

On (Not) Being a Feminist: Feminist Identification and Praxis in a Kyoto Women's Group

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INTERPRETATION OF the term "feminism" is inherently and significantly influenced by an individual's perception of her own womanhood and life experiences.¹ Young observes that while the category "woman" sketches the social constraints on and roles expected of an individual, it makes no prediction as to how she addresses those roles.² In this way, women's groups that organise around the social role of women as mothers (such as child-rearing groups) will primarily attract members who are women-as-mothers – women with experience of the socially-defined role of "mother". By contrast, a women's group that lobbies for increased funding of women's shelters makes no demands on the personal experience of its members, relying instead on a shared criticality of the general position of women in society.

It is predictable that there will be an area of overlap between these themes – commonalities in women's perception of their social positions and expectations they face, and common grounds for critique. However what is crucial is that this is not fixed – it is not a given that all women will approach their position and roles in the same way. The level of criticality at which women address their socially designated and personally-developed roles will influence – and be influenced by – the group's activities. Thus even within a group that is not explicitly or officially critical, there is space for women to contest the very expectations that may have led them to the group.

This paper aims to explore the ways that women in one women's group perceive feminism – my understanding of their understanding of feminism and feminist identification – and the ways in which this group engages in feminist praxis. The interviews and data included are drawn from fieldwork conducted in Kansai (Western Japan) between 2000 and 2002, as part of my doctoral research on feminism, women's groups and women's agency in contemporary Japan. This research involved regular participation in an observation of non-government and non-profit women's groups, and individual and group discussion with members.³ Rather than a definitive study of Japanese feminism then, this paper thus focuses on a single women's group, its members' interpretations of the terms "feminism" and "feminist", and their perception of the group and its functioning.

In focusing on interpretations of feminism, I have consciously avoided presenting a specific definition of the terms "feminist" or "feminism". As a broad working definition, I adopt Kupperts' interpretation of feminism as implying "unity in diversity, the power to be many and different, to be separate and separately organized and politically active".⁴ However, the definition of the term "feminist" and "feminism" must ultimately be contextualised, and while the words themselves

may be “contested terrain”, it is the process of their definition – an innately continuous process – which marks the value of the contest.⁵

My initial decision to participate in and observe women’s groups as sites of feminist praxis grew from the observation that feminism tended not to be explicitly identified by Japanese women as a force in their lives. Thus while feminist texts abound in bookshops and gender studies courses have become common in universities, feminism as an ideological practice – that is, as an explicitly-identified and consciously adopted way-of-life – remains outside most women’s experience.

And yet the sheer number of women’s groups in Japan, with their enthusiastic attention to “women’s issues” (including child-rearing, elder-care, sexual discrimination and media literacy) suggested that in certain forums at least, feminist practice is a significant force in women’s lives. Furthermore, through participant observation and interviews conducted with members of the group, it became clear that group participation can and often does have a subtle but distinctly enabling impact on individual members. Members interviewed spoke of the group as a space to question, to learn, to discuss and sometimes to share. Beyond these explicit acknowledgements, the informal discussions and exchanges between members indicate the capacity of the group to extend and increase feminist knowledge, in the sense that such knowledge flows from critical examination of women’s lived experiences. This capacity is not uniform cross the group, and of course this observation should not be taken as descriptive of all Japanese women’s groups. However, I argue that organisation around “women’s issues”, that is, the issues flowing from women’s experiences, inherently offers the potential for producing feminist knowledge and praxis, and it is from this potential that agency can grow and develop.

The focus on a single group reflects a desire to explore the experiences and opinions of members in greater detail than would be afforded by comparative analysis, and attempts to give greater volume to the voices of the women quoted. A non-government funded, non-profit organisation, the Kyoto-based group Notices publishes an international women’s magazine and holds bi-weekly English discussion (self-study) meetings.⁶ The group was founded in 1988 by TN, a freelance journalist and mother, with the aim of creating English-language information on Japanese women for international publication, as well as encouraging English language study in Japan. The magazine production is funded by subscription and supplemented by funds raised through community lectures and events organised sporadically. Although subscribers to the magazine are of many nationalities, active members in the group (apart from myself and guest editors) are all Japanese. The magazine is sent to about 600 individuals/ organisations, but only seven to ten members attend meetings regularly.

Basing this paper on work done in the group, I emphasise that the findings are not necessarily indicative of trends or attitudes in Japanese society at large, nor of women’s groups in general in Japan. Neither is it my aim to define (a specific) Japanese feminism, a task that seems at once a monumental and ultimately fruitless endeavour. As Buckley notes, “there is no singular ‘Japanese Feminism’, but rather a rich cacophony of voices constantly redefining and renegotiating the boundaries of feminism in that country”.⁷ Rather, in this paper I explicate conceptualisations and manifestations of feminism in one particular women’s group. In doing so, I

encourage a re-evaluation of the boundaries of feminism, and of the construction of “feminist” as specifically and exclusively activist and/or academic.

Attitudes towards feminism in women’s groups will reflect the age, economic position, health and geographical location of the members, as well as the material functions of the group itself – the organisation and activities of an all-woman environment. The significance of these factors is not to be underrated, for in delineating the areas in which these beliefs are bred, we can gauge the potential span of feminist inclusiveness. In this way we see that “who subscribes to what” is the product of multiple overlapping influences and not an homogeneous or ascribed identity.

Misciagno’s theory of feminist praxis emphasises the application of feminist principles in women’s daily lives- the unconscious acting out of feminist theory by women who can be identified as ‘de facto feminists’.⁸ Focusing on the agency and objectives of women, as exemplified in grass-roots organisations, leads to an inclusive framework for feminist identification.⁹ Feminist praxis de-emphasises the role of leaders and the need for leadership within groups, locating the group’s feminism in its activity rather than in a shared identity or belief system.¹⁰ For this reason Misciagno regards grass-roots women’s groups as representative of de facto feminism.

Furthermore, noting the negative image of the term, Misciagno brackets “feminist” to shift the locus of discussion outside the existing (academic) threshold of feminist identity.¹¹ This allows for groups outside the academy to be included as feminist and for women to be identified by their actions, by the political outcomes of their everyday decisions in child-rearing, family life and the workplace.¹²

In the Japanese context, Buckley observes that increased media attention to feminism and feminists has had the negative effect of homogenizing a diverse field of feminist perspectives, reducing the multiplicity of women’s voices to the “images and sound-bites” of a select few feminists.¹³ This false representation of uniformity narrows the goal posts for “who can be a feminist” identification, and the word “feminist” itself becomes synonymous with the specific work of certain women. The belief that feminists aspire to take-over men’s roles reflects another side effect of bad publicity.¹⁴

Viewing the nurturing/ mothering role as compatible with, rather than counter to, a feminist perspective is of particular significance in Japan, where, as Ueno notes “the mothering, nurturing function is a key concern of feminists and seen as something that must be protected”.¹⁵ The political power of the so-called “housewife activism” can be read as an extension of this nurturing role, with women-as-mothers tackling education reform, genetically engineered food and environment issues.¹⁶

How then, does Notices nurture de facto feminism among women who are reluctant to identify as feminists themselves? Examining member’s perceptions of group participation and interpretations of feminism, I aim to show that the group addresses the needs of its members, working on multiple levels as production sites for feminist praxis.

Motivation to join a group may initially relate to the official function of the group, in this case, English-language discussion and intercultural studies. However, participation also reveals the desire for connection with other women with similar experiences and/ or perspectives.

Khor notes that women's groups in Japan tend to be organised around specific concerns, rather than broad concepts of "women's issues".¹⁷ Extending on this, I argue that while groups may form officially to address a single area of concern, the incentive to participate draws on a broader understanding of "women's issues"- the issues which affect women's lives. Thus when asked for a definition of "women's issues", member Tanaka observed that "[i]ssues regarding nursing the elderly are women's issues. Education issues are women's issues. 'Women's issues' covers pretty much everything!"¹⁸

Notices meetings can be divided into three sections. The first is the English reading and discussion session, at which members read through newspaper articles and roughly translate them into Japanese, using a combination of Japanese and English to negotiate the translation. Articles chosen for discussion in the weekly English class may relate to politics and international affairs, but more often reflect themes such as marriage and divorce statistics, women in business and human rights issues. Following this section is lunch, and finally the afternoon session, which is devoted to editing and administrative tasks, or to a separate English conversation class.

There are generally seven to ten members at meetings, and while subsequent discussion often reflects the themes of the articles studied, the first section of the meeting significantly presents an opportunity for women to relate their own experiences.¹⁹ Discussion of personal themes continues through the next and most informal segment of the meeting, lunch. Most of the morning participants stay for this section, reflecting the fact that almost all members are housewives who are not engaged in paid work and who have a considerable degree of free time.²⁰ If new members are present there are self-introductions, and when a member attends after a holiday or other absence, she is encouraged to speak about her experiences.

While English-language intercultural studies are the official focus of weekly meetings, Notices members emphasised the social element as an incentive to remain with the group. Member Kano speaks about her experience of the group: 'For me, the first motivation was learning English, but after talking like this, [I felt] that here I could talk honestly about things that I couldn't talk about in my other friendships, about what I think and in my own words. And afterwards it wouldn't be a case of "Oh, so and so said that!"'²¹

Setting discussion of their personal issues within the framework of social issues exposes the double-layer to the group aim of information-exchange. As the women advise, question and encourage each other, they generate real knowledge of the 'women's issues' that appear in the studied articles, and offer perspective gained from personal experience of these themes. It is this activity which represents the intersection of two main roads to women's solidarity- the celebration or sharing of experiences as nurturers and/or childbearers, and the acknowledgment of a common oppression.²²

The mothering role represents a long-standing ideal of Japanese femininity.²³ Iwao notes that the term "mother" (*okaasan*) popularly evokes such feelings of warmth and closeness.²⁴ In women's groups however, it is not these stereotyped ideals but the concrete conflicts inherent in the mothering role which takes the foreground in discussion.

When discussing the group's attraction, several women from Notices spoke of wanting to escape from the everyday routine of child-care. Nakane laughingly explained her participation in a government women's centre-run course on economic independence as mostly motivated by the free daycare service provided. 'So I got married without any kind of awareness of feminism or women's economic independence, and it was just because I just happened to take the course and that there was daycare...From then on it was like "I want to take this course! There's daycare! And its free!" That was the only reason- it wasn't that I had any particular interest in feminism, it was just that there was a daycare room and it was free! Free course and free daycare! [laughter].'²⁵ This woman also noted that, inspired by the classes taken, she had ventured into the workplace as a part-time worker, but found the situation too stressful and quit.

The decision to work after marriage and/ or while raising children also reflects the previous generation's decisions and influence. Maeda made her choice not to work based on what she had observed and experienced as a result of her working mother's lifestyle: 'I didn't want such a hectic life. I thought if I had to choose between family and career then I would go for family. On the other hand, my older sister, thinking that she couldn't do both, chose to go with her career and even now she is single and working.'²⁶

While some of the women encountered family pressure to leave their jobs upon marriage, Sone was pressed by her mother to continue working. "She said, 'You've come all this way to become a teacher, you're not quitting now!'"²⁷

Childcare and child-rearing practices represent one of the core aspects of "women's issues". Discussions suggested that while the women had similar experiences of childcare difficulties (such as tiredness and frustration at not being able to work), ideals about raising children were not uniform. The theme of childcare and child-rearing experiences occurred throughout the meetings, and these topics were also popular in the English discussion classes. Due to the varying English language capabilities of members, the dialogues tended to be less fluid than those held in Japanese. Nonetheless, these dialogues allowed the exchange of personal experiences, and also the opportunity to raise questions that may not be easily raised in Japanese dialogues. It seemed that the English-language forum encouraged at least some members to be more assertive and insistent in asking questions and offering opinions. In these discussions, member Itai was often the voice of dissent, and it is her opinions which most closely reflect "traditional" (that is, socially-accepted) ideals. The following dialogue took place in an English discussion class on 25 May 2001:

NAKANE: I have a question about women who have good education and careers- why do they quit job when marriage?

ITAI: I have a question... in my days, in old days, the most important thing for women was to build up children, educate children. When women have job, it's very difficult for children's education. So the first thing is for women to stay home and raise children.

NAKANE: Why during school education is equal? In school boys and girls are equal but..

ITAI: The surroundings- the old days conditions were not good I think. This is the truth I think- women bear babies, don't you think? So if we want or not want we have to be mothers. But the situation is changing I think. I have one daughter and I hope Japan will become a gender-free society.

ITAI (in response to Nakane's question): Nowadays? Those people need a support system. But how, that's the problem.

In this exchange, Itai is critical of perceived changes in mothers' lifestyles and priorities, suggesting that the focus of women's lives has moved from children to work. She acknowledges, however, that society and social demands are inevitably changing, and expresses hope for a gender-equal society – presumably one in which women will share the burdens inherent in childraising.

While many of the members express concern at the cost of raising children and the lack of childcare support for mothers, their personal experiences suggest that the decision not to work is influenced by a number of factors, not merely financial considerations.

TANAKA: Did you feel a difference between kids with one working parent and two working parents?

KOIDE: Not really.

SONE: I did.

ITAI: So children need somebody at home to look after children all times. So in my case my mother was at home until I was 15, and then she went to work for six days a week, and when I came home from school I was so lonely. That's why I didn't want to work when I get children.

KANO: My daughter used to say "why are you always at home? Why don't you work?" Now I come to [Notices] twice week she has to let herself in with key. Now my daughter wants to be with me, but my son doesn't.

NAKANE: I wanted to work but worried about what kids would do at home alone. I worked for 3 years but quit.

ITAI: Why?

NAKANE: Because of childrens' problems.

SONE: My eldest daughter was bullied in primary school and younger daughter was bullied in junior high school, so sometimes I would teach her at home, or we would go to town. [So I couldn't work].²⁸

For members Sone and Nakane at least, emotional care for their children ultimately prohibited work outside the home. While both women express a desire to work and maintain their careers, their care-giving duties as mothers took priority. Implicit in this is the idea that within their households, it is (only) the mother who can (or

should) give such care. One can only speculate on the kind of dialogue that would have preceded these decisions, of course, but given these women's interest in work it seems clear that being a full-time housewife was not their ideal lifestyle, but a necessary sacrifice. Furthermore, in other discussions members were critical of such sacrifice, both as an ideal and as practice, and hoped that it would be different for future mothers.

NAKANE: Japanese women don't use their education for career.

ITAI: Women have to choose. It [childcare] is a personal problem not a public problem. I quit work.

NAKANE: But next generation, maybe she want to have a career, maybe she want a family, what shall she do?²⁹

Thus, while certain issues- such as the lack of childcare, socially expected ideals of mothering and the influence of family on career decisions- reflect common experience for the women in the group, there is some diversity in the way these issues are resolved on a concrete, daily basis. Similarly, while recognition of the importance of mothering reflects the personal experience of most in the group, this does not translate to criticism of women who chose not to have children.³⁰ The experiences of these women, as daughters, aunts and observers of the mothering process, are not distinguished from those of women who have given birth. This suggests a recognition of alternative perspectives of mothering, at the same time highlighting the importance of child-rearing as a "women's issue".

Commonalities in experience of domestic roles, for example, as daughter/wife/mother/daughter-in-law, can be seen to link women at a specific locus, without precluding difference in experience of other roles- as student, worker or neighbour.³¹ In this way Notices members seem to feel relatively free to share their experiences of family life, without forcing an homogenous identity or position on the group.

This openness between members was such that one of the women spoke openly about her husband as "a drunk", revealing the difficulties she had experienced as a result of his alcohol-related problems. However, this openness was not uniform among all group members, nor did it cut across the board of topics. Issues of sexuality, for example, were never raised in Notices meetings, and one woman told me that she would not discuss her own issues (related to sexuality) in that group because the environment was not conducive to that topic, and she felt that the women might react negatively. She felt this to be related to the group's conservative nature, in turn related to their general age-bracket, and the fact that all members are married.

The group's reluctance to engage in discussions of sexuality and sex may thus reflect the generational and social backgrounds of the women. I suggest that the group's avoidance of sexuality in discussion reflects not simply its conservatism or modesty, but also an attention to the accessibility and comfortableness of the group as a space for women of different backgrounds. Silence around issues does not necessarily imply disapproval or repudiation of these issues as significant for women, but does reflect an awareness that such discussions may isolate and

embarrass older and more reserved members. This inclusiveness, however, implicitly involves the exclusion of women such as the member described above, for whom sexuality is central in her engagement with women's issues. It is in the silence around sexuality that the group is most limited and limiting for these members, and its absence as a topic of address both refers to wider restrictions on the discussion of non-heterosexual sexuality and marks the line by which private and public are demarcated.

Interpretations of "feminist" and "feminism" are significantly influenced by an individual's perception of her own womanhood and life experiences as a woman. Many of the women in Notices distanced themselves from the word "feminism", on the grounds that they believed they had not experienced discrimination as a woman. Below, Haneda and Saito explain their reluctance to adopt the term "feminist" as related to their personal experiences of living as a woman.

HANEDA: With feminism, well in my case, I think my life has been all the more easy because I'm a woman. So I haven't really ever felt abused, or discriminated against... I guess my life until now has been blessed.³²

SAITO: I have never been conscious of the difficulty [of being a woman]... I have never had that awareness of being oppressed or being treated badly by men because I'm a woman. I think I was very lucky.

INTERVIEWER: So, do you call yourself 'feminist'?

SAITO: No. I don't feel like I have fought my way here.³³

These women identified themselves as fortunate in having had "easy" lives as women, in having happy marriages, and these opinions were echoed by others in the group. The link between lack of experience of blatant discrimination and the resistance to the term "feminist" suggests that these women believe that "feminist" is a label earned by women who have suffered for their sex and struggled to overcome sex-based oppression. Thus a "feminist" is one with a specific awareness of inequality, or of the "difficulty of being a woman", which has grown from a tangible, personal experience of hardship. This interpretation overlooks indirect or "insignificant" pressures on and discrimination against women, and may partially explain the reluctance of many Japanese women to identify as feminists. Thus, when explaining why she did not identify as a feminist, Ueda said, "The word 'feminism' is what people like Ueno Chizuko do, in the academic sphere. Its not yet something that ordinary people [do]."³⁴

Related to this interpretation, is the association of "feminism" with the non-mainstream, be it lifestyle (as in the case of single career women) or sexuality. Accordingly, women who are not involved in subverting these social norms may be excluded from use of the term.³⁵ Sone, for example, comments: 'I don't know if I can say I am a feminist or not. Because actually, I don't work at the moment so I'm living on my husband's salary, and, well, I'm the one who does most of the housework. Yes... and particularly the cooking, I do most of that.'³⁶

This woman identifies economic dependence on her husband and the fact that she does all the housework as un-feminist. However, when asked about her

interpretation of feminism, Sone offered an inclusive and woman-centred definition, and one into which she clearly fit: "A feminist is someone who aims for women's rights, for equality between men and women. That's what I think."³⁷

The link between fulfillment of "traditional" domestic roles and anti-feminism supports the reluctance of these women – for whom housework is an inescapable demand – to identify as feminist. Although housework itself is not perceived as "un-feminist", the unequal division of household chores was often raised as problematic in discussions (particularly in Notices, where most members are married). While studying an article about a working mother, Notice members were impressed at the woman's expectations of equal participation in housework and child-raising and sympathetic that these expectations were not met by her journalist husband, with Sone remarking "Oh, he's just a man after all".³⁸ While the sharing of household chores is considered to represent a "gender-free" household, this ideal is rarely realised, not least because the long hours expected of workers limit the time that men are even available in their households.³⁹

The negative image of the word "feminist" reflects popular misinterpretation of its objectives. Associated stereotypes ("man-hating", "aggressive", "biased"), are frequently held up by women as grounds for distancing themselves from feminism, and by men as grounds for disparaging feminist views and theories. The conflation of Women's Lib with feminism reflects a distaste for political action by women, while at the same time implying that a specific strand of radical feminism subsumes the whole spectrum of feminist thought and action.⁴⁰

Offen notes that women who are reluctant to identify as feminists might be convinced by the perspectives of relational feminism, which emphasises women's rights as defined by their childbearing and/or nurturing capacities.⁴¹ For some members of Notices, such as Kano, information about broader social definitions of feminism encourages re-interpretation of the term "feminist": 'I was reading in the newspaper the other day, that feminism is not about women doing the same thing as men, or catching up with men, it's about getting men to appreciate women. So when I heard that that was what feminism is, I was convinced.'⁴²

Tanaka, who does identify as a feminist, differentiated between "feminism-as-seen-in-Japan" and the feminism she personally pursued.

INTERVIEWER: How is feminism interpreted in Japan?

TANAKA: Hmm... As radical and harsh, attacking men and purposely acting unfemininely, those kinds of things.... [But] I think that feminists and feminism are about treating each person as important, men and women alike, moving forward together. That's what I think real feminism is. Understanding each other. So in that sense I think I am a feminist.⁴³

Identifying the popular stereotypes of feminism as a misinterpretation reflects these women's familiarity with feminist theory, and their experience in feminist-identified circles. In distinguishing their own feminist beliefs from these interpretations, these women express a qualified support- they endorse a feminism that they understand to be "real" or "essential", as opposed to a popular stereotype, reserving space for their personal, practical experience of feminism.

Enabling such space for personal interpretation, women's groups support the de-institutionalisation of feminism, making it more readily available to women outside the academic world.⁴⁴ Women's groups also offer women the confidence to criticise, to address issues which may otherwise seem insurmountable, and to view their own experiences as authority for an alternative type of feminism. Nakane relates her changing perception of social change: '[I used to think that] social change was something that happened only when society was changed from above. So if I was in a really unhappy situation, I used to think there was nothing for me to do but wait for society to change. But since I started coming here, I've learned that's wrong-you should change society yourself!'⁴⁵

The subsequent feminist framework allows for the inclusion of a diverse range of experiences, (each woman's space reflecting her identity, background, sexuality), to the extent that even those who do not identify as feminists may be included. This inclusiveness addresses the need described by Young, for a feminism "which always refers beyond itself, to conditions and experiences not reflected on".⁴⁶

The women's group examined here provides a forum for women to critique the values, expectations and conflicts inherent in Japanese society. The few women in this group who do choose to identify as feminists, express their feminism quietly and in carefully qualified terms, aware that the word means negative things to many people, while the majority of women distance themselves from the word for the same reasons. Interpreting "feminism" in its negative and narrow mainstream definition will inevitably discourage women from adopting the term, and it is this reasoning which underlies the reluctance of women's groups (and their individual members) to use the word "feminist". Prindeville observes, women's "reluctance to be labeled as feminists [is] understandable when one considers how they believe others define feminism".⁴⁷

The upside of non-identification is inclusiveness. Without explicit feminist identification, there is no boundary imposed by narrow or misconstrued definitions of "feminism". While participation in such groups may presuppose a woman's interest in traditionally-defined "feminist issues", more frequently this may be a consequence, rather than motivation, of entry. The social aspect of women's groups, involving the exchange of information and experience, enables the flow of feminist ideas without demanding subscription to any explicit theory or single perspective.⁴⁸

In offering an area for women to share personal experiences of social expectations, roles and related problems, women's groups create a socially legitimate forum for woman-centred and woman-driven critique. That they do this without adopting an explicitly feminist identity leads one to the question of what practical effect feminist identification actually achieves.

Mandle argues that the lack of feminist-identification represents a lost opportunity to maximise on women's political power.⁴⁹ This suggests that the greatest benefit of feminist identification is the creation of a banner under which women's groups might unite to increase political clout. Offen suggests that defining feminism (and therefore 'feminist') would help activists to "combat the present confusion about and fear of feminism in the public mind".⁵⁰

It is this aim that is addressed by a praxis-focused model of feminism. Emphasising action over theory, training the focus to the movement rather than its

leaders, feminist praxis insists on what Boellstorf calls “the reconfiguration of the grid of similitude and difference”, the question-marking of the yardstick itself.⁵¹ This is arguably the greatest potential of feminist praxis. In challenging the effect as well as the conditions of feminist identification, we are reminded that feminism must adapt if it is to stay focused on the changing needs of women.

NOTES

¹ This paper draws on interviews conducted in Kansai 2000-2002, as part of my doctoral research into women's groups and feminism in Japan. I am grateful to the Japanese government for the Monbukagakusho scholarship that enabled this research. I am also indebted to Dr Lyn Parker and Dr Tomoko Nakamatsu of the University of Western Australia, and to the anonymous *GJAPS* reviewers, for their valuable insights and constructive criticism.

² Iris Marion Young, 'Gender as Seriality: Thinking About Women as a Social Collective', *Signs: Journal of Women and Culture in Society* (SJWCS), 19, 3, (1994), p.733.

³ Members of Notices are quoted in this paper by their (pseudonymous) surnames, following the Japanese custom of addressing colleagues and acquaintances by surname, rather than given name. Quotes are taken from interviews, Notices meetings and Notices English Discussion Classes.

⁴ Gaby Koppers, *Companeras: Voices from the Latin American Women's Movement*, Latin American Bureau (Research and Action), London, 1994, p.5.

⁵ Valerie Sperling, Myra M. Ferree and Barbara Risman, 'Constructing Global Feminism: Transnational Advocacy Networks and Russian Women's Activism', *SJWCS*, 26, 4, (2001), p.1168.

⁶ The fictive name "Notices" was chosen for its similarity to the group's real name, which is English. It is written in both Roman script and in katakana.

⁷ Sandra Buckley, *Broken Silence: Voices of Japanese Feminism*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1997, p.xviii.

⁸ Patricia S. Misciagno, *Rethinking Feminist Identification: The Case for Feminist Praxis*, Praeger, Connecticut, 1997, pp.83-90.

⁹ *ibid.*, p.85.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p.63.

¹¹ *ibid.*, p.55.

¹² *ibid.*, p.94.

¹³ Buckley, p.187.

¹⁴ Countering such misinterpretation, Ueno Chizuko spoke at a public seminar entitled 'Gender-free that Shouldn't Be: Overcoming Feminist-bashing' (*Shite ha Ikenai Jendaa-furii?: Femi-bashingu wo Koete*), on 15 April 2001. Discussing the nature and obstacles of feminism in contemporary Japan, Ueno stated emphatically: "Never have I said I wanted to be a man- who would say that?...A feminist who wants to become a man is a fool".

¹⁵ Ueno Chizuko, 'Interview' in Sandra Buckley, ed., *Broken Silence: Voices of Japanese Feminism*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1997, p.280

¹⁶ Robin LeBlanc, *Bicycle Citizens: The Political World of the Japanese Housewife*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1999. See also Sumiko Iwao, *The Japanese Woman: Traditional Image and Changing Reality*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1993, p.244. The 2001 federal election reflected the political arm of nurturing, with the Women's Party (*Joseitō*) entreating in their campaign: 'For the sake of future children, please help us get into politics!'

¹⁷ Diana Khor, 'Women's Grassroots Activism in Japan', *Feminist Studies* (FS), 25, 3, (2000) p.636.

¹⁸ Tanaka, Notices meeting 27 July 2001. The term used in this case was 'josei mondai', literally translated as "women's problems".

¹⁹ While reading a newspaper article about a woman who was back at work within one hour of giving birth, one Notices member remarked that she could understand this as her own labour had lasted only five minutes. The other women expressed amazement and spoke about their own labor experiences. At the end of this discussion, one of the women turned to me and said "That's something for you to look forward to, Laura!", at which everyone laughed. This comment was an effort to include me in the discussion, as the only woman present who had not given birth, at the same time reflecting the assumption that my future experience would parallel to their own.

²⁰ The women are all tertiary-educated and middle-class, and while many worked prior to marriage and/or childrearing, current economic situations (of married members at least) seem such that they can rely on their husband's income.

²¹ Kano, Notices meeting, 27 April 2001.

²² Karen Offen, 'Defining feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach', *SJWCS*, 14, 1, (1988), p.154

²³ Iwao, p.244. Muriel Jolivet, (translated by A.M Glasheen), *Japan: The Childless Society?*, Routledge, London 1997.

²⁴ *ibid.*, p.126.

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- ²⁵ Nakane, Notices meeting, 25 July 2001.
- ²⁶ Maeda, interview, 24 July 2001.
- ²⁷ Sone, Notices meeting, 13 April 2001.
- ²⁸ Notices English discussion class, 25 May 2001.
- ²⁹ Notices English discussion class, 23 July 2000
- ³⁰ At least three regular members of Notices do not have children.
- ³¹ Khor, p.647.
- ³² Haneda, interview, 30 March 2001.
- ³³ Saito, interview, 30 March 2001.
- ³⁴ Ueda, interview, 27 April 2001.
- ³⁵ Obviously the conflation of feminism with lesbianism is not a phenomenon limited to Japan. Popular (particularly white, middle-class) North American reaction to the 1970s Women's Liberation movement remains an underlying thread in the critique of feminism today. In Australia, the stereotype of feminists as lesbians "have been around since the beginning" and continues to inform conservative anti-feminist rhetoric. Jan Bowen, *Feminists Fatale: The Changing Face of Australian Feminism*, Harper Collins, Sydney, 1998, p.xvii. While resistance to these ideas has come from within the (liberal) feminist camp, it has involved the explicit exclusion non-mainstream (queer) feminists. See Naomi Wolf, *Fire with Fire: The New Female Power and How It Will Change the 21st Century*, Chatto and Windus, London, 1993. For similar issues of stereotyping and mistranslation in South American societies see Kupperts (cited above in Note 4).
- ³⁶ Sone, interview 30 March 2001.
- ³⁷ *ibid.*
- ³⁸ Sone, Notices meeting, 1 June 2001.
- ³⁹ See Iwao and Jolivet.
- ⁴⁰ None of the women interviewed participated in Women's Lib. Most in fact distanced themselves from it: "I didn't participate at all. [laugh] At that time I had absolutely no consciousness of those kind of things", Maeda, Notices meeting, 25 July 2001.
- ⁴¹ Offen, 'Defining feminism', p.152
- ⁴² Kano, Notices meeting, 27 April 2001.
- ⁴³ Tanaka, interview, 25 July 2001.
- ⁴⁴ Ueno Chizuko, 'Interview' in Buckley, ed., p. 284. Ueno's efforts in the popularization of feminism have been furthered by the work of tarento feminist Haruka Yoko, whose first book was a best-seller. See Haruko Yoko, *Learning to Fight with Ueno Chizuko at Tokyo University*, Chikuma Bookstore, Tokyo, 2000. Her subsequent books *I Won't Marry*, Kodansha, Tokyo, 2000, and *Working Women Have Nothing But Enemies*, Asahi Newspaper Publishing, Tokyo, 2001, have built on this success, making Haruka one of the more popular contemporary feminists. By contrast, Tajima Yoko, the Tokyo university professor who became a Diet member, was identified by one of the women in Notices as "The most well-known feminist in Japan!", but was also regarded by this woman as "aggressive and radical".
- ⁴⁵ Nakane, Notices meeting, 25 July 2001.
- ⁴⁶ Young, p.737.
- ⁴⁷ Diane-Michele Prindeville, 'Promoting a Feminist Policy Agenda: Indigenous Women Leaders and Closet Feminism', *The Social Science Journal*, 37, 4, (2000), p.642.
- ⁴⁸ Misciagno, p.63.
- ⁴⁹ Joan D. Mandle, 'Sisterly Critics', *NWSA Journal*, 11, 1, (1999) p.102.
- ⁵⁰ Offen, p.122.
- ⁵¹ Tom Boellstorff, 'The Perfect Path: Gay Men, Marriage, Indonesia', *GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies*, 5, 4, (1999), p.480.