that they could say no if they did not want to conduct the interview while being recorded. None of my informants objected to the tape-recorder being used.

Qualitative research and studies are based on strategic selections. This means that we choose out informants who possess qualities or traits strategically relevant for our research question and theoretical perspectives.²⁷ Because qualitative studies often concern personal and intimate relations, it can be very difficult to find someone willing to share their information with me. It was therefore important for me to stay in Tokyo for a longer period of time, three months, so that I could gain the trust of my informants. My selection of informants was based

²⁴ Thagaard, *Systematikk og Innlevelse*, 69.

²⁵ Gustavsson, *Kulturvitenskap i felt*, 233.

²⁶ See attachment 4.

²⁷ Thagaard, *Systematikk og Innlevelse*, 55.

on convenience samples, which means that I was dependant on the availability of informants, as well as their willingness to participate. My method for selecting informants available to me is called the snowball-method.²⁸ This method is fairly common, and means that one first establishes contact with someone who inhabit the traits or qualifications (in my case, from Japan and being a lesbian or a bisexual woman) relevant for one's research. One later asks the persons for names of other people who inhabit the same qualifications. For me Reina became the person whom I first established contact with. She later introduced me to her friends, and to her friends' friends. One problem with this approach is that one risks that the selection of informants comes from the same network or environment. For me, this was not an issue, as this was exactly what I needed for my research. I needed fairly young people (Japanese lesbians) in the same network (the lesbian community). Moreover, the Japanese lesbian community is indeed fairly small, but it also houses a vast number of different people. Even though I found my informants using the snowball-method, it turned out that many of them did not know each other, and had barely spoken to each other before I interviewed them.²⁹

2.2.4 The interview-guide and executing the interviews

My interview-questions were formed by a relatively structured scheme.³⁰ This means that the questions had been thought out beforehand, and the order of the questions are relatively fixed. My interview-guide³¹ was formed in such a way that I had certain themes, such as 'general information', 'sexuality' or 'society', and different sub-questions under each theme. Because I had fixed questions, it was easier to compare and code the gathered information I received from the informants. During an interview there is a lot to remember, and having a relatively structured guide proved to be very helpful to me. This was also because I had to conduct three of the interviews in Japanese, so I was very nervous. My Japanese is intermediate at best, and there was times when I experienced somewhat of a language-barrier between myself and my informant(s). I will return to this language-barrier challenge later in this chapter. Two interviews were conducted half in English and half in Japanese, and the other three in English. I felt the need to customize my interview-guide a few times, as my informants discussed

²⁸ Thagaard, *Systematikk og Innlevelse*, 56.

²⁹ It is relatively common for Japanese lesbians to establish contact with other people online, but that does not necessarily mean that they have met each other in Person. Reina and Mitsuko had only talked on the Internet, and they met for the first time at the Goldfinger-event that we attended together.

³⁰ Thagaard, *Systematikk og innlevelse*, 89.

³¹ See attachment 5.

topics that I initially did not have any knowledge about beforehand only to realize its importance. One of these topics concerned being *tachi* (butch) or *neko* (femme).³²

The interview-guide's main focus is how the informants identify themselves and their sexuality within the norms of Japanese society, if they had told anyone about their sexuality, how they feel they are perceived by society, marriage and how they think the future for lesbians will be. All of my personal interviews were conducted in public; four of them in Ni-Chōme area and two in other coffee shops. Due to the sensitive nature of the interview-topic, I could not help but wonder if perhaps my informants' answers were being influenced by being out in public space. I wondered if they would be afraid of people listening in on our conversation, which may again limit their answers. This was not the case however, as all my informants seemed eager in telling me about themselves and their experiences. If they did have any hesitations, they did a very good job hiding it from me. They all answered every one of my questions, often very detailed and in a passionate tone of voice.

Before starting the interviews, I told them a little about myself and my research and asked to use a tape-recorder. With a sensitive theme such as sexuality, some of them were a little anxious about opening themselves up to me and questioned me about what I was going to do with the information. I explained that the information would be known only to myself and my supervisor, and that their names would be substituted with pseudonyms to avoid recognition. When this became understood, they all happily signed an informed consent. I started the interview slowly by asking neutral questions where the informant did not need to think much to give an answer. This can be advantageous to getting the informant(s) relaxed as well as gaining the informant(s) trust.³³ As the interview progressed I started asking more emotionally charged and intimate questions. As the interviews drew close to the end, I asked them if there was anything they wanted to talk about that did not come up during the interview. This is how I got information about *the tachi/neko* paradigm, as well as the importance of being included in a community. Lastly I turned off the tape-recorder and asked them if there was anything they wanted to say 'off the record'. None of my informants seemed to mind the tape-recorder at all, and were happy having our entire conversation on tape.

³² See my discussion on the *tachi* and *neko* paradigms in chapter 4.

³³ Thagaard, *Systematikk og Innlevelse*, 100.

2.2.5 (Unintentional) observation

I found that I also used participatory observation during my fieldwork. This means that the researcher is present in situations where the informants are located, and systematically observes how they behave.³⁴ The important thing to consider is whether this observation will be visible or hidden. When I first entered into the lesbian community in Tokyo, I planned to receive data through interviews and conversations. As my fieldwork progressed, I started to realize that by attending various women-only events, and various meetings, I was also observing the people there by noticing how they behaved, how they dressed and how they related to each other. The fact is, at first I attended these events primarily to recruit informants for my research. However, I found that by attending these events I learned a lot about the lesbian community, their culture, and the social interaction between the participants. I realize that the dominant opinion concerning observation is that the researcher let's her identity be known. Conducting hidden observation is considered unethical to some degree. However, letting one's identity be known is not always feasible; especially in situations that take place in public areas. The women-only events are practically arenas for dancing, much like any other public club or discotheque. The people attending are therefore not necessarily bound to relate to one another, and when the observation does not lead to establishing contacts there are no specific persons to whom the researcher can reveal her identity to.³⁵ I did not attain any informants by going to the women-only events in Ni-Chōme. The reason I felt I could not ask people to participate at these events was partly because the flow of alcohol was too evident; many of the people who came over to talk to me had often had a few drinks too many. I could not ask them while intoxicated as they could have answered anything at that point, and perhaps regretted it the next day. Although I met Mitsuko and Sei at Goldfinger, I did not ask them to become my informants straight away. Instead, I made close friendships with them, and eventually they agreed to talk to me about my research. Moreover, upon meeting them for the first time I was careful to tell them about my reasons for being in Tokyo as well as informed them about my research.

When attending Peer Friends groups, I immediately approached the staff and asked them if I could sit down and observe the group, and how the participants interacted with each other. I was welcomed to observe, and join them if I wanted to. At first I only watched how the participants got to know each other, but after a while I also participated in some of the

³⁴ Thagaard, *Systematikk og Innlevelse*, 65.

³⁵ Thagaard, *Systematikk og Innlevelse*, 75.

games and conversations they were having. In retrospect, I realize that this method of observation was a bit more problematic than attending events such as Goldfinger or Panache. Although I asked the staff for permission, I did not ask the participants if they minded being observed. Although I talked to most of the participants during the meeting and they all told me that they did not mind me being there, I should have presented myself in front of the whole group, and ask them if I was allowed to stay and watch them. This would have been a better approach, and I realize that I may have intruded on some of the participants. Also, even if I did ask everyone's permission, it is not necessarily true that they would be comfortable by my presence; they might not have the courage to say that they did not want to be observed in the first place. This puts the observed parties in a bit of a bind. Although the participants did not seem to mind my presence, I admit that I should have acted differently.

I also attended four *off-kai* meetings during my fieldwork. When attending the first *off-kai*, I did not realize what kind of meeting this actually was supposed to be. I had never heard the term *off-kai* before, and when Mitsuko invited me to come along she just said "you should join me and some other lesbian friends for dinner Tomorrow". I thought the dinner would comprise of people that already knew each other, but it turned out to be an offline-meeting for the first time. Except for Mitsuko and one other woman, the women attending did not know each other from real life, they had just been chatting on the Internet for a while. The *off-kai* members that day consisted of me, my partner Celina, Mitsuko, and three other women. When we first met them, I could see their surprise when two foreigners showed up. I was also somewhat bewildered because I thought it was supposed to be dinner between friends. During the presentation-round, I presented myself in Japanese to the best of my ability, and Mitsuko helped me explain why I was there and what my research was about. We ended up having a lovely evening, and one of the women actually said that she wanted to become my informant. I invited her to join us at a Panache-event the next day, and she managed to find a girlfriend while attending that event. This resulted in her disappearing from the lesbian community, because she no longer needed to actively seek out other women; she had already found the one she wanted. For me, this meant that I never saw her again, and the interview she said she would give me did not happen.

Two of the other *off-kai*'s were particularly big; one was held in Shinjuku and consisted of about twenty participants, the other in Shibuya where as much as forty people attended. I was adamant in revealing my researcher-identity from the very beginning, and stood up and presented myself and my research in front of everyone. They all seemed thrilled

to meet a person all the way from Norway attending, but it did not result in any new informants. I did however get to talk to a lot of people, and both of these evenings were among the most fun and exciting evenings I had throughout my fieldwork's duration. When attending these *off-kai*'s I was particularly careful to enlighten everyone present of my researcher-identity. In most of the cases it did not result in finding new informants, but it gave me a lot of insight into the lesbian community in Tokyo, and how they get to know other lesbians even though they are relatively invisible in everyday society. I admit that in some situations my observations may be construed as hidden observation, and will point out the ethical problems this entails. However, I feel that I did my very best to reveal who I was and why I was there at the time. When attending large public events such as Goldfinger, it would be impossible for me to reveal to everyone why I was there. It was in a public setting with probably 100-150 women present, in a club setting where it would be impossible for me to let my presence (as a researcher) be known to everyone there.

Because I was participating in so many meetings and events and meeting a large amount of people, I decided to make my own fieldwork-diary.³⁶ After attending an event, meeting, *off-kai* or other activities I was careful to thoroughly write down everything that happened during the event. This helped me remember a lot of details which I later could ask about during interviews.

2.2.6 Document Analysis

Analyzing existing texts or documents are often used as a supplement to interviews and observation.³⁷ After countless efforts of making contact with Korean organizations to no avail, I decided to use document analysis in regards to the lesbian situation in South Korea. Because there exist only a limited amount of available articles and documents available in English, I had a hard time finding relevant information mainly concerning lesbians in South Korea. The articles I found primarily only focused on male homosexuals or the feminist and lesbian movements of the 1990s. I wanted to focus on the present state of lesbians in Japan and South Korea today, but it was challenging considering the lack of available information. I therefore had to incorporate both male and female homosexuals when writing my chapter on South Korea. The reason I chose to do so was because I simply could not find a satisfactory amount

³⁶ Line Esborg, "Feltarbejdet mange samtaleformer", in Gustavsson, *Kulturvitenskap i felt*, 95-96.

³⁷ Thagaard, *Systematikk og Innlevelse*, 13.

of existing data focusing solely on lesbians. The fact that I wanted to examine their current situation, and not their situation thirty years ago, also helped me reach this decision. In Korea, both male and female homosexuality is a much more sensitive issue than in Japan, and I therefore chose to incorporate some of the male homosexuals' experiences. I imagine that what male homosexuals experience in South Korea can also ascribe to what the female homosexuals in South Korea experience today. Even though there are differences such as gender equality and gender attributes in South Korea too, homosexuals as a minority face largely the same challenges; they are seen as abnormal, whether they are male or female.

2.2.7 Analyzing and processing the data

As described in the interview-guide section, I chose to do a theme-based approach, which means that I studied the information given to me from every informant about each individual theme. Theme-based approach means dividing the text into different categories, where the categories represent central themes in the research survey.³⁸ One of the concerns when using the theme-based approach is that it might not maintain a holistic perspective because the statements are being detached from its original context. In order to maintain the holistic perspective it is important that I made sure that did not use the informants' statements in any other context than originally stated. Because there is limited prior research done on this subject I chose an inductive approach based on my informants statements. Therefore I have placed great weight on the statements of my informants, but I have also used other articles concerning human rights and lesbian identity. This is especially evident in chapter 6, where I did not have any statements from informants. The only exception was a statement from one of my informants about her Korean friend, living in Japan.

By using interview as method follows the risk that the researcher has complete power to interpret what has been said. This can lead to the informant not recognizing the interpretation of the informant's statements.³⁹ Humans possess a perception of their own identity, who they are and who they want to be. They also have a perception of how their society actually is and how it should be. This means that as a researcher, I need to interpret and understand something that has already been interpreted and understood by my informants. This is called double hermeneutics, which means that the informant describes herself and her

³⁸ Thagaard, *Systematikk og Innlevelse*, chapter 8.

³⁹ Steinar Kvale and Svend Brinkmann, *Det kvalitative forskningsintervju* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 2009).

experiences, and I as the researcher once again interpret this information.⁴⁰ In my dissertation I tried to emphasize important findings and implications that might not be immediately visible, which my informants might not recognize or take for granted. I also run the risk of interpreting their answers incorrectly. As a Norwegian researcher, my culture is different from the Japanese culture in many ways. I may have interpreted the data collected from my informants through Western eyes, or in other words with a different cultural base. As I have spent a semester in Chiba in 2007, I have a bachelor's degree in East Asian studies and my Master's course also requires me to take classes on East Asian culture; I am confident that I possess the cultural knowledge needed about Japan to be able to interpret my findings fairly accurately.

To transcribe means converting speech into text, or to convert an oral form into a written form.⁴¹ When transcribing the interviews I first wrote down word for word what was being said. Sounds such as laughter or were transcribed as "LOL" [laugh out loud] or "haha" for milder laughs. If the informant was thinking or hesitating, I noted that as "Hm" or "...". I did not transcribe my interviews before after returning to Norway. If I had transcribed the interviews right after they were conducted I would have been able to listen to my own questions and behavior, and might have been better prepared for the next. Transcribing the interviews took longer than I expected. This was due to the fact that the interviews were carried out in public places, with some degree of background noise added. Also, three of the interviews was in Japanese (one of them in written form through mail), and two others was half conducted in English and in Japanese. Because my Japanese is not nearly as sufficient as I would want it to be, I spent quite some time with dictionaries and grammatical books nearby. In my dissertation, my informant's statements are quoted in apostrophes and in small text. When quoting from secondary sources, I have added italics to make sure the reader knows which statements are from my informants and what is not.

2.2.8 Anonymizing and ethical perspectives

The participating informants are entitled to their privacy being maintained at all times and that the information is being kept confidential. The informants' statements are not to be

⁴⁰ Nils Gilje and Harald Grimen, *Samfunnsvitenskapenes forutsetninger: Innføring i samfunnsvitenskapenes vitenskapsfilosofi* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1993).

⁴¹ Kvale and Brinkmann, *Det kvalitative forskningsintervju*, 118.

recognized.⁴² I anonymized my informants by substituting their names with pseudonyms, not stating their age or place of origin to the extent that the informants can be recognized. Many of the statements have been translated from Japanese into English, and in others their use of English has been modified to the extent that the quoted language is similar, but its original meaning is not lost. The reason for this is to keep the statements from being traced back to the informant. When referring to what other people besides my informants have told me, I have left out their names altogether and only given brief accounts of our conversation to ensure that it cannot be traced back to them.

The researcher is bound to relate to ethical guidelines following every research project.⁴³ My research involved sensitive information about my informants, as well as information that could be considered taboo in their culture. It was therefore imperative that I maintained their privacy in every way. It also meant that I had to work hard to gain my informants trust before they would agree to let themselves be interviewed. They needed to know my motives behind the research project, as well as feel confident that I would not give out their information to anyone besides myself and my supervisor. My experience was that before starting each interview, some of my informants asked me why I wanted their information. I explained to them that it was solely for research purposes, and that the project had been approved by the NSD to ensure their privacy. After introducing myself and my project, none of my informants seemed to mind being interviewed, and talked about sensitive issues as it would be the most natural thing in the world to them. I suspect that my informants were somewhat reassured by the fact that I myself is a lesbian, I am one of them. I was not out to 'get them'. Another reassurance might have been that I am from Norway, half a world away. The dissertation is being published in a place they mostly knew about because of salmon and the Northern lights. The fact that they would be anonymized, too, was helpful in gaining their trust and co-operation.

Unfortunately I realized the ethical problems concerning my observation a little too late. When attending the Peer Friends meeting especially, I should have made sure that every participant knew who I was beforehand. Although none of them seemed to mind when I talked to them later on, I regret my inability to comprehend this on an earlier occasion.

⁴² Bente G. Alver, Tove I. Fjell and Ørjar Øyen, *Research Ethics in Studies of Culture and Social Life*, a part of the series FF communications, bind no. 292 (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 2007).

⁴³ Thagaard, *Systematikk og Innlevelse*.

2.2.9 Challenges:

When attempting to collect data from my informants I was faced with a lot of challenges. First, I did not know where to go or who to contact when I first arrived in Tokyo. Luckily for me, Reina took me under her wing and made sure that I made new friends as well as bringing informants my way. One of the primary challenges was the fact that except for one, my informants could not speak English all that well. I have studied Japanese language for two years before doing this fieldwork, and my comprehensive skills are intermediate at best. To make sure that we did not misunderstand each other, I asked my informants to speak very slowly and make good use of their body language. I did the same when asking questions and follow-up comments. I worked very hard to make sure that no misunderstandings had been made when receiving answers, and at times I had to ask the same question in three different ways in order to ensure the informant understood what I meant. When returning to Norway, the tape-recorder proved to be an invaluable tool for me, because I needed to listen to the interviews again and again to make sure I had captured the right context. Translating the interviews from Japanese into English took longer than first expected, but I was thankful that all of my informants were happy to be recorded. If some of them had objected and I had to conduct an interview in Japanese without the use of my tape-recorder, I am confident that I would have lost a lot of valuable information. However, there are many challenges combined with the use of tape-recordings and transcribing of interviews. Details such as gestures, facial expressions and body language will be lost. Transcribing the interviews also entails compression of the text and the removal of surplus words or pauses. This was a risk I was bound to take, as I could not have got as much information down on paper if I did not have my trusted tape-recorder with me.

One of the biggest challenges I faced was finding informants from South Korea, let alone accessible information about the lesbian populace in general. As previously mentioned, trying to establish contact with South Korean seemed to be a bigger challenge than expected. I was unsuccessful in my attempts to establish contact with the organizations KSCRC and LGAAD as well as finding any informants I could talk to. My main problem here was that I do not speak or read Korean. The fact that all the websites I found were written in Korean did not help my progress at all. With the help of my supervisor who speaks Korean, I sent a

request to a counsel-group called Lsangdam.⁴⁴ I also tried sending an e-mail to Daum⁴⁵, expressing my sincere wish to establish contact. I also tried contacting a group dedicated to the Solidarity for LGBT Human Rights of Korea.⁴⁶ I sent them an e-mail, and also tried calling the number listed on their homepage even though I had no idea what language they would be speaking when they picked up the phone. Regrettably, I failed in my attempts to establish contact both by e-mail and by phone. Another challenge was finding up-to-date academic texts about South Korean lesbians. Many of the articles I have used in my analysis dates back to the early 2000s. This however, proved to be inevitable. With the limited information available in English, I have tried to give the best description of how lesbians live in South Korean society today.

2.3.0 The validity of the collected data

As I conducted my fieldwork in Tokyo, my dissertation may not be accurate in describing the situation for lesbians in all of Japan. I imagine being a lesbian living in the big city-metropolis Tokyo differs from being lesbian in any rural areas of Japan. The woman living in Tokyo, or in other big cities with lesbian spaces such as Osaka or Kyoto, will have vastly more opportunities to seek out other lesbians. This is especially true in Tokyo because it is the city where the important “gay area” Ni-Chōme lies. Rural areas or smaller city-inhabitants may be tempted to move to Tokyo because it is considered to be more gay-friendly. Also, my informants’ age ranged from 23-34, with the majority of my informants still in their twenties. I did this intentionally, because I wanted to focus my attention of how the lesbian youth today perceived their own identities and experiences. This dissertation is therefore less applicable to women in their forty’s and up. Also, I chose to neglect the issue of lesbian mothers. This may seem strange as Japanese society is very centered upon family, marriage and childbirth, but I chose to do so because none of my informants had children, and very few of them expressed the desire to bear children in the future.

⁴⁴ I sent exactly the same request written to LGAAD and KCRC in English. See the Lsangdam website <http://www.lsangdam.org/bbs/counsel.php>.

⁴⁵ I found a movie called “After all, We’re Lesbians” on the Daum website, and I wanted to attempt to make contact with the persons in charge of the website to get more information about it in English. See <http://movie.daum.net/moviedetail/moviedetailMain.do?movieId=45631> for more information.

⁴⁶ See the Solidarity for LGBT Rights in Korea website: <http://www.lgbtpride.or.kr/>

The most obvious fault in my dissertation is the lack of informants from South Korea. In order to fully understand the situation in Korea it would be advantageous to have testimony from Koreans as well. Regardless of my many attempts I could not achieve contact with Koreans, so my dissertation may seem inadequate in this regard. However, considering the fact that there are little prior research in English, the cultural taboo and homosexuality in South Korea as well as the lack of response from the sexual minority-groups I contacted, I tried my best to give a holistic picture of how it is like being lesbian in South Korea with the tools accessible to me.

Chapter 3 – Framework and History

3.1.0 Introduction

To be able to understand the Japanese and South Korean lesbians' situation today, I will apply queer theory as the theoretical framework for my dissertation. When talking about gender and gender theory, it is common to differentiate between biologic gender; that one is born a man or a woman, or to view gender as a social construct. Judith Butler and Michel Foucault believe that gender is socially constructed, which means that one understands and performs one's gender according to our comprehension of our biological gender.⁴⁷ Foucault understands the notion of gender through discourses.⁴⁸ The way in which we perform our gender is a historical process where those who possess power and knowledge have influenced the shaping of the gender discourse, which again is important for how we perceive and perform our gender. Foucault was concerned about how history shapes the way we perceive the social world around us; the subjects is historically constructed though these discourses, shaping it. His discourse theory is a positioning theory, which entails that the subject needs to position itself and relate to others through the dominant discourse. These discourses have shaped the way we see the relations between male and female, and how we perform gender.

Drawing on the ideas of Judith Butler, I will attempt to explain how the notion of how gender, which seems so natural and obvious to many, in fact are socially constructed through everyday actions that rewards heterosexuality.⁴⁹ It will show how Japanese and South Korean society has privileged heterosexuality as well as explain why lesbians in these societies remain invisible, often hidden away from society. Heteronormativity as a dominant sexual discourse has rendered homosexuality largely invisible, not only in the Japanese and South Korean context but in most parts of the world. Through socialization we learn from an early stage what it means to be a man and a woman, as well as the expectations tied to each gender role.⁵⁰ In relation to my dissertation, it is also important to examine how Japanese and South Korean society has dealt with homosexuality through history. This is important not only to show that homosexuality was in fact common in Japanese society until the late nineteenth century, but also to understand how the society's historical background has shaped the

⁴⁷ Annick Prieur, "Frihet til å forme seg selv", *Kontur*, No. 6 (2000), 4.

⁴⁸ Kari N. Solbække and Helene Aarseth, "Samfunnsvitenskapens forståelser av kjønn" in Jørgen Lorentzen and Wenche Mühleisen (ed.), *Kjønnforskning: En grunnbok* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2006), 72-74.

⁴⁹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

⁵⁰ Heidi Eng, «Homo og queerforskning» in Lorentzen and Mühleisen, *Kjønnforskning*, 143-145.

construction of the dominant gender roles and stressed the importance of family. History will greatly contribute to my explanation of my empirical findings later in my dissertation.

3.1.1 *Queer Theory*

Queer theory originated in the 1990s, and seeks to problematize heteronormativity. It seeks to destabilize heteronormative discourses and reveal how one is placed into a certain identity category within a cultural context. Queer theory argues that identities are not fixed and do not necessarily determine who we are as a person, but we can challenge these notions of fixed identities in a number of ways. Butler states that gender does not exist, but “proves to be performative – that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. [...] There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results.”⁵¹ Thus gender, according to Butler, is completely socially constructed, and therefore open to change and transformation; we perform our identity, we perform our subjectivity, and we perform our gender. She also argues that one cannot have the concept heterosexual without having the concept homosexual as well; they are mutually dependent on each other. The idea of what is natural and superior (heterosexuality) and what is unnatural or derivative (homosexuality) is a false impression because one cannot have the one concept without the other.

3.2.0 **Early modern traditions**

Although in this dissertation my focus lies upon lesbians and lesbian culture, there is a very limited supply of available information (at least in English) concerning female same-sex practices East Asia. It no doubt existed, and was being practiced, but female same-sex desire had no specific term equivalent to that of the male sexuality, or *nanshoku*.⁵² Female sexuality was paid very little attention to, and even though female same-sex practices existed in arts and literature, it was usually constructed and consumed *by* and *for* men. Examining homosexual behavior among males in early modern history is useful for understanding how society has constructed the notion of homosexuality, in favor of men. It is also beneficial because it shows how society changed its view and its politics on sexuality. Historically male

⁵¹ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 25.

⁵² Nanshoku consists of the kanji-symbol for 'male' and 'desire', and can be translated into the male eros (desire) or male homosexuality.

homosexuality was very commonly found in East Asia. China has a homosexual tradition dating back to at least the Bronze Age.⁵³ In Korea homosexuality was at times common in courtly society, and the earliest reference to male-male sex in Japan dates back to 985.⁵⁴

3.2.1 Japan

Today Japanese society perceives homosexuality as something strange or unnatural. But during the Tokugawa period (1603-1868) no normative connection was made between gender and sexual preference. Male homosexual behavior was extremely common, and even celebrated in arts and literature. According to Gary Leupp, in urban Tokugawa Japan, homosexual activity seemed to be the norm, and was met with widespread tolerance.⁵⁵ Homosexual activity between men was considered normal and even complimentary to heterosexual relationships, including marriage. Of course, the love of husband and wife was sanctioned and considered natural and proper, but Tokugawa Japan was skeptical and mistrusting when it came to intense romantic relationships. The Confucian intellectuals who dominated this period “condemned love as an irrelevant and possibly disruptive element”.⁵⁶ Loyalty to the family and the familial duties were to be held most important, and accepting the partner chosen by parents was a part of this loyalty. Love, however, was supposed to develop after marriage.

Mark McLelland describes *nanshoku*, or *shudō* (the way of youths) as a code of ethics governing Edo-periods same-sex (male) relationships, “where elite men were able to pursue boys and young men who had not yet undergone their coming of age ceremonies, as well as transgender males of all ages [...] who worked as actors or prostitutes”⁵⁷ *Nanshoku* sexual culture was highly organized around penetration as well as the active/passive polarity. Homosexuality was constructed as involving an active masculine partner having sex with a passive, younger or feminine man.⁵⁸ A possible explanation as to why *nanshoku* prevailed in the Tokugawa era is because sexual activity amongst elite men, mostly monks and samurai,

⁵³ Bret Hinsch, *Passions of the Cut Sleeve: The Male Homosexual Tradition in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

⁵⁴ Leupp, *Male Colors*.

⁵⁵ Leupp, *Male Colors*, 3-4.

⁵⁶ Leupp, *Male Colors*, 195.

⁵⁷ Mark McLelland, *Queer Japan from the Pacific War to the Internet Age* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 16.

⁵⁸ Leupp, *Male Colors*; see also Wim Lunsing, *Beyond Common Sense*, 27; see also Mark McLelland and Katsuhiko Suganuma, “Sexual Minorities and Human Rights in Japan: an Historical Perspective”, *The International Journal of Human Rights*, Vol. 13, No. 2-3 (April-June 2009)

existed long before the Tokugawa era. These earlier traditions might have reflected the absence of women in monasteries and warrior bands, but the Tokugawa tradition rose in an urban environment where women were present, although somewhat underrepresented. This old tradition of elite homosexual relationships may have contributed to the tolerance of homosexuality in common circles too, encouraging male commoners to desire and experience male-male sexual relations while maintaining heterosexual relationships. Leupp explains that although *nanshoku* emerged largely due to a lack of female companionship, at some point in time the culture grew stronger so that it no longer needed the absence of women to flourish.⁵⁹

Although there are records of same-sex acts in Tokugawa culture too, it was not coded into a *dō*, or a ‘way’ of loving. As the word *nanshoku* is made up by the characters for “man” and “desire”, no such word existed for female same-sex desire. The parallel term *joshoku* were made up of the characters “woman” and “desire”, but this did not in fact reflect love between women. Rather, it referred to love relationships between men and women; a man loving a woman.⁶⁰ At the time, no term existed that referred to women’s same sex love. Women’s same-sex love was not regarded as serious as men’s, but that doesn’t necessarily mean that it wasn’t widespread; in the Yoshiwara district of Edo⁶¹ a section was reserved for lesbian prostitution. Lesbian relationships were also fairly common in the Shogun’s living quarters, where no men other than the Shogun himself were allowed to enter, and there were also “rare instances in which they occurred among ‘people who despised liaisons with men’”.⁶²

3.2.2 Korea

There is not an abundant source of information regarding homosexual tradition in Korea, certainly not to the extent of Japanese *nanshoku* tradition. There are records of homosexual behavior in ancient or medieval Korean history, but Seo Dong-Jin refers to them as “representing nothing more than historical footnotes”.⁶³ Compared to Japan, *nanshoku* was much less accepted in Korean society. A possible reason for this was the heavy influence by

⁵⁹ Leupp, *Male Colors*, 198-199.

⁶⁰ McLelland, *Queer Japan from the Pacific War to the Internet Age*, 17-18; see also McLelland and Suganuma, “Sexual Minorities and Human Rights in Japan”, 330.

⁶¹ Edo is the former name of Japan’s capitol city, Tokyo.

⁶² Leupp, *Male Colors*, 189.

⁶³ Dong-Jin Seo, “Mapping the Vicissitudes of Homosexual Identities in South Korea”, *Journal of Homosexuality*, Vol. 40, No. 3-4, 2001), 68.

Confucianism on Korea. Japan's main religion at the time was Buddhism, where the *nanshoku* culture has strong cultural bonds. Korea however, was made into being the most Confucian-influenced kingdom in the world.⁶⁴ Despite this a number of Korean Kings and people in the high court were engaged in homosexual activities; in Korean courtly society eunuchs were employed by the Korean kings, as they were by the Chinese rulers, and these eunuchs probably served as sexual partners. During the Silla dynasty (57 B.C – A.D. 935) the court established an institution of young warriors, the *hwarang*, or flower boys. These aristocratic youths were chosen for their beauty and education, and in addition to soldiering they performed ritual dances and recited prayers for the welfare of the state. It has been suggested that these men served as sexual partners from the time of King Chinhung (r. 450 – 576), when male-male sexuality was commonly found in the Silla court.⁶⁵ There are also historical references pointing to pederastic relationships involving several kings of the Koryō dynasty (918 – 1392). King Kongmin (r. 1352 – 1374) appointed at least five youths as “little-brother attendants” and used them as sexual partners.⁶⁶

Later in Korean history, the term *hwarang* became applied to travelling performers, often in all-male troupes. These performers had built up a reputation for homosexual prostitution. Also, references to “beautiful boys” in plays from the seventeenth century suggests that men in the gentry class retained boys for sexual purposes, and homosexual seems to have been particularly associated with the gentlemen class. Some of these men also kept boy-wives whose status was publicly acknowledged in the village. When these boys reached adulthood, they were expected to enter into a heterosexual marriage. There are no records of homosexuality amongst the lower classes, but in oral Korean folklore there are seemingly many stories about sexual relations between men.⁶⁷ According to Gahyung Youn, homosexuality in the courts was not as accepted as one might think; King Hyekong of the Silla Dynasty received no sympathy for his sexual orientation and was killed by his subordinates. King Kongmin received a reputation of being a pervert. In the Choson dynasty (1392 – 1910), the palace chronicles also reveals an instance of lesbianism. Sejong, the 4th ruler of the Choson dynasty called to a meeting of his cabinet in 1436, discussing the rumors

⁶⁴ Martina Deuchler, *The Confucian Transformation of Korea: A Study of Society and Ideology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

⁶⁵ Leupp, *Male Colors*, 17; see also Douglas Sanders, “Mujigae Korea”, (August 2009), 9.

⁶⁶ Leupp, *Male Colors*, 17; see also Gahyun Youn, “Do Human Rights Exist for Korean Gay men and Lesbians?”, paper presented at the “Stigma, Human Rights, and Sexual Orientation—International Perspective” symposium at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association (104th, Toronto, Canada, August 9-13, 1996), 3.

⁶⁷ Leupp, *Male Colors*, 19.

that his daughter-in-law had been having a relationship with her maidservant. As these rumors had been somewhat confirmed, the ministers advised the king to strip the woman of her noble status, such as to preserve the honor and dignity of the family. As the truth would probably injure the throne's image, it was proclaimed that she had to be expelled from the palace due to faults in character, such as extreme jealousy and lying.⁶⁸

3.3.0 Modern era

Male homosexual relationships seemed to be flourishing in early modern times, but this has changed as history progressed. The emergence of Western moral culture influenced both these countries, and this was a major factor in shaping the new societies. The view on homosexuality shifted from being tolerated to something unnatural and deviant. From here I will shift my main focus back towards women and female-female sexual relations from the modern era and up until today. As Japan entered the modern era, a new lesbian culture started to grow and attempted put on the political agenda. In Korea, there is a large gap in available information, and the earliest reference to any homosexual and lesbian activism or activity I could find only dates back to the 1980s, where Human Rights organizations tried to focus the spotlight on sexual minorities.

3.3.1 Modern Japan

The Meiji-period (1868 – 1911) questioned old feudal traditions and sought to modernize Japan under heavy Western influence. This had a large impact on the earlier well-accepted *nanshoku* tradition. As Japan was heavily influenced by Western sexology discourses, the view on male homosexual practices shifted from being tolerated to the construction of homosexuality as something deviant.⁶⁹ Under this new discourse, attitudes towards homosexuality changed dramatically and were considered to be unnatural. The main reason for this was Japan's incorporation into the world system. In order to gain the respect of the Western nations and reverse the unequal treaties imposed upon Japan, the nation had to absorb Western learning. This learning included homophobia. Leupp also points out that another factor contributing to the decline of the *nanshoku* tradition was not solely the

⁶⁸ Youn, "Do Human Rights Exist for Korean Gays and Lesbians?", 4.

⁶⁹ Chalmers, *Emerging Lesbian Voices from Japan*, 18.

emergence of Western influence, but also the collapse of the feudal structure in pre-modern society. The Tokugawa society insisted that homosexual sexual relationships occur only between an “older brother” and a “younger brother”, which mirrored the feudal lord-retainer bond. With the fall of the feudal order, these values were for the most part either weakened or eradicated.⁷⁰

The Meiji leadership was particularly male-centered, which is evident in the Meiji Civil Code of 1898. The family was established as the basic unit of the Japanese society, with the male head as dominant over the rest of the unit’s members, including his wife.⁷¹ This was a highly patriarchal system called the *ie*-system.⁷² In the 1930s, as the nation geared up for the 15-year war,⁷³ society became increasingly occupied with nationalist spirit, and took an interest in ‘race improvement’. As McLelland and Dasgupta points out, a result of this discourse was “an increased polarity in gender roles resulting in women being cast as mothers whose purpose was to produce workers for the empire, and men being regarded as fighting machines, part of the ‘national body’”.⁷⁴ The female ideal of *ryōsai kenbo* (good wife, wise mother) was being promoted as the ideal for Japanese women. Women were expected to breed healthy babies for the empire, and sexual activity became almost entirely focused around reproduction. According to Sharon Chalmers, women’s sexuality needs to be understood in terms of this desexualized *ryōsai kenbo* term.⁷⁵ Drawing on the very essence of ‘womanhood’, the women’s education at that time consisted of shaping young girls into becoming good wives and wise mothers, making the woman’s purpose in life to care for her child and husband.

In the early 1910’s the female homosexual was discovered, and quickly problematized. As the female education consisted of preparing young girls into becoming good wives and nurturing mothers in the future, women who loved women did not fit into this discourse, and were largely ignored, or rendered invisible by society. In the early twentieth century, double suicides and suicide attempts by female couples drew the media’s and the public’s attention towards female-female sexuality.⁷⁶ During the 1920s, the term *dōseiai*, meaning same-sex love, emerged. This was the first time in Japanese history that female-female relationships

⁷⁰ Leupp, *Male Colors*, 203.

⁷¹ Robert J. Smith, “Making Village Women into ‘Good Wives and Wise Mothers’ in Prewar Japan”, *Journal of Family History*, Vol. 8, No. 70 (1983)

⁷² *Ie* is often translated in English as ‘stem family’ or ‘household’.

⁷³ The 15-year war is also known as the Asia-Pacific war or the (early) World War 2.

⁷⁴ McLelland and Dasgupta, *Genders, Transgenders and Sexuality in Japan*, 36.

⁷⁵ Chalmers, *Emerging Lesbian Voices from Japan*, 20.

⁷⁶ Robertson, “Dying to Tell”.

could be categorized, and it became possible to speak of male and female same-sex love as the same phenomenon.⁷⁷ Despite the Western influence on sexology and government's attempts to internalize the *ryōsai kenbo* ideal, the Taisho period (1912 – 1926), and the following post-war period also saw the birth of a new sexual 'perverse', or 'queer', culture with many magazines featuring homosexual publications.⁷⁸ Perhaps this curiosity was triggered by the strict gender roles women and men were automatically placed in. Although this 'perverse' press' focus was mainly on male homosexual relationships, lesbian articles were also featured. Many of these articles may well be written *by men for men*, as many men liked to fantasize about female same-sex desire. However, some contributions were made to these magazines asking them to focus more on "female homosexuals", claiming that although there had been a lot of research and attention towards the 'male homos' in Japan, but that the women had largely been overlooked or ignored, and therefore urging the magazines to engage more lesbian readers and writers.⁷⁹ Also, this was the time that several prominent Japanese women writers wrote publicly about their relationships with other women. The founding of the Takarazuka Revue in 1913 was also of great significance for women at the time.⁸⁰ In contrast to the more traditional Kabuki-theatre where all the roles are played by male actors, the Takarazuka revue is a theatre-group where all roles are played by women performers. The roles were split into *musumeyaku* (the female gender actors) and *otokoyaku* (the male gender specialists).⁸¹ Kobayashi Ichizō, the founder of Takarazuka, intended the theatre to be an addition to promoting the actions of ideal gender roles in accordance with *ryōsai kenbo* to the masses, but it also brought forth a lesbian subculture within the venue. The opportunity to challenge the strict gender roles which were imposed on them by society arose, and the actors broke with the dominant gender ideology of the state, performing both the male and female gender.⁸² A flourishing lesbian "butch/femme" subculture developed within the venue, which encouraged lesbian relationships. I will return to a more detailed discussion of the Takarazuka venue and this butch/femme culture later in my dissertation.

⁷⁷ McLelland and Suganuma, "Sexual Minorities and Human Rights in Japan", 331.

⁷⁸ McLelland, *Queer Japan from the Pacific War to the Internet Age*, chapter 2; see also McLelland and Suganuma, "Sexual Minorities and Human Rights in Japan", 331-334.

⁷⁹ McLelland, *Queer Japan from the Pacific War to the Internet Age*, 89-90.

⁸⁰ For a thorough discussion on the Takarazuka Revue, see Jennifer Robertson, *Takarazuka: Sexual Politics and Popular Culture in Modern Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

⁸¹ Jennifer Robertson, "Theatrical Resistance, Theatres of Restraint: The Takarazuka Revue and the 'State Theatre' Movement in Japan." *Anthropological Quarterly*, Vol. 64, No. 4 (October 1991).

⁸² Butler, *Gender Trouble*.

By the late 1950s *Ni-Chōme* was well established as an area with a lot of gay bars and clubs. As in the rest of Tokyo, the bars are relatively small, but provided a space for sexual minorities to meet and socialize. Ni-Chōme today features a variety of bars, clubs, various events and other miscellaneous shops that cater to the sexual minorities in Tokyo, and is still an important area for meeting people. Most of the bars in Ni-Chōme are aimed at male clientele, but there are an increasing number of bars aiming towards females. The 1970s saw the dawn of a second feminist wave in Japan seeking to question female sexuality-issues.⁸³ But these discussions took place within the heteronormative discourse, and Japan did not see the birth of a national lesbian and gay movement like the West experienced. The mainstream feminist movement didn't have much interest in the lesbian agenda, which meant that many lesbians did not feel comfortable fighting alongside the mainstream feminists, who did not challenge the hetero-normative discourse within the patriarchal Japanese family system. But despite this, the feminist spaces did create possibilities for experiencing and expressing female same-sex relations and intimacy. Publications such as "*Subarashii Onnatachi*" (Wonderful Women), which was the first feminist-lesbian small scale newsletter, and another feminist newsletter called "*Za Daiku*" (The Dyke) attempted to retrieve a history of lesbians in Japan.⁸⁴

The 1970s also saw the advent of lesbian organizations. Lesbian and gay activism has developed independently in Japan, and it was Japanese lesbians, and not gay men, who were the first to build a community based on politics and change.⁸⁵ Gay men had less motivation for political change since they were not discriminated against *as men*. The founding of the group *Wakakusa no Kai*, the Young Grass Club, in Tokyo in 1971 is often mentioned as the turning point in Japan's lesbian community-building. This group, according to Chalmers, consisted of women who identified themselves either as *tachi* (butch) or *neko* (femme), consistent with the butch/femme culture that developed in the Takarazuka Revue. The members were required to fill in a membership-form which included their personal information, along with a photograph and a description of their 'desired lover'. In this sense, the groups did not just act as a political group, but also as a lesbian dating-group where people could meet each other.⁸⁶ Another lesbian organization founded in the 1980s was *Regumi*.

⁸³ Vera Mackie, *Feminism in Modern Japan: Citizenship, Embodiment and Sexuality* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 159-160.

⁸⁴ Chalmers, *Emerging Lesbian Voices from Japan*, 33-34

⁸⁵ McLelland and Suganuma, "Sexual Minorities and Human Rights in Japan", 330-334.

⁸⁶ The group were at times criticized for mirroring existing gender roles in the Japanese society. See Chalmers, *Emerging Lesbian Voices from Japan*, 33.

The group's name is made up of "Re" for *rezubian*, a translation of the English word for lesbian which gained popularity in this period, and the character "gumi", or group. *Regumi Tsūshin* is a newsletter published since 1985 which includes information about lesbian news, literature and various groups and discussion boards, as well as a telephone-line.⁸⁷ OCCUR, founded in 1986, and chose to take a more proactive stance than its predecessors. OCCUR has been involved in lobbying the Japan Society of Psychology and Neurology to have homosexuality declassified as a mental illness, and to make the definition of homosexuality in Japanese dictionaries rewritten in line with modern understandings of gay men and lesbians as sexual minorities.⁸⁸ One of the most notable events in Japanese gay and lesbian history was the organization of the first Tokyo Lesbian and Gay Parade in August 1994. This event attracted over 1000 participants, and the following year almost doubled its numbers. Also, the Tokyo International Lesbian and Gay Film Festival (TILGFF) was first held in 1992.⁸⁹

In 1992 the writer Kakefuda Hiroko came out publicly as a lesbian through her publication of her book '*Rezubian de aru to iu koto*' (On Being Lesbian).⁹⁰ This had a major impact in forming the Japanese lesbian and feminist debates throughout the decade. In her book, Kakefuda argued that it was difficult, if not impossible to constitute herself as a lesbian in Japan, and that in Japan's patriarchal order, women are denied agency and the means of self-representation, and that the invisibility Japanese lesbian women are experiencing is a systematic cultural disease based on the notion that one should always do what's best for the collective, not for the individual. After the publication of her book, she was called on by the media whenever there was need for a lesbian point of view, but in 1995 she retired from public life, possibly because of the strain of being asked to speak on behalf of all lesbians. In 2003, Otsuji Kanako was elected to the Osaka Prefectural Assembly, and in 2005 she published her autobiography where she came out as a lesbian.⁹¹ This made her the first openly sexual minority politician in Japan, and she campaigned for a number of pro-sexual minority policies. She was not reelected in 2007, but became a Democratic Party candidate in the National House of Councillors in the 2007 elections. Despite positive media coverage both in Japan and overseas, she was not successful in entering national politics.

⁸⁷ McLelland and Suganuma, "Sexual Minorities and Human Rights in Japan", 334.

⁸⁸ McLelland and Suganuma, "Sexual Minorities and Human Rights in Japan", 336.

⁸⁹ For more information, visit <http://tokyo-lgff.org/2011/>

⁹⁰ Chalmers, *Emerging Lesbian Voices from Japan*, chapter 1.

⁹¹ McLelland and Suganuma, "Sexual Minorities and Human Rights in Japan", 337. For more information on Otsuji, see her website: <http://www.otsuji-k.com/english.html>

3.3.2 Modern Korea

In Korea, there exist limited academic information available concerning lesbian issues and very little mention of homosexuality in general. Korean society has denied the existence of homosexuals and lesbians, or simply just ignored them for a long time. The Korean lesbian and gay subculture is said to be relatively new, and it is estimated that it started developing around the mid-80s.⁹² Although such a subculture exists, and I believe it probably has for a long time, it has been hidden from the public eye and remained invisible.

There are two main reasons as to why Korean homosexuals have been ignored for so long. Korea has a long history of Confucian patriarchal tradition, and it is Confucianism that sets society's norms. In the 1960s and 70s, the state sought to promote filial piety as a model of loyalty to the state.⁹³ Simplified, filial piety means showing respect for and taking care of one's parents. This also implies continuing the family name by getting married and having children. Examples of 'unfilial behaviour' is stated by Mencius, where he states that "[...] following the desires of one's ears and eyes, so as to bring his parents to disgrace".⁹⁴ Another example are being too preoccupied by one self as to not pay enough attention to the parents' well-being. In both Korean and in Japan, a homosexual identity conflicts with strong family expectations of marriage and child-rearing, and would bring shame to the parents. Another factor is the strong role of Christianity in Korea; more than 25 percent of South Koreans identify themselves as Protestant or Catholic.⁹⁵ When Christian missionaries entered Korea, they were the first to introduce Western education and health care, and thus Christianity became synonymous with progress and modernity. With it, however, it brought the Christian thought that love should only be between a man and a woman, and that homosexuality and lesbianism is a sin. These two factors, Confucianism's filial piety and Christianity, has been major factors in crippling the progress of homosexual movements and groups in Korea. In addition to this, in the 1990s another homophobic ideology started to take form, stating that AIDS was the plague of homosexuals.⁹⁶

⁹² Seo, "Mapping the Vicissitudes of Homosexual Identities in South Korea", 68. See also Sanders' LGBT timeline in Sanders, "Mujigae Korea", 3.

⁹³ Charlotte Ikels, *Filial Piety: Practice and Discourse in Contemporary East Asia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 143.

⁹⁴ Ikels, *Filial Piety*, 3-4.

⁹⁵ Robert E. Buswell and Timothy S. Lee, ed., *Christianity in Korea* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006). According to the official Korean Government's webpage, 34.5 percent (8,616,438 people) identify as Protestants, and 20.6 percent (5,146,147 people) as Catholics. <http://www.korea.net/AboutKorea/Korean-Life/Religion>

⁹⁶ Khor and Kamano, *Lesbians in East Asia*, 162-163; see also Youngshik Bong, "The Gay Rights Movement in Democratizing Korea", *Korean Studies*, Vol. 32, (2008).

The former military authoritarian leadership had created conditions that were oppressive to all minorities in Korean society, especially sexual minorities. Although there never existed any criminal law against homosexual acts in Korea, it is forbidden for members of the military. The reason behind this is because the military regime enforced a Confucian-based ideology which denied homosexuality because it emphasized gender hierarchy, duty and family over the individual. Homosexuality was regarded as foreign and an un-Korean value.⁹⁷ Also, the military dictatorship in the 70s and 80s was predicated on a militarized masculinity complex; the belief that every normal man has to perform their roles as soldiers and family breadwinners.⁹⁸ Because of the fact that homosexuals could not serve in the military, homosexuality was seen as an abnormality. The end of the military authoritarian regime in 1987 sparked an opening for organization, and the Korean gay right movement emerged in this new political atmosphere created by the beginning of political liberalization.

The gay rights movement in Korea as political activism began in the 1990s. At this time, most Koreans were completely unaware of the existence of gays, who remained hidden, and homosexuality went unmentioned. The first organization created was *Sappho*, a fraternal society of foreign and Korean lesbians, founded by an American woman in 1991. The student organization “*Maum001*”⁹⁹, the gay organization *Ch'in'gusai* (Between Friends) and the lesbian organization *Kkirikkiri* followed around the mid-90s, and sparked the founding of the Korean Homosexuals Human rights Association.¹⁰⁰ The head of *Kkirikkiri* founded the lesbian Bar Lesbos in 1996, a space where people could socialize together. In 1996, for the first time in Korea, three members of *Kkirikkiri* publicly came out as lesbian on national television. This, and the opening of Lesbos, was probably the two greatest impetuses for the growth of the lesbian community.¹⁰¹ The formation of the group “Come Together” at Yonsei University in 1995 was founded by seven gay men. It did not go unnoticed amongst Christian conservatives, and there are reports of Christians trying to destroy these groups, or at least their activities.¹⁰² In 2001, there were more than 30 universities with gay groups. The emergence of gay and lesbian bars from the 1980s contributed to a sense of community or

⁹⁷ Bong, “The Gay Rights Movement in Democratizing South Korea”, 88.

⁹⁸ Seungsook Moon, *Militarized Modernity and Gendered Citizenship in South Korea* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

⁹⁹ This organization was founded at Seoul National University, where “001” is a percentage figure which represents the human rights condition for homosexuals. The group is presently named *Maum003*.

¹⁰⁰ Bong, “The Gay Right Movement in Democratizing South Korea”, 89; see also Seo, “Mapping the Vicissitudes of Homosexual Identities in South Korea”, 71-73.

¹⁰¹ Sanders, “Mujigae Korea”, 19.

¹⁰² Sanders, “Mujigae Korea”, 22; see also Huso Yi, “Life and Death in Queer Korea Part 1: A Queer Exorcism, how Religion and Violence Shadow LGBT Koreans”, *The Gully* (March 7., 2003). Stable URL: http://www.thegully.com/essays/asia/030306_lgbt_korea_huso_yi.html

belonging. Most of the gay and lesbian bars are concentrated on “Homo Hill”, close to “Hooker Hill”, and lesbian bars has grown in numbers ever since the first opened.¹⁰³

Also small lesbian and gay discussion groups appeared on the major Internet servers in Korea. As in the case of Japan, it is the lesbian organizations and groups that are being the most active, and lesbians are making themselves known on the Internet and other places. In both Korea and Japan, there are distinct differences in opportunity for women to make sexual contacts because women are to a great extent desexualized bodies. Motherhood, chastity and virginity are stressed as womanly virtues.¹⁰⁴ Making use of the Internet is therefore useful for finding information about lesbian issues, as well as finding and forming relationships with other like-minded people. In 1997 however, the Youth Protection Act was passed, a law that was aimed at controlling the distribution of harmful media materials and drugs to young people. Under this law, harmful matters included perverted sexual acts such as bestiality, group sex, incest and homosexuality which were considered ‘socially unacceptable’. This meant that anything related to homosexuality were to be hidden or kept away from the youth of South Korea. After widespread protests from various foreign and domestic organizations, the government removed homosexuality from the harmful categories.¹⁰⁵ In 2000, the first public ‘pride’ event in Korea was a two day Queer culture festival, organized by *Kkirikkiri*, *Ch’in’gusai*, various university groups and others. The aim was to make the public more aware of gays and lesbians in Korea by mimicking some of the queer festivals of London, Sydney and in other parts of the world. Of course this Korean “Rainbow” Festival was in very small scale compared to those well-established ones in other parts of the world, but it was a step in the right direction. According to the Korea Queer Culture website the 2011-festival was the 12th to be held.¹⁰⁶

In 2007, there were attempts to include “sexual orientation” in a proposed Anti-Discrimination Law. In the first draft, “sexual orientation” was mentioned along with twenty other categories where discrimination was prohibited. Conservative forces opposed this inclusion rigorously, and the Ministry of Justice dropped the reference to “sexual orientation” in the bill draft. This was again protested against, and a petition was submitted to restore “sexual orientation” to the bill. The attempt was unsuccessful however, and the bill was

¹⁰³ Sanders, “Mujigae Korea”, 17. For more information on Lesbian recourses in Korea, visit <http://www.utopia-asia.com/womkor.htm>

¹⁰⁴ Seo, “Mapping the Vicissitudes of Homosexual Identities in South Korea”, 75.

¹⁰⁵ Sanders, “Mujigae Korea”, 37-40.

¹⁰⁶ Korea Queer Culture Festival: <http://www.kqcf.org/>.

withdrawn from the National Assembly.¹⁰⁷ The following year, the more conservative Lee Myung Bak assumed presidency. During his campaigning he condemned homosexuality, and stated that the only normal union is between that of man and woman. While being opposed to homosexuality, he also stated himself to be a “feminist”.

3.4.0 Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown how homosexuality was a relatively common part of history in East Asia, particularly in Tokugawa Japan. This changed as Western ideology and sexology was introduced, and the construction of homosexuality shifted from being something ‘normal’ to be considered unnatural and ‘abnormal’. Under the heavy influence of Christianity, in Korea it was also regarded as a sin. Heteronormativity consolidated itself firmly due to the importance laid on family and normality. The patriarchal structure of both societies was, and still is, a challenge for sexual minorities, because of the importance of marriage and the continuation of the family-name. Even so, a Japanese feminist wave in the 1970s, and a smaller but equally important wave in Korea in the late 1980s, opened up for the emergence of homosexual and lesbian organizations, fighting for their cause. The emergence of the Internet was the most important factor in obtaining information, and it became easier for people to find other people like themselves and realizing that they were not alone. Even though they are living in a male-centered society, the Japanese and South Korean women are strong, and has championed for their rights for a long time. I am confident that this is not going to stop, and they will be able to enjoy their freedom as sexual minorities in the future. In the next chapters, I will examine how they see themselves, how they live their life and what hopes and dreams they have for the future.

¹⁰⁷ Sanders, “Mujigae Korea”, 44-46.

Chapter 4 – The Japanese Invisibility

4.1.0 Introduction

Invisibility remains one of the biggest issues for lesbians, not only in Japan but in the world in general. In most patriarchal cultures, it is common to render lesbians invisible because they do not conform to the patriarchal sexual stereotypes; women's sexuality exists only for men's sexual pleasure, or for reproductive purposes.¹⁰⁸ In a patriarchal society, lesbians face a double oppression because of their gender and their sexual identity. Japan is in fact very typical in this aspect, and Japanese lesbians face the same challenges as many other women across the world. Although the previous chapter explained how Japanese and Korean lesbians have been fighting for their rights as well as working towards being acknowledged as women who love women, it seems little progress has been made in terms of increasing their visibility outside of the lesbian community. It is difficult being openly lesbian in Japan, and the overwhelming majority of the people I talked to had not told their parents about their sexual orientation. Instead, they seek out contact with other lesbians in secret, and even when they form relationships they rarely come out to their parents or co-workers. In contrast to South Korea, Japan is not considered a Christian country; it is estimated that only about one per cent of the population is Christian. Therefore it is not a 'sin' or a crime against nature to practice homosexuality. However, the strong paternal tradition embedded in Japan makes it difficult, even undesirable, to be left standing outside of society's norms. According to Sharon Chalmers:

“There is one over-arching assumption that still remains firmly in place and overwhelmingly unchallenged in academic and popular discourse. That is, that all Japanese are heterosexual, or, at the very least require a heterosexual guise in which to operate as full members [...] of Japanese society.”¹⁰⁹

She explains that all Japanese are to be heterosexual by default, so as to be able to participate fully in and to Japanese society. This may not be linked to homophobia, at least not directly.

¹⁰⁸ See for example this article on lesbian invisibility in Georgia: Nino Kharchilava and Nino Javakhishvili, “Representation of ‘Lost Orientation,’ or, Lesbianism in Georgian Print Media”, *Anthropology of East Europe Review*, Vol. 28 no. 1 (Spring 2010).

¹⁰⁹ Sharon Chalmers, quoted in Heather Humphreys, “How Do the Depictions of Japanese Lesbian Life in the Short Stories of ‘Peony Snowflakes of Love’ and ‘A Strange Tale from Down By the River’ Correspond With Accounts of Lived Experience?”, *Début: The Undergraduate Journal of Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2010), 20.

As Wim Lunsing points out, Japan's homophobia is mostly implicit in nature.¹¹⁰ That is, rather than being aimed at homosexuality *per se*, it is aimed at anything that is not common-discourse. If we think about the fact that gender is viewed as performance, it should be easy for lesbians and others to act out their role without problems. This is not the case however, as homophobia and heterosexism still is a very real obstacle in many societies today. Adrienne Rich explains how heterosexuality was rewarded and maintained, while lesbians were punished or discriminated against. She describes the enforcement of heterosexuality for women as a means of assuring male right of physical, economical and emotional access. She criticizes the assumption that 'most women are innately heterosexual' and notes that this assumption still exists because:

*"lesbian existence has been written out of history or catalogued under disease; partly because it has been treated as exceptional rather than intrinsic; partly because to acknowledge that for women heterosexuality may not be a "preference" at all but something that has had to be imposed, managed, organized, propagandized, and maintained by force, is an immense step to take if you consider yourself freely and "innately" heterosexual. Yet the failure to examine heterosexuality as an institution is like failing to admit that the economic system called capitalism or the caste system of racism is maintained by a variety of forces, including both physical violence and false consciousness."*¹¹¹

Although this article was written in 1980, Rich's arguments are still valid today. In the contemporary, modern nation of Japan, the heterosexual dogma continues to be very real:

"It is so hard for every kind of minority in Japan to live openly about their differences, because Japanese people do not like to be associated by a not-normal person, I think. But as long as you hide it, there is no problem." - Yuna

This compulsory heterosexuality was indeed an issue for all my informants, as it is challenging for them to be able to trust other people with who they really are, as well as making it difficult for them to meet potential partners. Yukari explained:

"It is difficult being lesbian. People just ignore us. And because you can't see other people being or looking like lesbians, you can't tell. So meeting others is difficult. I think it's because people are ashamed."

In this chapter I intend to explore some of the reasons that contribute to the invisibility of Japanese lesbians.

¹¹⁰ Wim Lunsing in McLelland and Dasgupta, *Genders, Transgenders and Sexuality in Japan*, 83.

¹¹¹ Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence". *Signs*, Vol. 5, No. 4, Women: Sex and Sexuality (Summer, 1980), 648.

4.2.0 *Jōshiki* – common sense

One of the factors contributing to the invisibility issue is that it is considered to be something outside of what is normal in Japan. Society is based on certain norms, giving guidelines as to what is normal behavior for a woman, so we perform our gender in order to conform to these given norms. This can be called the notion of common sense; using your brain and doing what you think is sensible. As Butler's view on gender performativity, this is culturally constructed and liable to change, and what may be considered common sense in one cultural context may not in another.¹¹² The English term 'common sense' can be translated into the Japanese word *jōshiki*, which means having good sense, and the word *jōshikika* means being a sensible person.¹¹³

Modern Japan can be described as a heterosexist society. This means that heterosexuality and everything which it implies is the norm, and anything challenging this norm is seen as going against *jōshiki*, or what is normal. Doing what is normal and what is 'natural' (*shizen*) is inextricably linked; for example, in Japanese society, it is considered natural to get married and have children. Being heterosexual is normal, being homosexual is not. Many of my informants felt pressured by their family to get married some day, thereby doing what a 'normal' Japanese woman would do. This was problematic in the sense that what people expected of them did not coincide with their own wishes for the future. In addition to these expectations, they also fear being ignored by their friends or acquaintances, making it difficult for them to come out even to close friends. When Eri told one of her friends, she was met with skepticism:

"I told one of my friends at work that I liked girls. And she replied 'Oh, is that so? That's impossible for me.' When I came out to her, I think she thought that that I liked her, so she said that because she was not lesbian it is impossible for her. Actually I did not have any interest in her at all, but I thought I should tell her because we were getting to be very good friends at work. I really thought it would be okay, but in the end she ended up running away from me."

Eri was feeling hurt by the rejection from the person she thought was her friend, but later she realized that she did not need to be friends with someone who could not accept her for who she was as a person. Foucault's *paradox of subjectivation* is interesting in this respect; the very processes and conditions that secure a subject's subordination are also the means by which she becomes a self-conscious identity and agent.¹¹⁴ By being forced into a heterosexual

¹¹² Lunsing, *Beyond Common Sense*, 2-3.

¹¹³ Jonathan Bunt and Gillian Hall, *Oxford Beginner's Japanese Dictionary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000)

¹¹⁴ Saba Mahmood, "The Subject of Freedom". *Politics of Piety*, Princeton University Press (2004), 17.

guise lesbians can become aware of their own identity as lesbians, or at least as a sexual minority, and may try to stand up for themselves against society's norms. This however, requires an individualistic way of thinking, which is not commonly found in Japan. Instead, great importance is placed upon group collectivity, which in turn has forced individualism to be suppressed.¹¹⁵ In Japan, the women are idealized as mothers, comforters and helpers within the family context. Women are supposed to be good housewives, take care of their husband and children and eventually take care of their elderly parents and parents-in-law. If one thinks outside of these norms and do otherwise or think about one's subjectivity, this brings forth both social and self-criticism that is difficult to respond to.¹¹⁶ This is slowly changing as the new generation are increasingly becoming more influenced by Western culture and by the increased information brought forth by the Internet; but as women loving women, lesbians are continuing to challenge what is normal, and therefore natural, in Japanese society.

4.2.1 Japanese Womanhood

*"[...] the general portrayal of a Japanese woman's life course is portrayed 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."*¹¹⁷

This image of a Japanese woman's life is not an uncommon one. The Japanese female sexuality is inextricably linked to Japanese femininity, motherhood and heterosexual reproduction within a homogenous notion of the Japanese family. Marriage and child-rearing largely define what it means to be a woman, which came about through to the glorification and romanticisation of the ideal of motherhood and the Japanese housewife.¹¹⁸ In Japan, one becomes *ichininmae no shakaijin* (a fully adult social being) through marriage, which suggests that one is not an adult before one is faced with the responsibilities that comes with

¹¹⁵ New generations in Japan are increasingly becoming aware of their subjectivity; rejecting the traditional collectivist virtue. But collectivism has been a primary factor in shaping Japan into the society it is today, and is still of significant importance in Japanese culture. See Kuniko Miyanaga, *The Creative Edge: Emerging Individualism in Japan* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1991)

¹¹⁶ Chalmers, *Emerging Lesbian Voices from Japan*, 64.

¹¹⁷ Chalmers, *Emerging Lesbian Voices from Japan*, 80.

¹¹⁸ Chalmers, *Emerging lesbian Voices from Japan*, 44.

getting married.¹¹⁹ This further contributes to the silencing of lesbians, as well as increases lesbian invisibility.

Butler views gender and sexuality as not something that is given, but which is constantly being acted out, performed and recreated. This means that we have been taught how to perform gender and gender-roles. This teaching is applied to us from early childhood. So what does it mean to be a ‘Japanese woman’? In Japan, the Meiji Civil Code from 1898 established the *ie*-system,¹²⁰ where the family became the basic unit of society with the male head as dominant over its other members, including his wife. The ideal Japanese woman was expected to breed healthy babies for the empire, and the slogan *ryōsai kenbo* was being promoted. The women’s education at that time consisted of shaping young girls into becoming good wives and wise mothers, making the woman’s purpose in life to care for her child and husband.¹²¹ Although the traditional *ie*-system has been somewhat abolished and the ideal of *ryōsai kenbo* may be an old one, it is still evident in Japanese culture even today. Even though more and more women work outside the home, the very construction of Japanese femininity, and what being a woman entails, is inextricably linked with the traditional ideal of *ryōsai kenbo*. For both men and women, marriage is considered to be common sense; or what is normal.

4.2.2 Identities

The Japanese identity, or the Japanese self, is contextual, and continually defined in social interactions with other people. It is common to make a distinction between *tatemae* (the presented stance) and *honne* (inner feelings). In short, *tatemae* is what you show other people, and *honne* is what you keep hidden from others. The Japanese operate between shifting between what Jane Bachnik calls “two faces”, depending on the situation.¹²² Japanese are taught this ability to switch between different situations from an early age and learn to be able

¹¹⁹ I will elaborate further on becoming *ichininmae no shakaijin* through marriage in the following chapter, where I examine how the importance of familial relations impacts the lives of Japanese lesbians. See McLelland and Dasgupta, *Genders, Transgenders and Sexuality in Japan*, 172-173.

¹²⁰ *Ie* is most commonly translated into English as “stem family” or “household”.

¹²¹ Smith, “Making Village Women into ‘Good Wives and Wise Mothers’ in Prewar Japan”.

¹²² Jane M. Bachnik, “The Two ‘Faces’ of Self and Society in Japan”, *Ethos*, Vol 20, No. 1 (March 1992)

to distinguish situations in which each type of behavior is appropriate. This is an ability called *kejime*, which is thought to be essential to the maintenance of Japanese social order.¹²³

In this respect, Wim Lunsing presents three ways Japanese lesbians see and relate to Japanese society, and how they construct their own selves in relation to it.¹²⁴ 1) They may try to adapt as much as possible to society's demands by suppressing their feelings. This is not applicable to any of my informants, as they at some point actively sought out information and/or other lesbians in some way. 2) They may choose to divide their lives into a public part in which other characteristics are expressed. This was the case for all of my informants, especially when dealing with family or co-workers. They had chosen to divide their social life in two; one *tatema*, where they put on a heterosexual guise in relation to other people outside of the *Ni-chōme* area, and the other *honne*, where they could be free to seek out and socialize with other lesbians. 3) They may choose to think that society is wrong and that their own problems are nothing but the result of a society that had ordered things 'the wrong way', and try to apt for change. All of my informants agreed that they thought that the Japanese heterosexist society was wrong, but only a few made an effort to make changes. Megumi told me that being a part of the LGBT community was the best thing that ever happened to her. She sometimes worked as an organizer of the Gay and Lesbian Film Festival which she felt was helping other lesbians to become aware of themselves, as well as encouraging her to be open about her sexuality. Another was passionately involved with helping out at the LGBT Rainbow parade, and was openly wearing t-shirts with rainbow-prints as well as using social media to spread the word about the event. Others were simply satisfied to find other like-minded friends and maybe even meeting a partner at all-female events. Finding a place in the community was imperative for many of my informants.

When I asked my informants how they identified themselves, all of them except for one identified as bisexual. This is very interesting, because when I asked them how they pictured their life in the future, few of them could picture themselves with a man in the future. Furthermore, the majority of the women I talked to at bars, events or sexual minority gatherings also identified themselves as bisexual. Eri knew for a fact that she was a lesbian at heart, but still chose to tell others that she was bisexual. She explained why this was more comfortable doing this:

¹²³ Lunsing, *Beyond Common Sense*, 17; see also Bachnik, "The Two 'Faces' of Self and Society in Japan", 7.

¹²⁴ Lunsing, *Beyond Common Sense*, 14

“In Japan, people tend to think about lesbians as something unpleasant [*kimochi warui*]. But if you say that you are bisexual it seems okay, because people will immediately think that there is also a potential for liking men. I think Japanese people are bad at accepting things that are different from themselves. So if you tell a friend that you also like men, they think ‘oh, she is not completely different from me, we both like men so we do have something in common’, and they seem fine with that. Of course, I don’t have any interest in men at all, so I feel bad for lying. If I told them the truth, they would say ‘Is that so? Huh.’ And then the next thing I know they will ignore me.”

Japanese people are often inclined to run away if they can’t find a common value of which to relate to. Being bisexual made people think that since she likes both girls and men, they had something in common. In addition, also liking men meant that there is a possibility that she would grow out of her fascination with women and get married and settle down some day. I do not doubt that there are a vast number of truly bisexual woman in Japan, as there are in every other country in the world, but in my opinion many of the girls I talked to may have had the same motivation as Eri did for stating that they were bisexual. When talking about their future most of them hoped they could spend their lives with another woman, not as married to a man with children. Coming out as bisexual is safer than risking alienation from others.

4.2.3 *Tachi or neko*

Another interesting factor in ways of self-identification is the paradigm of *tachi* (butch) and *neko* (femme) roles. These performed, heterosexualised roles define the *tachi* as the dominant, aggressive and masculine body, and the *neko* as a passive and feminine body.¹²⁵ Interestingly, this was considered to be a very important piece of information to know about others in the community. When I first entered the lesbian community in Tokyo, probably one of the most common questions I received was “Are you *tachi* or *neko*?”. For Japanese lesbians it is a way of identifying themselves either as butch or femme, but it is also an important piece of information to know about potential partners. It not only applies to how you look or how you behave or how you dress, it is also an indicator of how you behave in the bedroom. As *tachi*, you are the dominant person in bed, or the giver. I was explained that a lot of women didn’t like to be touched, so in other words, the *tachi* does all the touching. As *neko*, you are the passive partner, or the receiver. A relatively new term, *riba* (reversible), means that you like both giving and receiving. This was considered to be the most prevalent amongst women, but there were also woman who solely belonged to the *tachi* or *neko* paradigm:

¹²⁵ Chalmers, *Emerging Lesbian Voices from Japan*, 27-29.

“Some lesbians does not like to be touched, and the other way around. If you are *tachi* and together with a girlfriend who is *neko*, you might feel bad if you make her [the *neko*] touch you, because it might make her uncomfortable.” -Mitsuko

There are also several sub-categories within the *tachi-neko-riba* paradigms, such as *femme-riba*, a woman who is feminine, but reversible and likes other feminine women¹²⁶; *nonke* (heterosexual) and so forth. Megumi explained why this is so important for people:

“It is some kind of culture in Tokyo. It just means that there is some places that you can go to try to find your partner, or people you like [...] And they can make a list and they can say ‘I am... name, and *tachi*, or *neko*, and feminine or boyish [...] and there is also some size involved, skinny or not skinny, smoking or not smoking...’ Yes, that kind of thing. I don’t know why that is, and I don’t really like it, but people listens to that. And they make a list. After they make the list of themselves, also list the things they want. You know, ‘I am looking for a partner who is *tachi*, *neko*, or either way, feminine or boyish...’. It is a very weird culture I think. But it is important. Everybody asks.”

I got to experience firsthand what she meant when I attended an *off-kai*, which is a group of people who have met online get together for drinks to get to know each other in person. This was a particularly large-scale *off-kai* with over 40 people attending, and the organizer surely wrote a list of people’s names, their age, if they were *tachi*, *neko* or *riba*. I was told later that as a European girl with long hair, I was automatically put as a *femme-riba*, even though the organizer had not asked me in person. Later as I attended many events, other *off-kai*’s and went to woman-only bars I got the question “Are you *tachi* or *neko*?” more often than not. When I explained that in Norway we are not used to people asking us that kind of question, as well as not being comfortable with letting other people know how we act in bed, some seemed to respect my answer but still present me to other people as *femme-riba*. Others replied “Oh that must be wonderful!”, and explained that constantly being categorized as ‘such and such’ was more of a burden than a blessing, even though at the same time claimed it to be important information. Being forced into various categories and at the same time being expected to act your designated role can prove be a hassle. For example, the dominant *tachi* is expected to be the active body when it comes to approaching other women, while the *neko* is supposed to take on a passive role and not initiate contact. A woman I talked to identified herself as *tachi* because it was expected of her due to her short hair and the way she dressed, but she was very shy and had trouble initiating contact with other women. This could prove to be a problem for her because she was the one who was expected to approach other girls. As a result, a woman identifying with one category can at the same time feel utterly misplaced and uncomfortable in it. These performed gendered roles, however heterosexualised they may be, had their advantages as well. The masculine woman is expected to be the aggressive one, and hereby

¹²⁶ According to Sei, there is now an emerging trend of *neko*-couples, or feminine women preferring other feminine women.

has an easier time coming into contact with other lesbians, whether making friends or meeting a partner. The advantage of being a feminine woman makes her able to blend easily into society. But she is also the most threatening, as she signifies the possibility that all women are potential lesbians.¹²⁷

4.2.4 *Gay versus lesbian acceptance*

Although I chose to focus my research solely on lesbians and how they live their life, I found that I simply could not ignore the male homosexual population altogether. When talking to my informants, many of them mentioned that even though they did not have many lesbian friends, they did have a lot of homosexual friends, such as in the case of Kaori or Sei. I also noticed that every one of them mentioned an uneven balance in social acceptance when dealing with lesbians, homosexuals or people with gender identity disorder (GID); male homosexuals is generally more accepted than lesbians. All of my informants agreed that one of the reasons behind this is because homosexuals are often in the media, so people are used to seeing them. But the portrayal of homosexuals in the Japanese media is not necessarily a correct one. According to Megumi, there are certain stereotypical tendencies when portraying homosexuals to the public:

“I think gay males in the media are like funny gay males. They are fashionable and stylish, and everyone has some kind of special skill. So there is not a normal gay male in the media, because the gays on TV or in the movies are characterized as special people or something. So in the case of lesbians it’s quite hard I guess, because talking about lesbians is not funny for many people, but talking about gays is funny.”

Sei had the same impression of how homosexuals were being portrayed:

“There are so many features on television about ‘*onee-kei*’¹²⁸ celebrities. There are so many features in the media about successful gay hairdressers or comedians...there is so much going on. There is a controversy going on that the media likes to talk about them. They kind of like them, but they are also downgrade them at the same time. It’s kind of a parody you know, all that pink and purple. But I think there is a wider interest for *onee-kei* people [than lesbians].”

According to my informants, being portrayed as a successful gay male in the media made them more socially accepted, and by often being featured in the media, people got used to seeing homosexuals thereby increasing their social acceptance even further. However, the tendency to focus on the stereotypical gay male behavior; being funny, wearing a lot of pink and behaving in a feminine way; they simultaneously make it harder for the male

¹²⁷ Chalmers, *Emerging Lesbian Voices from Japan*, 26.

¹²⁸ *Onee-kei* is a derogatory word used for a feminine gay man, or someone who likes to dress feminine.

homosexuals that does not automatically fit into this media-portrayed picture. At the same time, a lesbian woman portrayed on TV would have a harder time being accepted:

“First of all, I think it would be really difficult for queer women to be on TV, and to be featured in a righteous way. Do you know what I mean? It would be very difficult for someone famous to come out and to still be accepted and successful. [...] Because I think there’s a whole lot of social pressure for women to still be dependent on men. There’s a whole culture around this, that women breed offspring. Here I guess Takarazuka has been kind of deviant. Subversive. [...] There is an ideal for women, or at least a dream, that women can be masculine; they could do things that is deviant from this typical fragile, this *kawaii bunka*,¹²⁹ and still be admired. But in terms of real life queer women? It would be difficult [...] I think queer women are kind of jealous of queer men, in terms of social acceptance.” – Sei

It would be difficult for a woman to come out as a lesbian in the media. It would not only be a denial of the heterosexual paradigm, but also a rejection of the cultural-based dependence on men. The media, usually within pornography, constructs lesbianism as anti-reproduction, anti-family and anti-motherhood while at the same time representing pleasure and desire.¹³⁰ It would take a lot of courage, and it would entail the risk of being seen as someone who is abnormal and hereby becoming subject to discrimination and ridicule. According to a study conducted by Suzuki Ayako on the formation of attitudes toward homosexuals and lesbians show that contact with male and female homosexuals through the media increases a friendly feeling toward male homosexuals.¹³¹ It also shows that heterosexual females have a less friendly attitude toward lesbian women than heterosexual males, which may be a result of the frequent exposure of gay homosexuals in Japanese media.

Another reason for this uneven balance in social acceptance is because men in general enjoy a stronger position in Japanese society:

“It’s a man’s world. *Otoko-shakai*. So men do have it easier.” - Yukari

What Yukari meant is that Japanese women have been discriminated against for a long time in Japanese society. Women are still having difficulties in obtaining top-leading positions as well as being largely financial dependent on their husband. Also, the Japanese employment system is heavily influenced by notions of paternalism and is financially discriminated against in the paid workplace.¹³² Women are expected to marry, take time off to tend to their children and maybe return to the paid workforce by working part-time. In this sense, men, homosexual

¹²⁹ *Kawaii bunka* can be translated as cute culture.

¹³⁰ Chalmers, *Emerging Lesbian Voices from Japan*, 44.

¹³¹ Ayako Suzuki, “The Media’s Role in the Formation of Attitudes toward Gay Men and Lesbian Women”, *Compilation of Papers and Seminar Proceedings, Studies of international Urban Society, Urban Culture Research Center in the Graduate School of Literature and Human Sciences, Osaka City University*, (15-17 September 2009), 103-113.

¹³² Chalmers, *Emerging lesbian Voices from Japan*, 83.

or not, have an advantage over lesbian women as they are more likely to achieve a high-paying position in a company and thus relieve themselves of a lot of economic burdens. Lesbians have faced a double oppression in Japan; as lesbians and as women.¹³³ Male homosexuals on the other hand are not being discriminated against *as men*, and thus can enjoy a higher standing in society. Because of this difference in social standing it will be easier for an open male homosexual to be accepted in the media than for a lesbian woman to do the same.

4.3.0 How and where do they meet?

Many of my informants complained that it is difficult for them to meet other lesbians. In Japan, being openly lesbian is in most cases not an option, and being rendered invisible by society makes it difficult for other women to connect with each other outside of the LGBT community. There are, however, ways to make contact.

4.3.1 The Internet

In contrast to the lesbians of the 70s who had a much harder time seeking out information about other lesbians, let alone find their way into the lesbian community, the new generation of lesbians today is fortunate enough to have wide access to information right at their fingertips. Since the emergence of the Internet, curious women can now just log into chat-rooms, search for information or simply use social media as a way of obtaining information about the LGBT community in Japan. Most of my informants met their current or previous partner through the Internet, and there are various channels you can use to get information about LGBT events, such as the Tokyo International Lesbian & Gay Film Festival¹³⁴ and the Rainbow Pride Parade.¹³⁵ There also are various webzines available online; for example Tokyo Wrestling¹³⁶, or Utopia Asia¹³⁷ for foreigner-friendly information.

There are various channels through social media where one can find information and other lesbians as well. One such channel is a social media site called Mixi¹³⁸, where you make

¹³³ Barbara Summerhawk, Cheiron McMahon and Darren McDonald (ed.), *Queer Japan: Personal Stories of Japanese Lesbians, Gays, Transsexuals and Bisexuals* (Norwich: New Victoria Publishers, 1998), 6.

¹³⁴ Tokyo International Lesbian & Gay Film Festival: <http://tokyo-lgff.org/2011>

¹³⁵ Tokyo Rainbow Pride: <http://tokyorainbowpride.jp/>

¹³⁶ Tokyo Wrestling: www.tokyowrestling.com

¹³⁷ Utopia Asia: <http://www.utopia-asia.com/tipsjapn.htm>

¹³⁸ Mixi: www.mixi.jp

your own profile, post pictures and write a few words of information about yourself. Here you can also become members of various groups of LGBT nature, and many of my informants used these Mixi-groups to get to know other lesbians. Another opportunity is by using Facebook which is similar to Mixi in many ways.¹³⁹ Many of my informants were hesitant to use Facebook as a way of meeting other lesbians however, because they feel that Facebook is a more open social media where it is difficult to hide all information, and hereby is easier to become ‘outed’ by family and friends on this site:

“One time I took a picture with my friend and her girlfriend, and I accidentally wrote under the caption ‘My friend and her girlfriend’. When my friend saw this, she became very angry at me for writing that, because she does not want other people to know that she has a girlfriend. I felt bad because even I forgot that she was hiding it from people, and I should know better.” – Eri

Another way of finding people through the Internet is by using an iPhone-application called Spindle. By using this application one could create a profile, and let other Spindle-users know your likes and dislikes, read your status-updates and, if you tag yourself in to a location, let users know where you are located. It also lets the users see who is in the immediate vicinity by using GPS-based satellite technology. It appeared to be one of the most popular ways of finding new acquaintances, however exclusively for iPhone users.¹⁴⁰ According to Kaori, it was also considered to be one of the safest places to make a profile because everyone using Spindle is non-heterosexual. In addition Sei enlightened me about various message boards concerning popular Takarazuka-actresses, and how women could discuss amongst themselves in a way they normally would not be able to:

“You see a lot of hidden desires. You can see them explicitly on the Internet. I don’t know what fans talk about to each other, but you can see on message boards that it’s sexual. You see a lot of hidden desires that people don’t really talk about normally. There is a lot of desire surrounding these women.”

Megumi also told me how she found the Internet to be effective:

“Yeah, the Internet gave me a good impression of the community, but I didn’t meet anybody through the Internet. But I tried to find a community, shops, and bars and what kind of things are going on in *Ni-Chōme*. So the Internet helps me a lot.”

¹³⁹Facebook: www.facebook.com

¹⁴⁰ When I learned about this application it was exclusively for iPhone users. I am not sure of this has changed since my fieldwork-period, as Android-based cell phones are increasing in popularity on the Japanese cell-phone market.

4.3.2 Offline meetings – *off-kai*'s

Often arranged over the Internet, *off-kai*'s provides an opportunity for people to meet in real life. Mixi or other social media-based groups often arrange an *off-kai* where you meet other people in the same groups for drinks or a meal. The scale of these *off-kai*'s can range from just two people up to a hundred people, depending on the organizer. During an *off-kai* introduction-round you tell the other members your name and age, and it is also common to state your category; are you *tachi/neko/riba*, and if you don't immediately enlighten the other members you will surely be asked. When attending bigger *off-kai* groups it is also common to play various party games to lighten the mood. If one connects well with someone, contact details can be exchanged for further meetings in privacy. I attended several of these *off-kai* gatherings, and what struck me was that most of these women did not know any one there. Most of them did not have any sexual minority-friends, and had never been to an *off-kai* before. The majority of women showed up by themselves, hoping to meet other lesbians. The women I talked to told me that they had to dig deep into themselves to find the courage to attend such a revealing event all alone, but in the end they were glad they did. Many of them feared lesbians, dreading that they would not be able to identify with them, but when attending an *off-kai* they got to see women in all shapes and sizes, and they realized that they too were normal people, just like themselves.

4.3.3 Shinjuku Ni-Chōme and women-only events

In Tokyo, the *Ni-Chōme* district in Shinjuku is called the gay district, due to its many gay bars and nightclubs. Here, a lot of bars and nightclubs tend exclusively to the gay public. There are an overwhelming number of bars and clubs dedicated to male-only or mixed clientele, but in recent years popular women-only bars and events have emerged. The biggest and most popular women-only events are Goldfinger, Panache and La Niña. These events occur approximately once a month each, resulting in one of these events being held on a weekly basis, often on a Saturday. Information about these events can be found on the Internet or by flyers laid out in various gay and lesbian bars around *Ni-Chōme*. In my impression these events are similar, but also slightly different from each other; Goldfinger focus mostly on a rave/disco-setting where people come to drink and dance as well as getting to meet other people; La Niña seemed to be more popular with the younger women, where the typical age ranging from about 18 – 30 years. It also seemed to have a more innocent setting than

Goldfinger, which tended to be arranged in dark, smoky locales. Panache too attracted a lot of young people, but also reached out to the more grown clientele with its own “Rose corner” for people over 30 years old. This corner was supposed to have a more lounge-feeling to it, as opposed to the rest of the locale which concentrated on dancing. Another interesting detail regarding Panache was the staff’s dedication to the people attending. They help newcomers to make contact with others as well as making sure everyone has a good time. Early in the evening they also hand out one rose to each woman. This rose can then be given to a person of particular interest. It proved to be a humorous and pleasant way for people to make contact with each other.

As I attended many of these events during my stay in Tokyo, I could recognize some of the women attending. However, the majority of women there were there for the first time, and often all by themselves. When I asked them why they were there alone, each and every one of them replied “I do not have any lesbian or bisexual friends, so I had little choice”. I met one of these girls at Panache. She had come by herself all the way from a prefecture over 600km away. She told me that she had decided to come to Panache after finding information about the event on the Internet beforehand. She did not have any friends who were lesbian so she came all alone. Her plan was to take the 4-hour ride on the *Shinkansen* (the high-speed Bullet-train) to Tokyo, attend the event and stay up all night, and then take the *Shinkansen* back to Kagawa the next morning. She had not told her parents where she was going, it alone that she was going all the way to Tokyo; they thought she was staying the night at a friend’s house. She lived in a small village, so she had a very difficult time in finding any local information about any LGBT groups or events, and came to the conclusion that there simply did not exist any arena for lesbians in her area. She had felt lonely and abnormal for a long time, but after doing some research on the Internet she decided that she had to go to Tokyo to meet others like herself. She also told me that she did not know what to expect when she arrived, as she had never in her life seen or talked to another lesbian woman before, but she knew immediately that she had done the right thing by coming all that way. For the first time in her life she was around other lesbians, seeing how they looked like and socializing with them. She must have had a very pleasant time at the event, because the next weekend I met her again at Goldfinger.

Attending these events are often preferable over going to women-only bars, as most of these bars are very small, with seating space only for a few people. They are also very well hidden, many of them with just a small, unlit sign and a narrow entrance. One day I met a

woman who was the Manager at a very small women's-only bar in *Ni-Chōme*. It had just enough room for the bar, a toilet and six barstools. She told me that even though people in Tokyo people are used to tight spaces, it is a problem to attract new customers into small bars in *Ni-Chōme* because they are afraid to go in. The customers in these small bars are usually regulars, who know the bartenders working there, so it can be intimidating for other people to enter. I was invited to her bar one night, and I could well see her point; With only six barstools cramped into a very small space it is very intimate, which can be intimidating for women new to the LGBT community. Bigger and more well-known bars like Motel are easier to seek out, and are also popular spots to hold *off-kai*'s or other activities.

Ni-Chome is also considered to be somewhat of a safe-spot in Tokyo:

“Here [in Japan] it is really hard. [...] even having a date is sometimes really scary, because you feel that people are really staring at us and then, in some situations, reacting in a negative way. In the case of lesbians you have a lot of invisibility too. Maybe people are trying to ignore us because we are not normal. But it just makes my environment feel really uncomfortable. But if we are here [in *Ni-Chōme*], it is different. Here, I don't really care.” – Megumi

For her, and for most of my informants, the only place she felt she could express herself and be open was in *Ni-Chōme*. When I asked her why, she said that it was because people did not care as much; in *Ni-Chōme* most people were non-heterosexual anyway. If she and her girlfriend would be holding hand walking down *Naka-dōri*¹⁴¹ she would feel perfectly safe. It would be different if they were in other areas such as Shibuya or Ikebukuro, where she felt that people would look at them and judge them. It did not matter if you were labeled as a lesbian or as a gay person when walking around the *Ni-Chōme* area, because there are so many other people that fit into that same category as well. In *Ni-Chōme*, non-heterosexuality can, to some degree, be considered the norm.

4.3.4 Organizations and groups

There are quite a few organizations working for LGBT-rights in Japan, and others are just seeking to spread visibility and information about these issues to society. Some of these groups include bigger organizations such as OCCUR and LOUD, and other smaller groupings such as student university groups which both Megumi and Yukari had been involved in. Despite countless efforts I was not successful in establishing contact with any of the major organizations, but I did however attend a small, newly started organization called Peer

¹⁴¹ Naka-dori is the main street running through the heart of *Ni-Chōme*.

Friends.¹⁴² This group is located in Tokyo, and they have one meeting-group for boys and one for girls. It is run by volunteers, and is an alternative for the people who are either too young to go to Ni-Chōme, or people who want to socialize and get to know each other without alcohol or partying being involved. It is a fairly new group; when I participated it was only their second meeting. Everyone can join, but the staff told me that it targets LGBT-youth in particular, so as they can have somewhere to talk about their problems, finding new friends or just having a place to find information about LGBT-issues.¹⁴³ The meeting I attended was mainly focused on making sure everyone got to talk to each other, and setting up various games for us to play. This helped release some of the tension, as all the participants came by themselves and were naturally pretty nervous. After the meeting we had some tea, and the staff handed out notes where you wrote your contact details so as it could be given to any person of particular interest, much like the ‘rose ceremony’ at Panache. This way, the girls could get in touch with each other, making new friends within the LGBT community. The next planned event was a barbeque at Odaiba beach, where everyone was welcome. I asked the participants of their overall experience they had at Peer Friends, and they could not give enough praise to the staff for their initiative.

4.4.0 Conclusion

As I have pointed out in this chapter, the main challenge for Japanese lesbians is that they are largely ignored by society. They have learned to live with two faces which they are constantly switching between in social circumstances. When relating to family or co-workers, they put on their heterosexual disguise in order to avoid uncomfortable situations:

“We often go out drinking with our company, and there is a lot of questions about if I am in a relationship or if I have a boyfriend. This is a problem. I just answer that I don’t have the time or something like that.” –Reina

Coming out to one’s co-workers was comparable to the fear of coming out to one’s family, and in most cases considered to be a bad idea. This was due to a constant fear of being ridiculed or being rumored about, as well as losing the opportunity of a promotion. When disguising themselves as heterosexuals they inadvertently contribute to strengthening the heterosexist grip held on Japanese society, but they all felt that there was little they could do

¹⁴² Peer Friends: <http://www.peerfriends.jp/>

¹⁴³ The staff at peer friends told me that the new “trend” in the LGBT-groups was the emerging issue of transgender youth, or people with a gender identity disorder (GID).

about it. One individual standing up against a whole society would be too much for the one person to handle by themselves. If they did decide to come out, mostly to carefully selected people, they chose to do so as bisexuals. A consequence of hiding behind their heterosexual guise was also that it was difficult for them to meet other people, as there was no way of knowing who is lesbian or not. I was surprised at how alive the lesbian community was when I arrived in Tokyo, and thought to myself repeatedly that I wish we had the same level of dedication in Norway. I also found a great deal of possibility for meeting other people, especially now that the Internet is so widely used and there is access to information about LGBT events easily available. However, with the lack of openness towards LGBT issues, they are completely dependent on the initiative taken by some women in organizing *off-kai*'s, Ni-Chōme events and volunteer groups like Peer Friends. In addition it is crucial that they have an area such as Ni-Chōme accessible so that they have somewhere they can go to be themselves, and meeting other women.

Lesbians in Japan today are still facing a lot of the same difficulties as lesbians from 30 years ago. But the new generation in Japan seems to be more open to minorities of every kind, including sexual minorities. In my opinion, as more and more information reaches the Japanese people, the 'abnormal' will slowly turn to become 'normal'. How the Japanese youth choose to perform their gender identity is still largely influenced by traditional gender-ideals, which is evident in the *tachi/neko* lesbian culture. As the emergence of more *neko-neko* couples start to emerge however, it may seem likely that these heterosexualised gender roles are being challenged. Two feminine women as a couple contest the feminine/masculine pairing, which could become an eye-opener to Japanese society.

The only way to make lesbians in Japan more visible is to focus our attention on them, and make sure they are portrayed as ordinary human beings, just like everyone else. The Japanese media has already started with male homosexuals, albeit a marginalized stereotypical portrayal. But it has made the population used to seeing them, in contrast to their lesbian sisters.

Chapter 5 – Family and marriage

5.1.0 Introduction

Heterosexuality is naturalized by the performative repetition of normative gender identities.¹⁴⁴ This repetition is clearly visible in Japanese society, as it is built upon a nuclear family structure with the heterosexual married couple as its anchor.¹⁴⁵ This is by no means only a Japanese phenomenon: heterosexual marriage is still considered the norm in many other highly industrialized societies today, such as South Korea and the United States.¹⁴⁶ In Japan, one becomes *ichininmae no shakaijin*, a fully adult social being, through marriage. Until one is married, one is considered to be *hanninmae*, meaning half a couple, and therefore half a person.¹⁴⁷ According to Lunsing, in relation to the *ichinin*-concept, a woman can only become *ichininmae no onna*. This is a fully adult but gendered being. Becoming *ichininmae no onna* suggests that one is not an adult woman before one is faced with the responsibilities that come with getting married.¹⁴⁸ The notion of being half a person corroborates well with Butlers idea of our notion of being ‘human’ and ‘less-than-human’.¹⁴⁹ Such culturally imposed ideas can hinder having a good life, because of the fear of being accepted if her life differs from normality. In the case of Japan too, for both men and women marriage is considered common sense, and what is normal. If one does not marry, one is seen as rejecting the responsibilities of being a good citizen and risks being half a person. This pressure to become *ichininmae no onna* also contributes to the invisibility the women are facing:

“My mother believes that a woman should get married and have children to be *complete*, that’s how she says it.” – Sei

According to Sharon Chalmers, the ability to achieve both social status and monetary gains lies deeply buried in the heterosexual marriage contract between husband and wife, as well as the notion of all Japanese are heterosexual, or at the very least portrays themselves in this

¹⁴⁴ Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory: An introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 85.

¹⁴⁵ For more elaborate information on the Japanese family system, see Susan D. Holloway, *Women and Family in Contemporary Japan* (New York: Cambridge, 2010).

¹⁴⁶ Michael Parenti, “Are Heterosexuals Worthy of Marriage?”, *Contrary Notions* (2007), IR’s Free Thought page. URL: http://www.skeptic.ca/Parenti_Heterosexual_Marriage.htm

¹⁴⁷ Lunsing, *Beyond Common Sense*, 75.

¹⁴⁸ McLelland and Dasgupta, *Genders, Transgenders and Sexuality in Japan*, 172-173; see also Lunsing, *Beyond Common Sense*, 74-75; see also Chalmers, *Emerging Lesbian Voices from Japan*, 2.

¹⁴⁹ Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York, Routledge, 2004).

manner, to function as full members of the Japanese society.¹⁵⁰ This was also the impression many of my informants had been taught:

“It seems that in Japan, if you are married and have children... making a family is like a status. [...] If you are married you get an image of being a fully adult person [*ichininmae no otona*]. It is a prominent feeling, and state that you are living your life well [*jinsei wo umaku yatteiru*].” – Eri

Because homosexual marriage is not supported under Japanese law, all of the phases of a woman’s life lies a predominant acceptance that the role of the woman as a wife or mother is only legitimized through the existence of a heterosexual male spouse. Japanese society encourages this heterosexual society in a number of ways. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the very notion of Japanese femininity, or womanhood, is inextricably linked to the traditional *ryōsai kenbo* ideal. After all, family remains as the basic unit of society even today, and the image of family is very clear:

“In Japan there is a father, 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.”¹⁵¹

Heterosexism is built into the very construction of family through institutionalized norms, such as the sexual division of labor, gendered spheres, motherhood and work practices where a certain type of family is privileged. This norm results in all other forms of family structures, such as the existence of homosexual couples being ignored or considered abnormal.

5.2.0 Why so important?

Marriage is an important part in Japanese society, and the only way for a woman to become *ichininmae no onna*. In recent years however, we have seen that Japan is experiencing a trend of more and more delayed marriages. In 2000, only 43 percent of women aged 25-29 were married, which has fallen from 76 percent in 1980.¹⁵² However, the majority of Japanese do eventually get married, and most women (88 percent) and men (87 percent) do intend and aspire to get married “someday”.¹⁵³ One reason for the delaying of marriage is because women are increasingly working away from the household. Marcus Rebick and Ayumi Takenaka points out that in 1975, 40 percent of working mothers were working at home (self-

¹⁵⁰ See Chalmers, *Emerging Lesbian Voices from Japan*, 2002.

¹⁵¹ Chalmers, *Emerging Lesbian Voices from Japan*, 81.

¹⁵² Marcus Rebick and Ayumi Takenaka, *The Changing Japanese Family* (London: Routledge, 2006), 39.

¹⁵³ Rebick and Takenaka, *The Changing Japanese Family*, 14.

employed or as family workers).¹⁵⁴ In 2000, the rate had dropped to 14 per cent. Reasons for this includes higher wage rate for women, women's educational levels has risen and they are actively seeking better work conditions and more interesting work. This and the dramatic decline in the number of children being born are some of the main incentives for the Japanese government to stress marriage and family in Japanese society.¹⁵⁵ Japan is already seeing the emerging of an aging society, and without an increase in fertility rates elders in Japan will have to face a difficult future. Therefore, young mothers today are encouraged to behave as the mothers in the past, following the ideal of *ryōsai kenbo*.¹⁵⁶ Nobuko Nagase has interviewed 123 Japanese women about their thoughts about marriage. What is interesting is that many were frustrated because of the expectations laid on them by in-laws and spouses to take the traditional role of women to do the housework and rear children.¹⁵⁷ Once they get married, they would have to quit their job, raise children, become a housewife and abandon their urban, independent lives. The family is still the basic unit of society, and motherhood in Japan symbolizes devotion to children and self-sacrifice, the latter being based in the Confucian principle that self-sacrifice is a virtue. Women feel the pressure to become housewives, which in turn leads to delayed marriages, which incidentally makes the birthrate in Japan one of the lowest in the world. However, as mentioned the majority of women still does marry, aspire to, or intend to marry. I also suspect that a small percentage of the decline in marriage-rates, as well as the increase in never-married women, lie within the homosexual community. Interestingly, although facing pressure from society and family, few of my informants wanted to marry in the future:

“I don't want to marry. If I find someone I really like, we can live together [*dōsei suru*].” – Reina

For most of my informants, they were content in living together with their partner. For lesbians, this too can prove to be difficult. It is common for lesbians who wish to live together to portray themselves as single, heterosexual women. As unmarried lesbian women, they face socio-economic discrimination such as low-paid employment without the option of being able to be reliant on a husband as a breadwinner. Housing is expensive, and is often subsidized by a husband's company. Thus, unmarried, 'single' lesbians who want to live together do not have a husband's company or salary to support them. Co-habitation is not as accepted in

¹⁵⁴ Rebick and Takenaka, *The Changing Japanese Family*, 11.

¹⁵⁵ The total fertility rate has dropped from 5.24 in 1920 to 1.57 in 1989. See Roger Goodman (ed.), *Family and Social Policy in Japan: Anthropological Approaches* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

¹⁵⁶ Rebick and Takenaka, *The Changing Japanese Family*, 131.

¹⁵⁷ See Rebick and Takenaka, *The Changing Japanese Family*, chapter 3.

Japan as in for example the United States where almost 10 percent of all (heterosexual) couples are living together.¹⁵⁸ Choosing to live together as a lesbian couple does not necessarily mean that they would tell their family about their relationship however; it seemed to be easier for my informants to just stay unmarried and let their family ask some questions from time to time than taking the step to come out. The fear of disappointing their parents, as well as facing rejection from them, was too great.

5.3.0 Coming out?

Although there are many women living together in Japan today, they often present themselves as single when applying to rent a house or a job, or when talking to their family:

“I know a [lesbian] couple, they live together. [...] I actually think one of them tells her family that she is living with her sister. So her sister knows, but they live far apart in Tokyo.” – Sei

Coming out to one’s parents was seen as unthinkable for many of my informants. They may have told their friends and siblings about their sexual orientation, or that they were having a relationship with another woman. Telling their parents however was either not an option at all, or they dreaded it so much that they kept postponing it indefinitely. Sei thought the reason for this fear can be found in the Confucian ideal of filial piety, or respecting one’s parents:

“I think it correlates with filial piety. Respect towards your parents. I think a lot of people think that if I tell my parents, it would be like I betray them.”

Filial piety means taking care of one’s parents needs, as well as not bringing them to disgrace.¹⁵⁹ This way of thinking has dominated the Japanese for a long time, and is still evident in modern society. Many of my informants feared bringing shame and disappointment to their parents if they told them:

“I will never tell my parents. I don’t think they could ever accept me. It’s something that they shouldn’t know. They don’t have to know. I don’t think *they* want to know.” – Mitsuko

“I’m kind of afraid to make them feel uncomfortable. And I’m afraid of being rejected. I think my parents are more liberal than some parents, but I just don’t really feel the need to tell them.” – Megumi

The fear of being rejected, as well as bringing shame to their parents was too strong for them to make the choice to come out. Only two of my informants had told their parents. One of

¹⁵⁸ Sharon Jayson, “Census Reports more Unmarried Couples Living Together”, *USA Today* (July 28, 2008). URL: http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/census/2008-07-28-cohabitation-census_N.htm

¹⁵⁹ Ikels, *Filial Piety*.

them was Yukari, who was living with her girlfriend. She had told her immediate family, except her grandmother. Then there was Eri, who told me about her parent's reaction:

“My mother first thought I was joking and did not want to believe it. So she said ‘what are you saying, stop joking like that’. But when my girlfriend at the time came by my house every day, they gradually started to think that it can't be helped [*shouganai*], and now they have stopped hoping that I would find a boyfriend. Before, they often asked me ‘I wish you would find yourself a boyfriend’ and ‘Are boys really that awful?’, but now they seem to have given up.”

Eri's parents accepted her, even though her mother openly expressed her desire for her to find a boyfriend. Another woman I talked to told me that if she was dating a man, she would get married because it was what was expected of her. But if she was dating a woman, she could settle for not getting married because it would be unfair to her partner. She had not told her family about her sexual orientation either, because she feared that her mother would not understand. Her grandmother was not feeling well, and she thought that if she told her mother it would just be another burden she had to bear, and she would cause too much worry. She had recently just started dating another woman, and although she wanted to tell her mother that she had found someone, she felt that she could not inflict more stress upon her at that time. Causing worry to her mother appeared to be something that caused her much grief. By not getting married one rejects the heterosexual paradigm, as well as challenge the foundations of the patriarchal family structure. There are many difficulties attached to the single status, and it will be a cause of worry for parents:

“Of course, my parents worry about my future. They are always saying ‘what are you planning to do later? Are you planning to live your life alone?’ and ‘it is lonely and sad to live your life alone’. So I answer ‘why are you always saying ‘alone’? I might have a partner, you know. There is a lot of people getting married and then end up in divorce, so marriage is not a guarantee for happiness anyway.’” - Eri

Eri's parents worry that if she stays unmarried she will have a lonely future. It is interesting because they do not seem to understand that even if Eri stays single, she might find a woman to make her happy, with whom she can spend her life with. The notion of happiness and family-life seem to be bound in the relationship between a man and a woman. Marriage and lesbian relationships may be seen as something unrelated to each other, and even when confessing to being a lesbian, parents keep pressuring marriage; “it's fine to be interested in girls, but you will get married, right?”¹⁶⁰ A parent's understanding will often be overshadowed by the need for social security only found in marriage. There are a number of practical and economical problems needing to be solved for unmarried women, whether being lesbian or not. The assumption that women marry at some point in their lives makes it

¹⁶⁰ Stevi Jackson, Liu Jieyu and Woo Juhyun, *East Asian Sexualities: Modernity, Gender and New Sexual Cultures* (London: Zed Books, 2008), 169.

difficult to attain high-paying jobs since they are expected to leave the paid workforce when starting a family.¹⁶¹ Thus the Japanese woman is often reliant on her husband's wage, and a single woman's salary will be much lower than a single man's salary by default.

Even if one decides to tell one's parents and their reaction might not be negative, the family's acceptance might not be their real reaction at all:

"If I tell them they might be upset. If they accept me, I don't know if it's from the heart." - Reina

This was also a cause of fear, at least from Reina. Being Japanese, she knows all about the culture of *tatemae* and *honne*, and it would hurt her if she knew that her parents had to use *tatemae* when having to deal with their daughter. I found it somewhat ironic that now; Reina was the one who was using *tatemae* to shield her parents from knowing about her sexuality. Eri's parents might have accepted the fact that she would not get married, but they are still very conscious about her coming out to other people in the family:

"I asked my parents if I should come out to my other relatives. They immediately said 'Stop it. They will all be surprised, what will they think?' [...] The reason they reacted like that is because they don't want to be embarrassed. If I come out to my relatives, my parents are afraid that they will be told 'why did you raise such a child; maybe your way of raising children is bad' or 'she is strange, and different from everybody else', and this is very scary for them. [...] Everyone is only concerned about what other people think of them. Maybe that's just how Japanese people are."

Gossip (*uwasa suru*) was also a reason for keeping quiet about one's sexuality. This was true not only in relations with family, but also when relating to other people in the workplace. As mentioned in the previous chapter, co-workers gossiping about one's sexuality could be reason for quitting one's job:

"If one person knows, it might get rumored to other people. And I'm worried about that, because maybe I will have to quit my job because of the rumor." – Reina

How they are seen by other people seemed to be a main concern in relation to staying single as well. If one passes a certain age, usually around the age of thirty, people start wondering why one is not yet married:

"Other will think 'Why is she not yet married? Does she have a bad personality? Can't she find a good person? [...] I am over thirty years old now, so all of my co-workers are asking me if I am not planning to get married soon. [...] There are some women working in my company who are not married, and everyone is wondering and talking about them. One person said something like 'she can't even get married', and was being very condescending. [...] I thought that was very rude." - Eri

¹⁶¹ Chalmers, *Emerging Lesbian Voices in Japan*, 82-86.

The collective consciousness is very strong in Japan, and being, or someday getting married is considered to be *jōshiki*, or common sense. If one does not conform to this norm it is ground for rumors being spread. Further, if one remains unmarried one will never become *ichininmae no onna*, because one rejects the responsibility of creating a family and supporting a household.

5.4.0 What do they do?

Considering how important marriage is to the Japanese society, it can be hard to withstand both the societal and familial pressure to get married. Remembering Lunsings three ways of self-identification from the previous chapter can be helpful for understanding the choices lesbians take in relation to the marriage issue; 1) adaptation to society's expectations by suppressing their feelings 2) dividing their lives into one public and one private part and 3) resistance to society's norms and apt for change. It is difficult to get information about the first because this category requires a woman to suppress her feelings and not act on her desires. This may apply for women who are not yet aware of their sexuality, or they may be unwilling to acknowledge to themselves that they are, in fact, non-heterosexual.

Again, the second way of relating to society seemed to be the most common; knowing about one's sexual orientation as a lesbian or bisexual and choosing to marry heterosexually. Like *tatema* and *honne*, there is another way for Japanese to portray only certain aspect of one's life to others. The notion is called *uchi* (inside) and *soto* (outside), and is a way of shifting between suitable forms and knowing one's place in into particular hierarchies founded on gender, age and social status.¹⁶² This way of fragmenting oneself into different selves is widely used in everyday relations in Japan, and is similar to *tatema* and *honne*. This was not at all uncommon information for my informants:

“[...] in the older generation there are some people who get married because they want to hide their sexuality, and maybe they also feel pressure from their family. In a certain age, if you are not married, society can be very...yeah.” – Megumi

“I know two or three women. They are married to guys, but find partners [other women].” – Mitsuko

“I know some Internet sites, where their status says ‘married’ but are looking for women. It seems a lot of people are doing this.” – Reina

¹⁶² Chalmers, *Emerging Lesbian Voices from Japan*, 13-17.

By dividing their life into one private (*uchi*) and one public (*soto*) sphere made it possible to become *ichininmae no onna* publicly, as well as being able to establish contact, and maybe even relationships with other lesbians. Megumi was one of them:

“I’m actually married right now, to a guy. [...] Well, my... I don’t really say husband, but my partner knows that I also like girls. He does not mind. I think our marriage is a little bit weird, because it is not the traditional type of marriage. We think that our marriage is agreed upon, a contract or a commitment, and we actually don’t live together. He went to another country for work. We have been together for three years, but we have been living separate for two years.”

Megumi’s view on her own marriage was untraditional in the sense that even though they were married they did not live together, and both being uninterested in starting a family. Her agreement with her husband left her able to meet women with his blessing. Later during my fieldwork Mitsuko also introduced me to a married friend of hers. She had come to a Girlfriend-event to meet other lesbians, and maybe even find a partner for the night. She told me that she was content in her situation, and she had many friends who were doing the same. There was not much talk about any consequences about having affairs with other women, but Megumi told me about a woman she got to know on the Internet:

“I go there [an Internet group for lesbians who are married] sometimes. [...] It is a good experience for me, because many of them are married in the traditional way, not like me, so they don’t tell their partners that they are lesbians. One of them had a very severe experience. She was found out by her husband, and he hit her. She already has three kids, so she said that it was very hard, but she did not divorce because her husband doesn’t want to divorce and break up. So she is kind of stuck in that situation.”

This situation may be common for many other women in Japan. The other reason this woman chose not to get a divorce was, according to Megumi, that she did not want to make her children unhappy. Some women may choose to get married because it is considered to be *jōshiki*, others may choose to get married to fulfill their desire to have children. Eri have been in a relationship with Kayo for over eight years. Although Eri is open about her sexuality, she could not tell her family that they were having a relationship because Kayo does not want anyone to know about it:

“Her [Kayo] family is very traditional, so we had to hide it. [...] She wants to keep it a secret [*kakushitai hito*]. Only three of her very close friends know. If you date a Japanese person, you have to hide and that gets tiresome. I always have to say ‘I’m Kayo’s senpai’¹⁶³ or ‘we are just friends’. I did not want to hide...but after all, in Japan it is difficult not to hide. [...] We don’t want to break up, but she wants to get married and have children...So in order to do that she had to find a boyfriend.”

In order for Kayo to fulfill her dream to get married and have children, they came to the conclusion that they had to find other partners. Kayo now has a boyfriend who has proposed to her. After eight years Eri and Kayo are very much a big part of each other’s lives, and in a

¹⁶³ *Senpai* is a word used to show respect, and refers to a senior in either an educational establishment or the workplace. Bunt and Hall, *Oxford Beginner’s Japanese Dictionary*, 81.

sense they are still together, albeit only platonically. The boyfriend never knew about their relationship, and they both know that they have to end it very soon.

Another way of upholding the *uchi-soto* division is by arranging fake marriages. This means finding a homosexual man who they marry, so as to calm the pressure. One of Saori Kamano and Diana Khor's informants were finding herself in that situation after she found her current girlfriend: "[...] I am seeing three gay men with the intention of finding a partner for faked marriage, so I picked one of them and talked about him as if he was my real boyfriend".¹⁶⁴ It is not uncommon for a homosexual man and a lesbian woman to arrange this type of marriages in order to enjoy the status of becoming *ichininmae* as well as being able to lead their own life:

"A gay man and a lesbian woman can marry for appearance sake, deceiving society." – Eri

This is advantageous for both parties, as the pressure from both families will be put to rest. In addition, as well as being free to act on their desires without being afraid of how the other person will react, they do not have to hide from their spouse. Others choose to marry a heterosexual man, only to get a divorce later. According to my informants, it was more accepted to be divorced than to never have been married at all:

"If someone says they are divorced, people would think 'Oh, you have experienced ups and downs in life, you have had good and painful experiences.' At the same time, there is the connotation that you have gone through the whole romantic final experience and all that. If you say you have never been married, people will question about your past experiences, and maybe get an idea that maybe you are not interested in heterosexuality. If you say you have never been married, people will be like 'why, why, why?'" – Sei

If one has been married at some point but later get divorced, one can live as a single woman without being rumored about.¹⁶⁵ Eri also experienced getting a well meant advice from her co-workers:

"Everyone is telling me 'you should get married once, because it is okay if you get a divorce later.'"

The third option relating to marriage is resistance, or at least making an effort to be together. Because it is not permitted by law in Japan for two people of the same gender to get married, some choose to hold a ceremony much like a wedding ceremony:

¹⁶⁴ Kamano and Khor in *East Asian Sexualities*, 170.

¹⁶⁵ See for example Jackson, Jieyu and Juhyun, *East Asian Sexualities*, 172-173. Here, Kumiko experienced getting "strange gazes" from others because she lived with another woman, but it did not happen to her partner, Setsuko, because she had been married before.

“Even if it does not make sense in Japan, people want some kind of proof for themselves. They want to say ‘He/she is mine. We are married’.” Eri

For this reason many choose to go overseas, for example to Canada, and get married there. Upon returning to Japan however, the marriage is rendered invalid and they end up being back where they started. Both Eri and Reina told me that they preferred a foreign partner over a Japanese one because they thought foreign women were more open. Another advantage to dating a foreign woman was being able to get married and live in the partner’s home country:

“If dating someone from a country where it is legal to get married it is possible to move to that country and live there. My friend’s girlfriend is from Australia, and they are currently applying for a marriage-visa there. [...] I also had a girlfriend from England before, and if we were still together to this day I might have been living in England now.” Eri

Finding a foreign girlfriend seemed to be more attractive than a Japanese, because doing so would open up new possibilities for them to be able to live together and maybe even get married outside of Japan. This also would mean leaving Japan, as well as your friends and family. Dating another Japanese woman would entail having to hide their relationship from co-workers and family, as well as having to face certain economical and practical problems. Another, and perhaps more heartbreaking challenge, is the fact that since two women cannot get married they cannot register as a household. Thus, they have no legal rights involving decisions or information about serious accidents or illnesses experienced by their partners. In the case of death, the partner risks being denied attendance at the partner’s funeral in a familial capacity, as well as the right to make decisions about their ashes and the place of burial.¹⁶⁶ These decisions hence fall to the members of the partners *koseki* (family registration), usually the biological family to which household they are still registered. Lacking such rights in such situations the partner of the injured or deceased risks being ignored:

“If someday I get a Japanese girlfriend who I want to spend my future with, and we only live together... a new problem occurs. For example, even if someone in my family disappears, my girlfriend will be treated as if she has nothing at all to do with it [*zenzen kankei nai*] because she is not a family member. I would be sorry for my girlfriend, because even if I would want to be with her in the sad times and she would want to be with me, we would be in a situation where we could not be together at the funeral or in other busy times. Because she is not family, she would get a feeling of being ignored.” – Eri

The partner would be treated as someone outside of family, even though they are partners. The situation that occurs is completely different from what a heterosexual married couple registered would experience, where the husband or the wife would be a natural part of the

¹⁶⁶ Chalmers, *Emerging Lesbian Voices in Japan*, 90.

funeral or in the decisionmaking process around such events. One way to subvert the *koseki* is explained by Eri:

“There are people like this too; in order to become a family [*kazoku ni naru tame*] they become siblings. By doing that, they can get the same family name. But it will not say ‘wife’ in the family registration, but ‘elder sister’ [*oneesan*] or ‘younger sister’ [*imouto*]. [...] They do this because they want to be a part of the same family and to have the same name. In Japan, having the same name as the person you love is a happy thing. But it seems very difficult, because if I have a Japanese girlfriend and ask my parents to let her take my family’s name they may refuse to give it to her [*yurusanai*].”

It is by no means certain that parents will let their daughters partner take their family name. Another possibility is then to use adoption to increase their legal and social recognition as legitimate family members. According to Chalmers, lesbian adoption usually entails an older partner adopting a younger partner to become a legitimate family member.¹⁶⁷ It will still not say “wife” in the family registration, but they at least allow the partners to name each other as next of kin in case something should happen. Adult adoption is not a new phenomenon, but usually occurs then there are no sons in the woman’s family, so a son is adopted in order to continue the family name or a business. But lesbian adoption has also occurred, such in the case of Yoshiya, a famous writer, and Monma in the 1920s.¹⁶⁸ Although Yoshiya did not adopt Monma until the late 1950s for various reasons, letters exchanged between them describes in detail a strong wish to be together as a legitimate family. Through adoption they attain more legal rights, but it also contributes to the myth that lesbians do not exist, thus increasing their invisibility:

“It is really a difficult problem because gays and lesbians cannot get married. If we could get married in Japan, I think the way society think about homosexual people would change for the better. The attitude would be more positive.” – Eri

5.5.0 Conclusion

In order to become a full member of Japanese society one must marry to become *ichininmae no shakaijin*. By not getting married, it means staying single, hereby rejecting the responsibilities of a fully adult human being. This is also cause for being rumored about, with people wondering why one cannot seem to find a good man to settle down with. There are also certain economical difficulties attached to staying single, as marriage provides a social security-net such as various welfare-benefits in order to encourage people to get married and

¹⁶⁷ Chalmers, *Emerging Lesbian Voices from Japan*, 88-91.

¹⁶⁸ Jennifer Robertson in Anne Walthall (ed.), *The Human Tradition in Modern Japan* (Lanham: SR Books, 2002), chapter 9.

have children. Most of my informants were hesitant, or even reluctant, to come out to their parents in fear of rejection. There is indeed a risk of being rejected when coming out, but there is also a possibility that the parents are only pressuring them to get married because they have their children's best interest in mind. Given the fact that marriage is institutionalized to give economical and social benefits, knowing that their daughter will miss out on these benefits will cause them to worry about their future. They might not be negative to the idea of their daughter being a lesbian and wanting to be with a woman; but they may worry about their daughter in terms of loneliness and the lack of social stability which can only be found in marriage. The strict rules of the *koseki* prevents eventual partners from entering her partner's household, as well as certain rights married couples take for granted.

The *uchi-soto* division of the self was thought to be the most common among my informants, where they put on their heterosexual guise when needed. This meant that lesbians would indeed get married, either to a heterosexual or a homosexual man. By doing so, they achieve the status of being *ichininmae no onna*, only to live a separate life as lesbians. Whether they choose to marry heterosexually or to adopt one's partner, both these actions contribute to fuel the myth that lesbians do not exist, hereby increasing lesbian invisibility. The only way for this veil to be lifted is to come out to the public and be open about one's sexuality.

I also noticed a generation-gap when dealing with the importance of marriage. My informants' parents, or the older generation, saw marriage as a natural thing, and was to be expected. Perhaps inspired by the Confucian thought of love as a disruptive element, love had nothing to do with it and could be developed at a later stage. The new generation wants love-marriage, although few of my informants did not feel the need to get married at all. They were content with being unmarried as long as they could be with their potential partner. Whether this meant living together or moving to another country where it homosexual marriage is supported by law did not seem to matter much. This could mean that marriage may be losing its importance for the younger generation, and that resisting the notion of becoming *ichininmae* may be on the rise, giving way to an opening for lesbian relationships.

Chapter 6 – The case of South Korea

6.1.0 Introduction

The existence of homosexuality in South Korea has largely been denied in the past. This does not mean that lesbians do not exist; it just means that they are not visible in everyday South Korean society. In recent years an increase in discussions concerning homosexuals or homosexuality has surfaced, and a few LGBT groups and organizations have been formed. Further, the emergence of the Internet and discussions in the media has helped bringing LGBT-issues forth to the South Korean public.¹⁶⁹ This increased attention towards homosexuality however, does not necessarily mean that the South Korean society is gaining more understanding or acceptance towards homosexuality. In fact, according to Seo, homosexuality does not have any social existence in modern South Korean society. He states that “homosexuality does not seem to be ‘that love whose name one dare not utter’ but rather ‘that love whose name does not refer to anything’”.¹⁷⁰ Identifying as a gay or lesbian may present difficulties when trying to relate to society, because of its lack of social recognition of this group.

Despite its apparent vibrancy, the lesbian community is almost entirely closeted in South Korea, hidden from the general public. This means that they show their real selves only to a very limited number of people. Leading double lives is common for most South Korean lesbians. As described in the previous chapters this is also true in Japan, but in South Korea the fear of being discovered is even greater; according to Jackson, Jieyu and Juhyun, using two names – one ‘given’ family name and one ‘chosen’ lesbian name – is common to avoid recognition. Most lesbians only know each other by their ‘chosen’ lesbian names, and are very careful not to ask or reveal their given family names. Using two names reflect two different sides of their lives: She is, as her chosen lesbian name, a lesbian; yet she is, as her given family name, to be read as being a heterosexual woman.¹⁷¹ This undoubtedly maintains the myth that lesbian does not exist in South Korea, because they are hidden away from

¹⁶⁹ See Sanders, *Mujigae Korea* and Seo, “Mapping the Vicissitudes of Homosexual Identities in South Korea”.

¹⁷⁰ Seo, “Mapping the Vicissitudes of Homosexual Identities in South Korea”, 66.

¹⁷¹ Jackson, Jieyu and Juhyun, *East Asian Sexualities*, 24; see also John (Song Pae) Cho, “The Wedding Banquet Revisited: ‘Contract Marriages’ Between Korean Gays and Lesbians”, *Anthropological Quarterly*, Vol. 82 no. 2 (Spring 2009), 420, n11.

society's watchful eyes. If one was to be known as a non-heterosexual woman, she might lose her social status both in society and within her own family.

In this chapter I will examine the most pressing factors contributing to the lesbian invisibility in South Korea, as well as looking at the alternative lifestyles they may choose to lead. To my regret, due to scarce available information on this topic and also the limited time available to do fieldwork on Korean lesbians as well, I will have to rely mostly on secondary sources when describing the state of lesbians in modern South Korean society. As mentioned previously I contacted several Korean LGBT organizations, but I was unsuccessful in receiving replies from any of them. I also found that there among these limited sources available, information concerning lesbians is scarce. Therefore I had to examine their situation in the light of both male and female homosexuality. This lack of information illustrates how taboo this topic still is in South Korean society.

6.2.0 Confucianism

One of the main factors contributing to the lesbian invisibility is the strong influence of Confucianism in South Korea. Historically East Asian culture has been strongly patriarchal and patrilineal in accordance with the influence of Confucianism. Chinese in origin, it influenced most of the East Asian region, and Korea more so than Japan. Confucianism stresses family, hierarchy, duty, patriarchal leadership, filial piety and women's subordination to men. Together, these different elements have contributed to constituting heterosexuality as the main social and ethical norm in South Korea.¹⁷² By identifying as a lesbian or bisexual one refuses not only the dominant heterosexual dogma and women's subordination of sexuality to men, but also threatening the continuation of the family line, hence challenging the cultural based norms posed by these Confucianism traditions. A patriarchal family system called *hojuje* (family registration system) was enacted by the Japanese in 1909, and required all Koreans to be registered on the *hojok* (family register) records as a member of a household headed by a male family-head called *hoju*.¹⁷³ Much like the Japanese *ie*-system, the *hoju* system was later abolished in 2005, but was significant for its influence on traditional family patterns. There is a close emotional bond between members of the family, and as in Japan, the

¹⁷² Young-Gwan Kim and Sook-Ja Hahn, "Homosexuality in Ancient and Modern Korea", *Culture, Health & Sexuality: An International Journal for Research, Intervention and Care*, Vol. 8 no. 1 (August 2006), 60.

¹⁷³ Jennifer J. Jung-Kim, *Gender and Modernity in Colonial Korea*, dissertation (Los Angeles: University of California, 2005), 18.

family system in Korea defines a “normal” family as consisting of a heterosexually married couple and their children, where the father is the main authority.¹⁷⁴

6.2.1 Filial piety

A fundamental part of the Confucian ethics is filial piety; the obligation to take care of one’s parents and preserving the family line. Within the patriarchal family, filial piety is an integrated influence to ensure reproduction of values across generations, and is the criterion on which ethical moral status within the family is judged.¹⁷⁵ Traditionally for a man, filial piety was connected with loyalty to the lord and state. For a woman, it was connected with being a wise mother and good wife (*hyonmo yangch’o*). This term did not stem from Confucianism, but was the Korean equivalent of the Japanese *ryōsai kenbo*, promulgated by the Japanese Meiji government. Korean women, too, were taught to become wise mothers and good mothers. Moreover, filial piety towards parents, warm concerns for brothers and sisters, and service to the ancestors were important attributes of a virtuous woman.¹⁷⁶ This reduces the woman’s existence to being a heterosexual married woman in a patriarchal state, where she is to be supported financially by her husband while taking care of ‘business at home’.

6.3.0 Family and marriage

Traditionally, children were expected to obey parents, and the supreme test of obedience was accepting the parents’ choice of spouse. Although the Korean family has changed drastically over the years the importance of family and marriage is still highly stressed, as the heterosexual family is considered to be an ethical virtue in accordance with Confucianism. The vast majority of matches in South Korea today are love matches or ‘half-love, half-arranged’ matches chosen by the children and sanctioned by the parents.¹⁷⁷ Being (openly) lesbian does not only imply rejection of the heterosexually oriented family system; it also means that one stays unmarried, which can be considered to be unethical or un-filial towards one parents. Unmarried and childless people are still considered ‘imperfect beings’ in Korean

¹⁷⁴ Soo Jin Park-Kim, Soo Youn Lee-Kim and Eun Jung Kwon-Lee, “The Lesbian Rights Movement and Feminism in South Korea” in Khor and Kamano, *Lesbians in East Asia*, 168.

¹⁷⁵ Kim and Hahn, “Homosexuality in Ancient and Modern Korea”, 60.

¹⁷⁶ Yung-Chung Kim (ed.), *Women of Korea: A History from Ancient Times to 1945*, 2nd. edition. (Seoul: Ewha Womans University Press, 1977).

¹⁷⁷ Ikels, *Filial Piety*, 165.

society. Therefore, only childless people and poor elderly people with no families to depend on go to nursing homes. Koreans consider living in a nursing home to be the most miserable of fates because it is regarded as a consequence of one's un-actualized and unfulfilled moral duties; raising a family. Moreover, sexual conduct is only thought to be legitimate only within the heterosexual marriage. Common beliefs about homosexuality in South Korea are strongly influenced by the word *byuntae*, meaning abnormal or deviant.¹⁷⁸ This word is used when describing all forms of sexual behavior outside of the traditional heterosexual pairing. Also, as Seo points out, women could more accurately be called non-sexual entities because "in South Korean society, women are caught up in the double standard of a conservative sexual ideology that stresses motherhood, chastity and virginity."¹⁷⁹ This not only makes it extremely difficult for lesbians to actively come to terms with their own sexuality, but it also challenges society's strict standards of sexual conduct only being legitimate within the heterosexual married entity; everything else is *byuntae*. Homosexuality is often described in South Korea as a disease, a mental disorder or a sin, or that (male) homosexuals are the spreaders of AIDS. Moreover, "gayness", as a sexual and social identity is seen as interference to the ability to perform one's role in the family, making it a family matter.¹⁸⁰

Koreans possess strong psychological bonds that exist between parents and children, which again are reinforced in the family-based society.¹⁸¹ Even if they become financially independent, South Koreans are expected to live at home until they get married and thus becomes an adult. Most Koreans see family as the biggest problem concerning their own sexuality, and although they may find it easy to come out to their peers or close friends, many would not dream of coming out to their families. Coming out in South Korean society, especially to one's parents, could entail having to break with one's family altogether. Eri told me about her Korean friend living in Japan:

"I was talking to my friend one day, and she told me this: 'I do not have the courage to tell my parents yet. If I tell my parents, maybe they will commit suicide. My parents are Korean, and are even more strict than Japanese. If there is a homosexual person in the household it is shameful for the family and will be severely talked about in a very bad way by other people. I think about this, and I cannot find myself to tell them.' [...] Also, her girlfriend is frustrated about the fact that she will not tell anybody, and they had an incident. After this, she decided that she would tell her sister. She said that her sister had reacted positively, maybe because she has been raised in Japan she has a more positive way of thinking."

¹⁷⁸ Kim and Hahn, "Homosexuality in Ancient and Modern Korea", 63.

¹⁷⁹ Seo, "Mapping the Vicissitudes of Homosexual Identities in South Korea", 75.

¹⁸⁰ Cho, "The Wedding Banquet Revisited", 402.

¹⁸¹ Seo, "Mapping the Vicissitudes of Homosexual Identities in South Korea", 77.

After being pressured by her girlfriend, Eri's friend successfully came out to her sister, but she was still denied coming out to her parents. Even though living in Japan, her parents are from the older generation, and strongly influenced by Korean cultural norms. Her sister on the other hand is from the younger generation, and was raised in Japan as well. This may have been a contributing factor for her positive view on homosexuality, in addition to the fact that the new generation is more likely to have a positive attitude on homosexuality in general.

Although South Korea is experiencing the same social transformation as Japan these days; increasing individualization, declining birth rates, increasing divorce rates and delayed marriage rates; the pressure to get married is still very real. The pressure to get married lies deeply rooted in the Confucian virtue of duty, and filial piety, and mothers are known to force their daughters to attend *matson*, or meetings with prospects to marriage.¹⁸² Such pressure does not only occur in the family, but also in the workplace. In modern South Korea, such as in Japan, both men and women need to get married in order to leave home, fulfill their filial obligations, hereby acquiring social status and get promoted at work. According to John Cho, a Korean man named Jonathan was told by his boss "only half jokingly that if he did not get married, he would not get promoted."¹⁸³ The fear of not getting a promotion if one is discovered as a lesbian appears to be equally great both in South Korea and in Japan. Eri's friend also felt she needed to hide her sexuality from people in her workplace:

"She does not want people she works with know that she is dating a girl. If you are wondering why that is, it is because she thinks that if her company knows that she has a girlfriend, she will not get promoted." - Eri

The possibility for losing a promotion in the workplace is enough to make both Korean and Japanese lesbians to hide their sexual identities from their supervisor or co-workers.

6.3.1 "Contract marriages"

Given the importance on marriage in South Korean society, many lesbians choose to get married heterosexually in order to hide their sexual orientation from their husband. Due to limited (English) research available on this topic, I find it difficult to give an in depth discussion on this area. However, I was lucky enough to stumble upon an article concerning

¹⁸² Interestingly, it seems that butch lesbians in Korea does not face much pressure from their parents to get married, at least in the case of Cho's informants, Eugene and Benan. The reason for this, he explained, is that "the parents found it more embarrassing to send a butch daughter to another family as a daughter-in-law than to have an unwed daughter." Cho, "The Wedding Banquet Revisited", 410-414.

¹⁸³ Cho, "The Wedding Banquet Revisited", 406.

so-called “contract marriages”, or *kyeyak kyolhon*, by John Cho. The reason for entering a contract marriage is to deflect the pressure to marry, but paradoxically only by conforming to it.¹⁸⁴ In his article he interviewed three contract marriage couples about their experiences. Albeit different from the more common practice of choosing a heterosexual husband, the goal is the same; to be able to pass as straight in a heterosexist society. Contract marriages are increasingly becoming more popular, as the Internet makes it easier for people to get information as well as an opportunity to establish contact with each other. According to Cho, there are two Internet sites devoted to establishing contact between its members in South Korea. One of them is “Our Wedding”, founded by the previously mentioned Jonathan; the man whose boss told him that he should marry to get a promotion.¹⁸⁵ These marriages provide a ‘way out’ for both lesbians and gays at the same time; by establishing a contract marriage so as to appear heterosexual, they are at the same time able to live as non-heterosexual on the side with a partner of the same sex.

These contract marriages are not unproblematic. First, they contribute to the invisibility already imposed upon lesbians in South Korean society. The notion that there are no lesbians in Korea is maintained by the fact that lesbians, too, get married under a heterosexual guise; hereby conforming to society’s heterosexual norms. Second, the lines between what is fake and what is real might become blurred. Although not necessarily living together as a married couple,¹⁸⁶ these marriages involve deceiving not only the contract couple’s families, but also society as a whole. By getting married to someone there is the natural assumption that one has to attend several family-gatherings with one’s own as well as their husband’s in-laws. It is also common for daughters-in-law to move in with their parents-in-law, so as to take care of them when they get older. In the case with Lesley and Jin Heon, Lesley had to perform the expected part as a good wife when Jin Heon’s parents stopped by. Another contract couple, Paula and Tae Hoon also noticed that although their marriage was only a formality, it was also challenging the boundaries of what was ‘only a contract’ and what was ‘the real thing’.¹⁸⁷ Although Paula entered the marriage in order to be with her girlfriend, Eugene, the marriage started to affect Eugene as well. In particular, the question of which was the real relationship; Paula’s relationship with her, or Paula’s relationship with Tae Hoon and his family was difficult. As Paula’s relationship with her in-laws began to deepen,

¹⁸⁴ Cho, “The Wedding Banquet Revisited”.

¹⁸⁵ Cho, “The Wedding Banquet Revisited”, 406.

¹⁸⁶ Many of these contract couples lived in separate apartments in the same apartment complex, so as to be able to quickly run into the other’s apartment in the case parents or others dropped by.

¹⁸⁷ Cho, “The Wedding Banquet Revisited”, 413-416.

Eugene was feeling left out because she had no apparent reason to be a part of the family: “For Paula to become a good wife and daughter-in-law, she has to become a bad girlfriend”.¹⁸⁸

6.4.0 Christianity

Another factor contributing to the lesbian invisibility in South Korea is the influence of Christianity, especially the conservative Protestant groups. Although South Korea does not criminalize homosexuality it is still seen as a sin, as well as going against the Bible’s teachings. Unlike Japan, where Christianity did not achieve such a tight grip on society, more than 25 per cent of Koreans today identify as Christians. Many lesbians define themselves as Christians as well; according to a 2004 survey done by the Lesbian Institute for Lesbians (LIFL) and the Lesbian Counseling Center in South Korea, 23.9 percent of the lesbians asked identified as Christians, and 9.3 percent as Catholics.¹⁸⁹ A number of South Korea’s political leaders are Christians, and they are widely represented in fields such as medicine, education and various other social movements. It is no secret that Christianity has not opened their arms to welcome gays and lesbians, especially in the more conservative circles. As mentioned in chapter 3, it was Christians who protested a festival by the LGBT-group ‘Come Together’ at Yonsei University in 1995. It was also Christians who were in the forefront in opposing the inclusion of ‘sexual orientation’ in the Anti-Discrimination bill in 2007. According to the Human Rights Watch, a petition was sent out claiming that if the bill passes, “homosexuals will try to seduce everyone, including adolescents; victims will be forced to become homosexuals; and sexual harassment by homosexuals will increase”¹⁹⁰ Having no root in reality, this statement provoked the LGBT community into the public eye. Normally South Korean LGBT activists are unwilling to be photographed or videotaped, but in this case several of them spoke out on national and international television.

In a more recent event, some protestant churches has put forth protests following the controversial American pop-star Lady Gaga’s planned concert in Seoul on the 27th May 2012. According to an article in the New York Times, the protesters are arguing that it is important

¹⁸⁸ Eugene quoted in Cho, “The Wedding Banquet Revisited”, 416

¹⁸⁹ 561 lesbians participated in the survey. Park-Kim, Lee-Kim and Kwon-Lee, “The Lesbian Rights Movement and Feminism in South Korea”, 163-164.

¹⁹⁰ Human Rights Watch, “South Korea: Anti-Discrimination Bill Excludes Many”, PDF. New York (November 6, 2007). Stable URL: <http://www.asylumlaw.org/docs/sexualminorities/SouthKoreaHRW061107.pdf>

to stop the concert because they are afraid that she will encourage homosexuality and pornography spreading around the country.¹⁹¹ The concert has also received an over-18 rating from the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family's Commission on Youth Protection. On a television debate show concerning Lady Gaga's concert, Reverend Jeong-Hoon Yoon made some particularly strong comments about homosexuality, such as "homosexuality was not created by God", and asking "Which is dirtier, mad-cow disease or homosexuality".¹⁹² He also claimed that until now, Korea has been free from homosexuality. This shows that South Korean society is still under heavy influence of conservative Christian values, although these incidents has sparked massive debate and comments on various social media channels such as Facebook and Twitter. With the increase of social media and the increased flow of information through the Internet, such conservative values and ideals can be contested, or at least give other, more liberal contenders a chance to state their opinion. Also, the fact that a large percentage of lesbian women identify as Christians may give them an incentive to criticize the homophobic discourse present in the Christian conservative circles in South Korea today.

6.5.0 South Korean youth

South Korea can pride itself on being the world's most wired countries; in 2010, 81.1 percent of the total population was Internet users.¹⁹³ The new generation is now growing up with Internet access, granting them a steady flow of information from all over the world. A study conducted on gay and lesbian Internet use in Korea and Taiwan in 1997 showed that such gay and lesbian sites were "extremely highly used, extremely lively spaces of l/g/q emotional support, political debate, and sexual and creative expression."¹⁹⁴ South Korean lesbian youth now has the opportunities to make friends, meet lovers, construct communities and share their knowledge and information about their lives to each other. Now, many Koreans have accepted

¹⁹¹ Mark McDonald, "Little Monsters' in South Korea Are Not Amused", *International Herald News Rendezvous*, The Global Edition of the New York Times (April 11, 2012). URL:

<http://rendezvous.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/04/11/little-monsters-in-south-korea-are-not-amused/>

¹⁹² Janice, "Controversial TV Priest claims Korea 'Free from Homosexuality'", *Koreabang* (May 9, 2012). URL:

<http://www.koreabang.com/2012/stories/controversial-tv-priest-claims-korea-free-from-homosexuality.html>

¹⁹³ Andrei Lankov, "How Korea has Become World's most Wired Country", *The Korea Times* (January 30, 2011). URL: http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/special/2012/05/113_80600.html

¹⁹⁴ Sanders, *Mujigae Korea*, 24.

the fact that homosexuality is a form of human sexuality, and not a sexual perversion and that discrimination against one is a violation of her human rights.¹⁹⁵

Despite this there are still controversies concerning youth homosexuality; youths, considered too young to think about their own sexuality are forced to stay asexual in public discussion. However, popular culture bombards teenagers with sexually charged connotations, such as popular girl/boy groups and *yaoi*, comics and fiction about boy-love mostly consumed by women. It is emphasized that information about homosexuality has a harmful influence on immature and innocent young people, making them more susceptible to accept homosexuality, or even turn into a homosexual themselves. As a result of the 1990s sexual minority movement, homosexuality is no longer officially described as a sexual perversion, and there is an apparent support for defending their human rights.¹⁹⁶ However, the discourses on homosexuality in South Korea today support the human rights of homosexuals as long as they cannot choose their homosexuality 'freely' through influence. An example of such influence is the debate concerning the Lady Gaga concert, and the concern that she might encourage homosexuality to susceptible youths. Another example is the popular *yaoi*-comics, depicting love between boys. According to Ji-Eun Lee, there is a distinction between lesbians, or *iban* girls, who experience pain and agony because of their sexual orientation, and girls who are *fanfic iban* just to follow a fashionable trend.¹⁹⁷ For example, a girl listening to Lady Gaga, reading *yaoi*, or is spending time on LGBT-websites chatting with girls who identify as lesbian, might not necessarily be a self-identified lesbian. But society may view her as being putting herself at risk of evolving into a *fanfic iban*, and needs to be protected from this becoming a reality. The Youth Protection Act from 1997 was formed to control the inflow of harmful media materials to people under the age of nineteen, and such harmful matters included homosexuality. The result was many LGBT-websites being censored or shut down under the guise that South Korean youth needed to be protected from the influence of such sites. Homosexuality was eventually removed as a category of harm, but in a society where heterosexuality is seen as the only sexuality a normal person should have, non-heterosexuality is seen as something that children must be protected against and can, and must be corrected.¹⁹⁸ Thus, youth homosexuality in South Korea is discussed in two ways; a protection discourse where one must protect youth from any influence of homosexuality, and the acceptance of the

¹⁹⁵ Lee, "Beyond Pain and Protection", 53.

¹⁹⁶ Lee, "Beyond Pain and Protection", 54.

¹⁹⁷ Lee, "Beyond Pain and Protection", 54-56.

¹⁹⁸ Lee, "Beyond Pain and Protection", 56.

human rights discourse, which claims protection from discrimination and the pain and agony a lesbian girl might experience because of her sexuality. In either of these two discussions, youth need to be protected by society, and how to rescue them from the pains of homosexuality.

6.6.0 Conclusion

Although living in a Confucian-inspired society, having access to the Internet, the influx of international information, the apparent vibrancy of the lesbian and gay community and being a part of the new generation are all contributing to building a new sense of pride among sexual minorities in South Korea. The social pressure to get married is still a harsh reality, but Koreans are experiencing an increasing trend of delayed marriages, as well as an increase in never-married women. Moreover, a lesbian community on the Internet, as well as lesbian bars and meeting places in the large cities in South Korea helps women to get together in a non-heterosexual setting. These places however, remain hidden from South Korean society. It must be pointed out that these communities are still centered on younger women; people in their twenties or thirties. The older generation is still more conservative, and may have a hard time accepting the fact that they are indeed a sexual minority, or they are reluctant to act on their sexual desires because of fear of repercussions from society.

After homosexuality was removed from the Youth Protection Act, the Seoul Queer Films and Videos Festival gained acknowledgement and popularity. This does not mean that every gay or lesbian person attending is willing to come out. At the Queer Film Festival in 2003, most of the participants and the staff were wearing red ribbons around their arms, wrists and necks.¹⁹⁹ These ribbons meant that they did not want to be photographed by the press. Coming out in South Korean society would mean shaming the family as well as being considered *byuntae*, or abnormal. Remember Eri's Korean friend, and her fear that her parents would commit suicide in shame if she would come out as a lesbian. This is largely due to the Confucian principle of filial piety and preserving the family line; being heterosexual is considered to be common sense as well the filial thing to do. Confucianism is not the only obstacle homosexuals in South Korea battle with. Christianity, too, hinders the development

¹⁹⁹ Global Gayz, "Showing Gay Pride – With Limits", *Gay South Korea News & Reports 2003-2007*, article no. 6 (June 23, 2003). URL: <http://archive.globalgayz.com/asia/south-korea/gay-south-korea-news-and-repor-4/#article6>

of a 'normal' homosexual identity. They are worried that free access to homosexual-related media will influence susceptible youth into identifying their sexual orientation, as well as encourage homosexual relationship. Although they agree that homosexuals should not be discriminated against for their 'abnormal' and 'unnatural' sexual identity, homosexuality should not be condoned. For the conservative Christians in South Korea it is imperative that youth be shielded from anything that will trigger their possible latent homosexual identity.

Chapter 7 – Closing words

The compulsory heterosexuality dominating both Japanese and South Korean society makes it difficult to challenge the lesbian invisibility. Also, because heterosexuality is considered as normal, thus being encouraged and rewarded, it is difficult being left standing outside of society's norms. There is no law that forbids homosexuality in Japan or South Korea, but if one goes against *jōshiki*, or what is considered to be common sense, one risks being construed as an outcast, deviant or abnormal. Heterosexism is built into the very construction of family through institutionalized norms, such as the sexual division of labor, gendered spheres, motherhood and work practices where a certain type of family is privileged.²⁰⁰ For both men and women, marriage is considered to be common sense; and what is normal. It also means being a good citizen; the hegemonic ideal of the paired man and wife. To deviate from the hegemonic heterosexual norm can have consequences that many women dare not face, and therefore put on a heterosexual guise in order to function as worthy members of society.

I found that the most prominent factors maintaining to this invisibility is the importance put on marriage and family. Even though the *ryōsai kenbo* or *hyonmo yangch'o* ideal is an old one, it still remains as an important factor of Japanese and South Korean femininity. This means that women are expected to follow a guided path laid out for them; get married and have children. In both Japanese and South Korean society the women are still being limited in the sense that she cannot become a fully adult social being before married. This is not only the case for lesbians, but also for homosexual men. However, there seem to be a slightly higher tolerance for homosexual men, at least in Japan. This is because they are frequently portrayed in the media, although in a very stereotypical and comical fashion. Thus, lesbians face difficulty in admitting for themselves that they are not only discriminated against as women, but they are also lesbians in a heterosexual world. In big cities such as Seoul, Tokyo or Osaka there now exist various communities, bars, exhibitions, and semi-annual Gay and Lesbian Film Festivals; the majority of lesbians does not necessarily want to face the consequences of “coming out”. The risks of being an outcast, of being rejected by one's friends and family are still too great, and “coming out” is not necessarily the desired goal. Therefore it is not uncommon for lesbian women to marry under a heterosexual guise, thereby performing their gender roles as a good wife adequately. By doing this, they consciously or unconsciously reinforce the belief that there are no lesbians in Japan or South

²⁰⁰ Chalmers, *Emerging Lesbian Voices from Japan*, 49.

Korea, consolidating the heterosexual practices in both societies. Also, by submitting to any form of marriage, which intends to relieve the pressure from friends and family for both parties, lesbians must automatically take on a role as someone's wife, committing to their husband as well as his family. This means that the goal of becoming a fully adult social being is achieved, but all the responsibility of being a family will follow, hindering a potential development in the relationship with a lesbian partner on the side. Also, by submitting to this very practice that lie at the base of lesbian invisibility, they inadvertently contribute to the further consolidation of their invisibility.

In Japan, lesbian relationships are still influenced by the heterosexualised gender roles, thus performing the *tachi/neko* roles. However, as the emergent *neko-neko* couples are becoming more popular, this challenges the idea that a human relationship must be constructed in accordance with the feminine-masculine pairing. This could entail giving lesbians more freedom to perform their gender roles more freely, and not be forced into given identity-boxes. This, in turn may spark the urge to resist the dominant heterosexism is built upon. As Rich mentions in her article, lesbian existence comprises both the breaking of a taboo and the rejection of a compulsory way of life.²⁰¹ Two feminine women, rejecting the dominant gendered perception of their relationship can thus contribute to increased understanding about women's sexuality as well as inspire others to perform their identity according to their own wishes.

Although the South Korean lesbians' share many similarities with Japanese lesbians, there are two main differences between them. The first is the wide-spread Confucian influence in South Korea. The importance of filial piety is much more evident in South Korean society, and South Koreans share a particularly strong familial bond. This makes it difficult not to conform to the family's expectations of marriage and continuing the family line. Not upholding filial piety towards one's parents is considered shameful in a culture where great importance is laid upon familial relations; remember Eri's friend, who thought coming out would drive them to suicide. The other is the stark influence of Christianity in South Korea. Along with Christianity comes the belief that homosexuality is a sin, and that they are going against the word of God. Many Korean lesbians identify as lesbians, which perhaps contribute to the shame they are experiencing because of their sexuality. However, this may also spark resistance amongst Christian lesbians, causing them to fight for their

²⁰¹ Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence", 649.

human rights as individuals. Although there is a consensus that the human rights of homosexuals are to be ensured, homosexuality is not condoned in any way. Rather, youth should be protected against any form of homosexual influence; be it information, chat-rooms or a Lady Gaga concert. This shielding of youth is increasingly difficult in a time where the Internet is rapidly expanding all over the world, increasing the flow of information as well as the influx of different opinions.

The new generation in both Japan and South Korea are faced with several opportunities the older generation did not see, such as the increased Western cultural influence, as well as access to the Internet. The result is increased tolerance concerning different opinions and lifestyles. I found it interesting that although my informants were apprehensive about telling people about their sexuality, they were particularly careful about informing the older generation such as their parents, older family members or seniors with whom they worked. Many of my informants had told their peers or their siblings without any repercussion. It seems to me that the younger generation does not share the traditional values of the older generation; they did not seem too eager to marry or have children at all. It is exciting to think about how Japanese and South Korean society will develop, given the increased openness and tolerance young people inhabit. President of the United States, Barack Obama, recently issued a statement in which he supports gay marriage.²⁰² This has not gone unnoticed in the Eastern parts of the world, and a party was held at Goldfinger celebrating Obama's decision.²⁰³ This is important because Japanese politics is largely influenced by the American government, which may lead to a possible debate about the issue in the near future.

It seems that in South Korea, the lesbian woman's movement seems to be moving at a slower pace. The attention towards homosexuality and lesbians are fairly recent; where focus on Japanese lesbianism has been around since the 1970s, the South Korean movement started around the 1990s. The apparent thriving lesbian communities in both Japan and South Korea are still fairly hidden away from the public, which I feel contribute to rendering lesbians invisible. If people knew more about lesbians, perhaps they would be more inclined to accept them. This is supported by Suzuki Ayako's findings in her survey about media's role in the formation of attitudes toward homosexuals and lesbians: having met a lesbian or a

²⁰² Jackie Calmes and Peter Baker, "Obama Says Same-Sex Marriage Should be Legal", *The New York Times* (May 9, 2012). URL: <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/10/us/politics/obama-says-same-sex-marriage-should-be-legal.html?ref=global-home>

²⁰³ Tokyo Wrestling, "オバマ大統領同性婚支持表明・祝イベント" (May 15, 2012) URL: http://www.tokyowrestling.com/notes/2012/05/obama_gay_marriage.html

homosexual increases their social acceptance.²⁰⁴ It is therefore important for lesbians to become more visible as more visibility will help them become agents for something that is *not* abnormal – it only *seems* abnormal because it is not visible. Women have always been their own agents in their struggle for equality, and there is no reason to stop now.

Proposals for further research

My dissertation main focus concerned lesbian invisibility in Japan and South Korea, as well as the challenges young lesbians face by society's expectations of marriage and family life. Considering the importance of family and the consolidation of the heterosexual family system, it would be interesting to explore the situation of young lesbian mothers. Due to limitations of this dissertation as well as the fact that none of my informants were mothers or seemed to want any children, I deliberately neglected this group. It would be interesting to find out how they are able to live their life as lesbians with a child, and to what extent they experience discrimination or difficulties because of their sexuality.

The emergence of the new *neko-neko* couples are also a very interesting starting point for further research. These couples challenges the heterosexualized gender roles imposed by society, and signifies a change in a change in gender performance; a feminine woman having a lesbian relationship with another feminine woman means a rejection of the institutionalized masculine/feminine pairing currently evident in the *tachi/neko* paradigm, where the *tachi* takes on a more aggressive, masculine and the *neko* submits to the passive, more feminine role. It would be interesting to find out if this is also a trend in South Korea as well, and if these new relationships involving two feminine parties could possibly have an effect on how lesbian gender roles are acted out.

Due to limited time available I focused mainly on lesbians in large, urban cities such as Seoul and Tokyo. Lesbians living in rural areas are therefore not adequately represented in this dissertation. I imagine they experience the pressure to get married on a much larger scale than lesbians in large cities such as Tokyo or Seoul. An interesting research project would therefore be to shift the attention towards the rural parts of Japan and South Korea, to find out how they view themselves and their situation, far from the more individually focused metropolises.

²⁰⁴ Suzuki, "The Media's Role in the Formation of Attitudes toward Gay Men and Lesbian Women".

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no. 1 (August 2006), pp. 59 – 65.

Attachments

Attachment 1: Letters to OCCUR, LGAAD, KSRCR and LOUD

Elise Fylling

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XXXX Oslo, NORWAY

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Oslo, 19.05.11

OCCUR

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Dear OCCUR,

My name is Elise Fylling, and I am a Masters student at the University of Oslo, Norway. My major is East Asian studies, where I'm focusing on Japanese and South Korean lesbian culture. I have studied Japanese at an intermediate level, and lived in Tōgane, Chiba for six months in 2007 as a part of my studies.

The reason I am writing you is because I am writing a Master's thesis about lesbians in Japan and South Korea. I am traveling to Japan from July to September this year in order to conduct fieldwork on this topic. I want to find out how Japanese lesbians identify themselves and whether or not they are facing difficulties in being accepted as lesbians by their family, friends or the society as a whole.

As I conduct my fieldwork I am planning to do interviews with Japanese lesbians to give me a deeper understanding of their situation. I am therefore in need of informants who would like to participate in an interview. The interview questions will largely revolve around lesbian daily life in Japan: Does she feel that she can be openly lesbian or not, how her friends or family react (if she has told them at all) and if she experience any problems or discrimination because of her sexuality etc. The participant can freely choose not to answer any given question. The answers will be coded and anonymized in order to preserve every participant's privacy. Participation is completely voluntarily, and will be strictly confidential. No names, personal information or e-mail addresses will be revealed. The informant can also withdraw from participation at any given time, without any explanation needed. The interviews can be conducted in either English or Japanese.

I am therefore hoping that your organization could assist me in my study. If you are able to, I would appreciate if you could post information about my research to your members, along with my e-mail address for future contact reference.

If anyone wants to participate, the person will receive more elaborate information about myself and my research at the time of the interview (or beforehand, by e-mail).

In accordance with the Norwegian privacy laws the participant will also have to sign an informed consent, where she agrees to participate in my project.

My thesis supervisor is Vladimir Tikhonov (his Korean name is Pak Noja), professor at the University of Oslo. He can be contacted by e-mail: vladimir.tikhonov@ikos.uio.no
I can be contacted by e-mail: elisefy@student.ikos.uio.no or by phone: +XXXXXXXXXXXX

Hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely yours,

Elise Fylling

OCCUR 様

私は Elise Fylling と申します。私はノルウェーのオスロ大学の学生で修士課程です。専攻は東アジアなので、日本と韓国のレズビアン文化に焦点をあてています。2007年に半年千葉県東金市に住みその間に中級日本語を勉強しました。

私は日本と韓国の同姓愛の女性たちについて修士論文を書いているため、今回 OCCUR に連絡させて頂きました。レズビアンを研究するために今年の7月から9月まで日本に行きます。研究の目的は、日本人のレズビアンは自分をどう見るか。なお、家族、友人や社会などにレズビアンとして認められるのにどのような問題点があるかを知りたいためです。

日本で研究する間に日本人のレズビアンたちへインタビューをしたいと思います。そこで私と話してくれる人が必要です。インタビューの質問はレズビアン生活に関するものです。たとえば、オープンなレズビアンですか？家族と友達が知っているなら反応はどうでしたか？女性というセクシュアリティのせいで差別された経験がありますか？などです。質問に答えるか、答えないかは選べます。プライバシーに立ち入らないように答えは秘密にしておきます。参加するかしないかは任意で、秘密の情報です。名前、メールアドレス、個人に関する情報は誰にも教えません。参加してもいつでもやめられます。細かい説明は必要ありません。インタビューの時は英語でも日本語でもどちらでもいいです。

このような理由から、私は OCCUR に研究を助けていただけると幸いです。その場合は、レズビアンメンバーに研究内容と私の連絡先を教えてくださいと大変有り難いと思います。参加したい人は、インタビューの時や事前に e-mail で私や研究について教えます。ノルウェーのプライバシーポリシーに従って、参加者は私の研究に参加するためにインフォームドコンセントを署名する必要があります。

私の先生はオスロ大学を務めている Vladimir Tikhonov です。先生の韓国名前は Pak Noja です。先生へはメールで連絡することができます：vladimir.tikhonov@ikos.uio.no
私のメール：elisefy@student.ikos.uio.no
私の電話番号：+XXXXXXXXXXXX

では、ご連絡をお待ちしております。

Elise Fylling

Attachment 2: E-mail reply from OCCUR

Elise Fylling 様

このたびは、お問い合わせをいただき、ありがとうございました。

早速ですが、ご依頼の件について、お返事いたします。

当会では、外部からの依頼を会員やプログラム参加者に対し、そのまま転送または依頼することはいたしておりません。

当会が双方をコーディネートすることで、事務所における面談インタビュー調査等に協力したことはありますが、しかし、現在、当会ではレズビアン恒常スタッフはおらず、また、レズビアンが集まるサービスを休止しておりますので、レズビアンの協力者を募ることが困難な状況です。

日本で、レズビアン（バイセクシュアル、クエスチョニング）女性へのサービスを行なっている団体を、ご参考まで、以下の通りお知らせします。

▼LOUD

<http://space-loud.org/>

▼QWRC

<http://www.qwrc.org/>

このたびは、せっかくお問い合わせをいただきましたのに、お力になれず誠に申し訳ございません。

Elise 様の研究が順調に進みますよう、祈念しています。

取り急ぎ、お返事まで。

NPO法人アカー
事務局 加藤

Attachment 3: Application to NSD:

Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste AS
NORWEGIAN SOCIAL SCIENCE DATA SERVICES



Harald Hårfagres gate 29
N-5007 Bergen
Norway
Tel: +47-55 58 21 17
Fax: +47-55 58 96 50
nsd@nsd.uib.no
www.nsd.uib.no
Org.nr. 985 321 884

Vladimir Tikhonov
Institutt for kulturstudier og orientalske språk
Universitetet i Oslo
Postboks 1010 Blindern
0315 OSLO

Vår dato: 01.09.2011

Vår ref: 27608 / 3 / SSA

Deres dato:

Deres ref:

TILRÅDING AV BEHANDLING AV PERSONOPPLYSNINGER

Vi viser til melding om behandling av personopplysninger, mottatt 13.07.2011. Meldingen gjelder prosjektet:

27608	<i>Her Story: Lesbians in Japan and South Korea</i>
Behandlingsansvarlig	Universitetet i Oslo, ved institusjonens øverste leder
Daglig ansvarlig	Vladimir Tikhonov
Student	Elise Fylling

Personvernombudet har vurdert prosjektet, og finner at behandlingen av personopplysninger vil være regulert av § 7-27 i personopplysningsforskriften. Personvernombudet tilrår at prosjektet gjennomføres.

Personvernombudets tilråding forutsetter at prosjektet gjennomføres i tråd med opplysningene gitt i melde skjemaet, korrespondanse med ombudet, eventuelle kommentarer samt personopplysningsloven/helseregisterloven med forskrifter. Behandlingen av personopplysninger kan settes i gang.

Det gjøres oppmerksom på at det skal gis ny melding dersom behandlingen endres i forhold til de opplysninger som ligger til grunn for personvernombudets vurdering. Endringsmeldinger gis via et eget skjema, http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/forsk_stud/skjema.html. Det skal også gis melding etter tre år dersom prosjektet fortsatt pågår. Meldinger skal skje skriftlig til ombudet.

Personvernombudet har lagt ut opplysninger om prosjektet i en offentlig database, <http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/prosjektoversikt.jsp>.

Personvernombudet vil ved prosjektets avslutning, 20.06.2012, rette en henvendelse angående status for behandlingen av personopplysninger.

Vennlig hilsen

Vigdis Namtvedt Kvalheim


Sondre S. Arnesen

Kontaktperson: Sondre S. Arnesen tlf: 55 58 25 83

Vedlegg: Prosjektvurdering

✓ Kopi: Elise Fylling, OSLO

Avdelingskontorer / District Offices:

OSLO: NSD, Universitetet i Oslo, Postboks 1055 Blindern, 0316 Oslo. Tel: +47-22 85 52 11. nsd@uio.no

TRONDHEIM: NSD, Norges teknisk-naturvitenskapelige universitet, 7491 Trondheim. Tel: +47-73 59 19 07. kyrre.svanva@svt.ntnu.no

TROMSØ: NSD, HSL, Universitetet i Tromsø, 9037 Tromsø. Tel: +47-77 64 43 36. martin-arne.andersen@uit.no



Utvalget består av 10-15 personer med lesbisk/bifil legning i Japan og Sør-Korea. Informantene skal intervjues om hvordan de opplever det å være lesbisk/bifil i Japan og Sør-Korea i dag. Data samles inn ved hjelp av observasjon, personlig- og gruppeintervju og registerdata(?).

Personvernombudet finner at behandlingen av personopplysninger i prosjektet kan hjemles i personopplysningsloven §§ 8 første alternativ og 9 a) (samtykke). Det vil i prosjektet bli registrert sensitive personopplysninger om etnisk bakgrunn og seksuelle forhold, jf. personopplysningsloven § 2 nr. 8 a) og d).

Førstegangskontakt opprettes via nettsider for lesbiske, og via ledelsen for diverse organisasjoner for lesbiske. Forsker tar deretter direkte kontakt med utvalget.

Personvernombudet finner informasjonsskrivet tilfredsstillende, så fremt det tilføyes:

- Veileders og studentens kontaktinfo (e-post, tlf nr., adresse).

Personvernombudet forutsetter at tredjeperson er informert og har samtykket til innhenting av data.

Revidert informasjonsskriv bes ettersendes før utvalget kontaktes.

Personvernombudet tar høyde for at informasjonsskrivet også oversettes til andre språk dersom det anses som nødvendig.

Personvernombudet anbefaler at alle innsamlede data krypteres.

Prosjektet skal avsluttes 20.06.2012 og innsamlede opplysninger skal da anonymiseres og lydopptak slettes. Anonymisering innebærer at direkte personidentifiserende opplysninger som navn/koblingsnøkkel slettes, og at indirekte personidentifiserende opplysninger (sammenstilling av bakgrunnsopplysninger som f.eks. yrke, alder, kjønn) fjernes eller endres.

Attachment 4: Informed consent

INFORMED CONSENT:

Project leader: Elise Fylling – elise_no@yahoo.com
Address, XXXX Oslo
+XXXXXXXXXXXX

Project title: “Her Story”: Lesbians in Japan and South Korea

Purpose: Master’s thesis in the Department of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages at the University of Oslo

Supervisor: Vladimir Tikhonov – Vladimir.tikhonov@ikos.uio.no
Address, XXXX Oslo
+XXXXXXXXXXXX

Participation in an interview concerning lesbians in Japan and South Korea:

Participation is strictly voluntarily, and you have the right and opportunity to withdraw from this interview before, during and after, without any explanation. If you choose to withdraw, any information about you will be deleted. Due to the sensitivity of the project’s theme, the information given by you will be handled confidentially and any recordings will be deleted after the thesis is completed in 2012. The information will be anonymized and no individuals will be able to recognize themselves in the finished product. This is done in accordance with Norwegian privacy laws, and the project is approved by the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD).

It is only I and my supervisor who will have access to the given information.

I have received informed consent about the project and I am willing to participate.
I hereby agree to participating, and that information given in this interview can be used in the said Master’s thesis.

Name: Date: Signature:

同意許可

プロジェクトリーダー: Elise Fylling – elise_no@yahoo.com
Address, XXXX Oslo
+XXXXXXXXXXXX

プロジェクトタイトル: ”彼女の物語”: 韓国と日本のピアン達

目的: オスロ大学・東アジア文化

教授: Vladimir Tikhonov – Vladimir.tikhonov@ikos.uio.no
Address, XXXX Oslo
+XXXXXXXXXXXX

韓国と日本のピアンについてインタビューを達参加すること:

参加するのは任意で、参加してもいつでもやめられます。細かい説明は必要ありません。やめたら、参加者の情報は削除します。プロジェクトの敏感テーマのせいで、参加者の情報は秘密情報です。論文の終わり 2012 年に録音も削除します。プライバシーに立ち入らないように答えは秘密にしておきます。名前、メールアドレス、個人に関する情報は誰にも教えません。このプロジェクトは Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD) で承認しました。

私と教授しか情報に近づく資格がありません。

プロジェクトの同意許可をもらって、参加したいです。インタビューの情報は修士論文に使えます。

名前: 日付: 署名:

Attachment 5: Interview-guide

INTERVIEWGUIDE

Interview-process, a short introduction:

Short introduction of myself:

- Name
- Master's in East Asian Studies in University of Oslo
- Supervisor: Vladimir Tikhonov

Presentation of survey:

- Theme: Lesbians in South Korea and Japan. Not a lot of information available in English. Available information is mainly focused on the older generation. I wish to focus on my own generation's experiences and thoughts.

Presentation of informed consent:

- Show them the paper; allow time for thorough reading.
- Explain why the signature is needed: All information will be treated confidentially, and the informant has the right to withdraw from participation at any time, without any explanation needed.

Ask to use a tape recorder. The reason for the use of a tape recorder is because it will be easier for me to transcribe, and it will allow me to better focus on what is being said.

General information

(turn on recorder)

1. How old are you?
2. Where are you from?
3. Where do you currently live?
4. What do you do for a living? (Student, working, etc.)
5. How do you identify your own sexuality?

Sexuality:

6. How old were you when you started questioning your sexuality?
7. How did you come to realize that you might be lesbian/bisexual etc.?

8. Have you told your family and friends about your sexuality?

Yes:

- How did they react?
- What made you decide to tell them?

No:

- Why haven't you told them?
- How do you think they will react?

9. Have you had a girlfriend before, or do you currently have one?

Yes:

- How did you meet?
- For how long were you together?
- Have you had more than one partner before?
- Were/are you open about your relationship?
- Does your family know about your partner? *If so*, how did they react?

10. Do you know any other Japanese lesbians/bisexuals who are currently in a relationship?

11. Do you feel it is common or uncommon for Japanese lesbians/bisexuals in a relationship to live together? Why/why not?

12. What are your own thoughts about being a lesbian/bisexual woman in Japan? *If the informant has studied abroad, compare it to the other country.*

13. In your opinion, how does Japanese society react to an openly lesbian/bisexual woman?

14. Have you ever had any negative experiences because of your sexuality?

If your answer to the previous question is yes, could you please tell me about what happened?

- Any positive experiences?

15. Do you have other Japanese lesbian/bisexual friends?

16. How do you meet other lesbians/bisexuals?

17. Have you ever been to a girl's only event or a gay bar?

- *If yes: How often do you go to such events/bars?*

Society:

18. Do you know of, or have you heard of any lesbians who are in a heterosexual marriage and/or have children?

Yes: Why do you think they chose to do so?

19. Do you want to get married and/or have children someday? (We can in Norway, 2008)

If the answer to the previous question is yes, how do you plan to start a family?

20. How do you think lesbians/bisexuals in Japan will be treated in the future?

21. Do you think people react differently towards lesbians than homosexuals? If your answer is yes, could you please explain why you feel they react differently?

22. Have you noticed any change in the attitude towards lesbians in Japan over the years?

If your answer is yes, what kind of changes have you noticed?

Closing words:

23. Is there anything else I haven't asked you that you feel is important, or that you want me to know about?

(turn off recorder)

24. Is there anything you want to talk about that you don't wish to have recorded?