

Gendered Marginalization Processes in Japanese Higher Education: Theory and Practice

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Female learners in Japan continue to remain underrepresented in higher education and leadership positions in society after graduation. Although more women than ever before are continuing their education at the tertiary level, their fields of study (liberal arts, home economics, child education) are those traditionally reserved for women, while their male counterparts major in courses of study (science, engineering, business) that guarantee entry into Japan's corporate world. Why did this gender-tracked educational practice come into existence? What are the ramifications for educators concerned with providing alternative life choices for both male and female students? The panelists on this colloquium examine these questions from various perspectives. After briefly examining the history of women's education in Japan and the intersection of socio-educational policies and local actors' resistance to marginalization, the article concludes with practical suggestions on ways to challenge (hetero)normative educational ideologies about sexuality and gender conformity.

日本の女性は高等教育においても、卒業後の社会における指導的役割という点においても、いまだに不平等な状態におかれている。史上最も多くの女性が高等教育に進む今日でも、男性が企業の中核への道を保障された科学、工学、経営などを専攻するのに対して、女性が学ぶのは教養、家政、保育など伝統的に女性に割り当てられていた分野である。このようなジェンダー別教育の慣習はいかにしてもたらされたのか。教育者が男性、女性双方の学生に、非伝統的な人生の選択肢を提供した場合、どのような影響が考えられるか。本コロキアムのパネリストは、以上の問題点について、さまざまな観点から論じる。続いて本稿は、日本の女性教育史を概観し、社会における教育政策と、それに対する現場の行為者たちの疎外への抵抗がいかに交叉するかを論じたのちに、結びとしてセクシュアリティと画一的なジェンダーに同化にかかわる(ヘテロ)ノーマティブな教育イデオロギーに具体的にどのように対抗していくか提案する

Despite worldwide recognition of the importance of gender issues in every aspect of our lives, educational systems often seem to be operating in a vacuum oblivious to students' and teachers' actual gendered needs and concerns in and outside of the classroom. This situation has serious ramifications especially for female learners in Japan who continue to remain underrepresented in higher education and leadership positions in society after graduation (Japan Almanac, 2001). Although more women than ever before are continuing their education at the tertiary level, their fields of study (liberal arts, home economics, child education) are those traditionally reserved for women, while their male counterparts major in courses of study (science, engineering, business) that guarantee entry into Japan's world of white collar workers. Why did this gender-tracked educational practice come into existence and what are the ramifications for educators concerned with providing alternative life choices for both male and female students? Some answers to these questions are laid out from the various perspectives of the four authors – panelists on the Gender Awareness in Language Education Colloquium at JALT 2004. Although described from different vantage points, the article's sections share a commonality of recurring and overlapping gendered themes in higher educational spheres. We begin with a brief history of tertiary-level education for women in Japan and then focus in on the intersection of socio-educational policies and local actors' ways of resisting marginalization. The article concludes with practical suggestions on ways to challenge (hetero)normative educational ideologies and societal rules about sexuality and gender conformity.

We (the authors of this article, Steve, Andrea, Robert, Louise) are following an interpretive qualitative research reporting style, as opposed to a quantitative research reporting style. Hence, rather than using the third person, we are using *I*. This usage follows the guidelines for qualitative research reporting (especially narrative style reports) mentioned in some international journals like the *TESOL Quarterly*. This usage also brings home the theme of our report, that is, although each of us understands gendered marginalization processes from our own individual standpoints as researchers, authors, and educators, our combined stories share the commonality of a concern with creating more equitable work and research situations (for both ourselves and our students) in Japan.

Marginalization and Women's Education in Japan

Prior to World War II, women's higher education for all practical purposes did not exist in Japan. In the 1930s only 1% of women were enrolled in any form of post-secondary education (Aramaki, 2000), and by 1955 that number had only increased to 5%, with junior college enrollment accounting for 2.6% (Iwao, 1993). Even as recently as 1998 less than 50% of women went on to higher education (Nihon Fujin, 1999, p. 280), and until the mid-90s, women's enrollment in junior colleges was greater than their enrollment in four-year schools. In fact, for many years women's education in Japan was synonymous with junior colleges.

Historically, junior colleges have been seen as finishing schools for women where they can prepare for the family role of *ryosai kenbo* or "good wife, wise mother" (Amano, 1985; Brinton, 1993; Fujimura-Fanselow, 1995; McVeigh, 1997). The concept

of good wife, wise mother was first articulated as part of the Meiji education reforms in the late 1800s, and has persisted to the present. Even today in Japanese society there are still many who feel that if a woman does continue her education past high school, she should do so at a junior college.

As often used by society, the phrase *ryousai kenbo* can be seen as a form of symbolic violence that is not restricted to just junior college students, but instead is extended to all women as a *goal* to strive towards. Amano (1997) suggests that general education for women has been aimed at “obtaining knowledge and attitudes pertinent to the gender roles assigned to women... such orientation [is] clearly reflected in the concentration of women in such courses as Home Sciences and Humanities and the low number of women in professional courses” (p. 217). She goes on to point out that even when women enter professional courses, it is usually in tracks that are associated with “extensions of the role of mother and wife” (p. 217) such as child care worker, primary school teacher, or secretary, all of which can be seen as serving a caregiver function. Related to this good wife, wise mother syndrome, but seldom stated, is the attitude of “let’s educate women, but not too much” as too much education “will make a woman too proud and therefore unfit to be a good wife” (Fujimura–Fanselow, 1995, p. 130). These notions of appropriate roles for women are consequently reflected in the educational system, thus creating an insensitive cycle of gendered marginalization throughout society.

A gender-tracked approach to education also is reflected in parents’ decisions about their children’s educational careers. Brinton (1993) noticed that parents often make “an economic calculation of financial return on the investment of family resources” (p. 209), that is, a university education will make sons more attractive in the work and marriage markets, but brings no advantage to daughters in either market. (p. 210). This makes it wise for parents to invest in a son’s education because it is more likely that he will be able to find a place in the work market and be able to support the family when the parents reach retirement age (Okano & Tsuchiya, 1999, p. 77).

In addition to parental attitudes towards their daughters’ education, traditional ideas concerning male or female roles in the workplace also play a part in the subordination of women. A 1987 survey found that both sexes felt that “women should quit working when children are born but return to work when they are old enough to need less care” (Bureau of Statistics, Management, and Coordination Agency cited in Iwao, 1993, p. 163). A similar question in a 2001 survey found an increase in the attitude that women should take care of young children. The Child Future (*Kodomomirai*) Foundation found that “57% of women and 55% of men agreed with the statement ‘When children are small it is best women devote themselves to child-rearing and wait until the child is older before returning to work’” (Curtin, 2002, para. 5). In addition, 53.3% of men and 41.3 % of women still feel that men should work outside the house while women should stay home (Prime Minister’s Office, 2004). Although this is a change from 1972 when 80% felt that a man should work outside while a wife should stay at home, it still shows that gendered attitudes toward child rearing are still strong in Japan. The point to be made here is not whether staying at home with one’s child until they are older is good or bad; it is that women are being positioned into the sole role of caregiver to the exclusion of other possible roles. This positioning influences other decisions made by women such as when to marry and whether or not to have children.

In light of the above, it is not surprising that young women are confused about their future prospects. In Yoshida’s (1988) analysis of her female students’ essays in her high school Japanese language arts class, she found the following: “Many young women have conflicting feelings about their futures; on the one hand, they are eager to be involved in society and to have careers, yet, on the other hand, often they feel that they ought to devote themselves to caring for their children while they are small.” (Cited in Kameda, 1995, p. 120). These conflicting views are reinforced by employment practices. Employers expect women to only work a few years before marrying and “retiring” to raise children, and have adjusted their hiring practices accordingly. Women just out of high school or two-year junior colleges are generally hired over those women who have been educated at university for four years; the reasons are that university educated women have fewer years to work at the company before they leave the job, and they are more expensive to hire because they are more educated. (Creighton, 1996; Okano & Tsuchiya, 1999)

Such employment practices exclude “women from recruitment and employment, job rotations and promotions, and education and training.” (Nakano, 1996, pp. 72-73) Companies hesitate to invest much in women since their term of employment is viewed as being limited. Instead of treating women fairly, many employers “confine women primarily to part-time employment where unstable positions and bad working conditions are a given,” leading to the “use of women’s labor...[as] nothing but a rationalization for and stabilizing mechanism for wage gaps between men and women.” (Nakano, 1996, p. 66) Women are regarded as cheap labor, unwelcome to participate in the permanent-employment system. (Creighton, 1996; Fujimura-Fanselow, 1995)

In 2001, Japan was ranked 41 by the United Nations according to the Gender Empowerment Measure, which looks at “three basic dimensions of empowerment— economic participation and decision-making, political participation and decision-making and power over economic resources” (United Nations Development Programme, 2003, para.1). This was a decline from its 2000 ranking of 32nd. In all these areas, Japanese women lag behind women in many other industrial nations, and even some developing ones. They are relatively inactive in politics, hold few top managerial positions, and on average earn less than half the amount men do. Namibia, the Philippines, Croatia, and the Dominican Republic all rank higher than Japan in the area of gender empowerment.

In this section I have tried to present a historical summary of many of the ideological issues of women’s education in Japan. We have seen how parents, schools, and employers’ attitudes all converge to treat women as second-class citizens in the area of education. We have also seen how women’s education has a direct effect on their job prospects. “Unless women are given full equality of educational opportunity, they cannot hope to participate in society on an equal footing with men.” (Hara, 1995, p. 105)

Female EFL Educators in Japan

Although significant steps are being taken in Japan for improving the positions of women in society, the work environment of female EFL educators in higher education is one area where gendered discrepancies continue to proliferate in both overt and covert

ways. When examining the reasons for this situation it is crucial to understand that sexual discrimination is only one of many factors involved in the marginalization of female educators within a male-dominated workplace. Narrative accounts of nine female EFL teachers in tertiary institutions in Japan (Simon-Maeda, 2004) revealed that socioeconomic and racial background, along with sexual orientation or physical ableness, were oftentimes more salient than whether one was a man or woman in the construction of professional identities. For example, because of the high priority placed on native-speakers of center-based Englishes (e.g., North America, U.K., Australia) throughout the ELT world (Crystal, 1997; Phillipson, 1992), women of color from outer circle countries have a particularly difficult time during the EFL job-hunting process. As Diana, a Black South African educator said,

What I feel is the Japanese are going to look at me, and I have to send a photo, and they'll just chuck it to the side when they see, first, South African; she can't speak English. Yet English is my first language and – I mean it is my first it's not my native – but it's my first language I feel they are going to look, they already have their stereotypical, you know, this teacher should be Australian or American or New Zealander or British or Canadian and then, you know, "You can't teach," or "What are you doing applying?" (participant interview cited in Simon-Maeda, 2004, p. 422)

Mariah, a Filipino national, also experienced racial discrimination while applying for a teaching position.

So, in the hiring announcement (for an EFL position) itself, I already felt there is a bias. And when he asked me over the phone, asking me about my country's name, so there I remembered the announcement Though I wanted to tell him that, "Why don't you just give me a chance to show if I'm capable or not? And if you think I'm not, then I'll give up." (participant interview, cited in Simon-Maeda, 2004, pp. 421-422).

A look at the EFL job advertisements in any local English language newspaper in Japan reveals that preference is given to native-speakers of English from center-based countries. This ethnocentric hiring policy serves to severely restrict employment possibilities for women of color from outer circle countries and other marginalized individuals who do not fit the *gaijin no sensei* stereotype that most educational institutions feel will appeal to their EFL student population.

Another powerful component in marginalization processes in educational contexts is the oppressive homophobic atmosphere in Japan (Summerhawk, McMahill, & McDonald, 1998). Messages posted on the Nihon Dykenet contain accounts from lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT) individuals who feel that they must remain *in the closet* in order to secure and maintain a teaching position. As a consequence, the LGBT subjectivities of teachers become disconnected from their teaching practices, creating a marginalizing situation not only for themselves, but also for those students of non-conformist sexual identities who miss the opportunity to explore sexuality issues in a safe educational environment with teachers and classmates. The following quote highlights the considerations that LGBT women must deal with in Japanese hetero-normative work contexts:

Why am I so closeted? That is a question I sometimes ask myself because in theory I think it would be better if more and more lesbians and other sexual minorities were out. What am I afraid of? That people's attitudes towards me might change. That my contract might not be renewed. That I might be laughed at. That I might become a more public figure. That I might always be viewed only as "the lesbian" rather than the multifaceted person I am. (cited in Simon-Maeda, 2004, p. 423)

Not to be undone, however, by a defeatist attitude towards the injustices they experience in their lives, women of different classed, raced, and socio-educational backgrounds are mobilizing personal and networking sources to improve their private and professional situations. To counter, for example, the *native speaker fallacy* (Phillipson, 1992) that privileges native speakers of English in ELT situations, educators such as Julia, who is in charge of hiring teachers at her institution, seek out nonnative teachers of English in order to give students a more realistic model of English speakers around the world, most of whom speak English as a second language (Crystal, 1997).

I felt for our students, it's risky, I know, I've taken a big risk and I don't know how it's going to go, a teacher from Afghanistan. I want the students . . . to see a model. I'd like to have a Japanese actually teaching listening, speaking. . . . I feel that really strongly; they don't have to sound like a Brit or an American. . . . and the people they're going to be communicating with in most instances are going to be nonnative speakers. (participant interview, cited in Simon-Maeda, 2004, p. 426)

In sum, when taking a look at gendered marginalization processes in higher education it is important to include a discussion of the complex interaction of one's idiosyncratic personal and professional background operating within or against the oftentimes constraining aspects of Japanese societal contexts.

The following sections illustrate how EFL educators can introduce pedagogical innovations that are more in tune with their own teaching philosophies and can provide students with a more liberating learning environment. This agenda for change involves the introduction of topics that are usually marginalized as *inappropriate* in an EFL curriculum.

AIDS Education and EFL

Just as people can be marginalized in the system of teaching and learning in Japan, topics can be as well. One academic area that is particularly subject to marginalization is the topic of HIV/AIDS. The current situation of AIDS in Japan is of great concern to doctors and AIDS organizations as they continue to watch the rates of HIV infection rise month by month. Yet, the issue is rarely, if ever, given more than superficial inclusion in the Japanese junior or senior high school classroom, and is almost never addressed at the university level.

In the JALT 2004 Colloquium, I outlined a 6-week *workshop* that was part of the program for English majors at Nanzan University in Nagoya. The focus of this course was HIV/AIDS. The material covered in the first week included basic information on the HIV virus, how it slowly kills the immune system, where people can be tested, statistics for Japan, and very basic

information on available treatment. In the second week, students conducted a *teach-in* by teaching others in their small group about one particular STD they had researched for homework. Through this study, they learned that having one STD makes it easier for a person to contract HIV. In the classes that followed, we looked at the history of HIV in the U.S. and the current situation in countries around the world. I used several video clips from NHK news and documentaries to illustrate how HIV/AIDS affects people on a personal level. This also brought out aspects of the epidemic such as discrimination, child sex trafficking, and the most powerful reason for the spread of the disease, poverty.

In the last class we addressed the sub-topic, “Power and the Spread of HIV,” in which students conducted another *teach-in*. Their research encompassed other channels that help the epidemic to expand. These include the use of rape as a tool of war, female genital mutilation (FGM), adult and child sex trafficking, educational and power differences between men and women, and children who are orphaned as a result of the AIDS epidemic. Although the topic was very serious and, at times, rather depressing, we ended on an up note by discussing what steps university students who have very little money or time can do locally or globally to address the AIDS crisis. Many said they could educate their families and friends, and many said they would be sure to protect themselves and their partners from infection.

Three years ago, a small group of students at our university formed a circle called “The Circle for AIDS Study and Teaching” (CAST). The members study about HIV/AIDS and go to elementary, junior, and senior high schools to teach students about HIV/AIDS. This offers the Workshop students another alternative, should they want to join a student-led group. Overall the workshop was very well received. Comments from the students in their Action Logs over the six weeks revealed a deepening understanding of the virus and the many other issues that are involved in the worldwide epidemic. They began to understand how power imbalances between men and women were the source of many social problems that contributed to increased infection rates in women and girls:

I researched “Women, Power, and HIV Infection.” I understood really about women’s weaker position than men, biologically, economically, socially, culturally. “Vulnerable” was the key word. When I researched, I looked at “Women are not expected to...” For example, women are not expected to discuss and make decisions about sexuality. That kind of old thinkings are ridiculous. I feel angry. Because I am a woman, I can do something for women. I can counsel women in the future (as an example). Because of this class, I think I want to do something I can do. (M.S., female)

Some students became aware of the problem of sex trafficking for the first time:

I read “Smuggling for Sex.” It says about the present situation of prostitution in Japan. I thought those kinds of Thai and Philippino women understand their jobs to earn lots of money. But according to this article, it’s not true. Some women were deceived and taken to Japan. They are totally victims. (N.N., female)

The female students were able to reflect on their own situations here in Japan. Part of the course included a worksheet on how to talk with your partner, and an activity in which the students could choose to role play the various phrases if they felt comfortable doing so.

I thought the role play was quite useful. Although we know it is important protect us and our partners, we can not think of any good or nice phrase to say at the scene. I am going to use them if needed. (M.T., male)

Today my partner (name) was a boy. At first we were both embarrassed to talk about such a sexual topic. But I realized during the class that to exchange opinions with boys was very very important. You know, in Japan, men and women take sex education separately in junior and senior high school. There was no chance to exchange our opinions or how men felt about our sex. [My partner] had very good attitude about sex. He said of course he could buy and use condom and also said it’s proper for all men. I was very glad to hear that and glad to exchange our opinions, glad to attend this class. I want all men to say “It’s proper” like him. (T.K., female)

Many wrote in their Action Logs that they felt they would be able to talk with their partner about how to protect themselves. Indeed, several wrote that as a result of the information they learned in this class, they had already talked with their partner, and some had discussed being tested. In the six weeks of the course, with four different groups of about 50 students in each, there were no negative comments. In general, there was a drastic change in the way the students viewed the disease and the relationship of economics, education, culture, politics, and power—especially of women, children, and refugees—to the spread of AIDS. The students showed great satisfaction in having the opportunity to look deeply into the issue on a local and global level.

By marginalizing AIDS awareness and other important issues, we also dismiss the crucial nature of key information that can lead students to consider topics from alternative viewpoints, and we do not give students credit for being able to critically analyze that information and apply it to their immediate lives. This analysis can spur a change in attitudes based on a greater understanding of people and cultures that are dissimilar to their own.

The Topics of Desire and Sexuality in the EFL Classroom

A recent special issue of *Language and Communication* (February, 2004) dealt with the subject of “Language and Desire” in which the journal contributors explored the ways in which language, both written and spoken, is often constitutive of desire. These authors promote the framing of gender and sexuality issues as an exploration of the meanings of desire. Some researchers fear that such a move could lead to *mystification*, but this need not be the case. Furthermore, by avoiding these *taboo* topics in the EFL classroom, educators are in effect, divorcing language learning from an essential part of college-age students’ lives.

I have found that Bracher’s (1999) theoretical analysis allows for an understanding of the complexities of people’s behaviors and the cultural products they make investments in. At the same time, it provides educational practitioners with a framework

of classification for use in the language classroom allowing the learner to distinguish the different types of desire being evoked in, say, a fragrance commercial, a Hollywood romance, or in a motor-show (auto show) exhibit. Above all, Bracher's analysis acknowledges the role of the unconscious in people's lived experiences, and how this acknowledgment can enrich the teaching of written composition, of poetry, and of engagement with literary pieces.

I have just begun the process of trying to incorporate this approach into my language classroom with graduate students in a cultural studies introductory course in a women's college (intermediate to advanced L2 language level). I have presented a module on "Desire for Food," in connection with issues of gender inequality. In a media-saturated cultural environment, people's need for food often becomes entangled within a web of conflicting desires that reflect insecure masculinities and femininities. The video documentary "Slim Hopes" (Media Education Foundation) provides ample data to show how mass-media representations of one particular body type for women ("V-shaped") leads to intense feelings of dissatisfaction with one's one body, as well as underpinning a lucrative diet industry (\$33 billion dollars annually in the U.S. alone). While women have been taking up less and less physical and symbolic space in media imagery over the past forty years, representations of men focus on threatening images of strength, domination, and toughness. This phenomenon is illustrated and explained effectively in the video documentary "Tough Guise" (Media Education Foundation). Students from my cultural studies course engaged with issues raised by "Tough Guise," as well as reflecting on other instances of insecure masculinities from popular culture. An episode of the U.S. situation comedy "Seinfeld" saw the character George feel intense anxiety because he received a massage from a man and found the experience highly stimulating! Later references to the unwanted appearances of men during his sexual daydreaming also points to the role of unconscious desires and unstable sexualities. Similarly, an episode from the U.S. sitcom "Will and Grace" shows the gay character, Jack, express his anxiety after he received a lap dance from a female erotic dancer and found that experience highly stimulating. The value of the inclusion of this clip, apart from its entertainment value, is the highlighting of self-limiting nature of monolithic categorizations of sexual identity. Once a person makes an identification with a particular social category, whether heterosexual or homosexual, they experience social pressures to suppress those desires, images, and thoughts that seem out of synch with homogeneous identity categories.

Returning to the topic of desire for food and gendered and sexual subjectivities, in my classroom I made use of a humorous illustration of these issues by showing another scene from "Seinfeld," one that we actually acted out in the classroom. In this scene, Jerry is eating out with a prospective girlfriend, Holly. During the conversation, Jerry mentions that he is not much of a meat eater. This causes a disappointed reaction that makes Jerry rush to reassure Holly that he is not "one of those!" (a Vegetarian? a Homosexual?). When the time comes to order food, Holly opts for a meat dish while he orders a salad. In a moment of awkward silence, Holly and the waiter trade looks of embarrassment and disapproval, something Jerry notices immediately as he thinks to himself, "Just a salad, just a salad, just a salad!" What sort of message has he just sent out to these people? Later in the show we see Jerry over-compensating in reassuring Holly of his love for meat and his readiness to "pack an artery" to show her he's a manly meat-eater. This scene stimulated a lively discussion among my students. I think it promoted an awareness of masculinity as a zone of socially defined constructs that have an arbitrary nature. Why isn't it manly to eat salad (or quiche for that matter?) Who decides what gender signifiers count for recognition as denoting "normal" men and women? How does media imagery evoke desire for certain types of bodies in a way that perpetuates psychological insecurities and gender asymmetries? All of these questions hold a good deal of interest for students, as well as providing them with a chance to reflect on desire in their own lives. The notion of desire is a multi-faceted one that can enrich not only pedagogies of gender and sexuality, but also of diverse issues that inflect our embodied lives, both in conscious and unconscious dimensions.

Conclusion

In diverse ways, educators concerned with addressing Japan's long history of gendered marginalization processes both in and outside of the classroom are developing teaching strategies that constitute an ethically and pedagogically sound fit between teaching philosophies and learner needs. However, in light of the progress that still needs to be made in higher education and career opportunities for female learners in particular, it behooves EFL educators to more seriously consider gender in their teaching practices. Because female EFL educators continue to grapple with their marginalized professional status, teacher preparation programs need to include case studies of teachers whose stories reveal the underlying hegemonic ideologies of Japanese society. Both our male and female students will benefit from exposure to educators committed to creating a more equitable work and learning environment in higher education that will better prepare graduates to challenge the constraining aspects of a sexist society. AIDS education in Japan needs on-going support from educational agencies in order to develop a more critical awareness among young adults just beginning to explore the multiple dimensions of their gendered, sexual selves. This colloquium was an opportunity for the authors to share theoretical insights on marginalization processes in higher education and to offer practical suggestions on how to create a more liberating educational environment for both teachers and students.

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