

Japanese Women and Critical Feminism: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

Paralleling Western feminist movements, the pursuit of equal rights between the sexes by Japanese feminists have a rich and diverse history. Despite the available records of the feminist movement from its conception to its current efforts, the impacts of the movement remain unaddressed by academia, leaving out the voices of the young women whose lives are intimately affected by the accomplishments and failures of feminism. The purpose of this qualitative study is to study the perceptions of young Japanese women in college regarding their nation's feminist movement, its successes, and its differences with American feminism. Qualitative data was collected through open-ended questions during interviews resulting in various opinions and experiences regarding the feminist movement's influences.

The feminist movement has a long history of progress regarding women's rights in Western nations, such as the United States, from the first wave in the twentieth century to the current modern day third wave. The fight for the equality of the sexes and for improvements regarding women's sociopolitical standing was not confined geographically, as Asian nations and their women have forged their own historical movements alongside Western feminism in the face of the patriarchal societies in which they live. Japan, a nation classified as a patriarchal society, is a notable place where women have to struggle against the gendered inequalities of a culture that is fixated on maleness. Unfortunately, within present Western European and American academia, there is a lack of literature regarding the cultural impact of the feminist movement on Japanese women's personal experiences through their own opinions and without being a part of the movement. The literature, however, does focus on historical aspects or singular cultural impacts that were presented from Japanese feminists themselves. Therefore, by interviewing Japanese women, this study provides insight from Japanese women concerning their personal connections with feminism in regards to historical and current knowledge, gender inequality, and progress.

Literature Review

With the growth that feminist movements have undergone within the last century, several theories developed in the academic application and literature. Liberal feminism's central focus is to dismantle discrimination against the female sex, particularly in the workforce, and create an equal standing between the sexes (Maugère & Ueno, 2010; Rosser, 2005). However, feminist theories, studies, and literature not only focus on how patriarchal societies singularly affect gender, but they incorporate other aspects of identity, such as class, age, race, and sexuality (Allen & Jaramillo-Sierra, 2015; Weber, 1998). Another theory is that of socialist feminism, where inequalities result from capitalist and patriarchal cultures that unevenly distribute labor by sex, undermining female contributions within the home. Politically, socialist feminism also aims to achieve a more democratic society in which labor is equally valued (Gordon, 2013; Rosser, 2005). Unlike socialist feminism, intersectional and other ethnic feminisms address the separate traits abovementioned, addressing the interactions between these aspects in regards to the oppression and discrimination that various women face based on their patriarchal communities and traditions (Carbin & Edenheim, 2013; McKibbin, Duncan, Hamilton, Humphreys, & Kellett, 2015; Rosser, 2005). Postcolonial feminist and transnational feminist theories focus on the Westernization of countries exposed to North and Western European countries, further addressing the discrepancies in race, class, and sex, as well as its connection to the power imbalances of both the patriarchy and the influence of the West (Kuo, 2015; Rosser, 2005). There are many other feminist theories, but the aforementioned feminisms are applicable to and utilized by Japanese feminists in understanding their own unique cultural experiences.

According to Maugère's (2010) interview with Chizuko Ueno, a Japanese feminist, liberal feminism in Japan is often rejected because it does not address patriarchy and solely focuses on placing women on equal footing with men. In this same interview, Ueno also points out that the Japanese feminist movement has utilized diverse methods of addressing different forms of gendered inequalities that Japanese women face that are beyond the typical scope of liberal feminism. In ZerbeEnns (2011) work, liberal feminism is also criticized by modern Japanese feminists, because it is too male-centered and does not focus on the unique value of women. Early twentieth century writings of Japanese women, which have since been considered early Japanese feminist literature, created a foundation for modern feminist theory in Japan. In the beginning of the twentieth century, Raichō Hiratsuka, who was one of the figureheads of the feminist movement at the time, published the magazine *Seitō*, which brought to light women's issues surrounding marriage, the role of motherhood, and problems with adultery (Tomida, 2005). In her article, Tomida (2005) also points to the fact that this early feminist magazines made no effort for political reform and instead focused on the sharing of experiences between women, providing an outlet and unifying women in their issues.

This slightly changed with the development of the Association of New Women, as it was led by Hiratsuka, Fusae Ichikawa, and Mumeo Oku, as their new magazine *Women's League*, shared articles on petitions to change laws prohibiting women from partaking in politics, such as the Police Security Law, and shared international news of other feminist movements in differing countries (Hayakawa, 1995; Tomida, 2005). These two magazines, which heavily focused on feminist issues and were run by feminists, became the defining literature of the movement from which modern Japanese feminists draw from (Tomida, 2005). These records were not the only source of literature, as presented in Umemoto's (2010) analysis of Fumiko Enchi's writings through the mid-twentieth century, as they touch on such early writings and work. The issues of oppressed sexuality and its effects on psychological health in Japanese women were repeatedly mentioned and represented through the several works examined. Additionally, there was also the overlapping aspect of the older ages of the Japanese women in Enchi's works, reflecting what could arguably serve as an example of intersection list feminist theory. Women's writings in Japan at that time not only focused on sexual oppression, but also of cultural identity that transcended the confines of Japan's islands. Within the 1925 work of Etsu Sugimoto's *A Daughter of a Samurai*, Kuo (2015) argues that Sugimoto's reflection on being an American-Japanese citizen and immigrant exemplifies transnational feminist ideas due to the oppressions Sugimoto faces as a woman from the two patriarchal societies. She was a Japanese immigrant who lived within a culture that was highly exposed to Westernization, and she expresses the difficulties with the duality of her identity and her expectations. Furthering these ideas of transnationalism, Mettler's (2014) article discusses the early interactions between American and Japanese women and oppression by explaining that the two groups of women faced similar forms of gendered inequality outside of feminist theories in regards to patriarchal oppressions on gender, race, class, and other identity traits. Built on the aforementioned literature from early feminists, much of the current Japanese feminist theory focuses on globalization and national issues involving the Japanese woman's identity (Kitagawa, 2011).

Early writings of Japanese women do not encompass all that the early Japanese feminist movement aimed to accomplish and instead highlighted the struggles of women during that time period. Beginning after the Meiji Restoration, towards the end of the nineteenth century, the 'first wave' of Japanese feminism began (Hayakawa, 1995; Kuo, 2015; Tomida, 2005). The feminist movement at the time worked within the People's Rights Movements, where women would speak out against the inequality that women faced and attended political meetings until, as aforementioned, the Police Security law, prohibited women from doing so (Hayakawa, 1995; Tomida, 2005). Much of the movement for these feminist speakers were to travel across the nation, demand and persuade for equality and better rights, as well as to question their role as a wife and mother. Due to the constraints on women that were implemented by Confucian ideals, women's only role was within the household, but soon was adapted by Japanese society, educational institutions, and by governmental officials, as the ideal of *ryosaikenbo*, or 'good wife, wise mother,' during the modernization period of Japan during the late nineteenth century; with this new ideal, women were still restrained to the domestic sphere of work, emphasizing the importance of becoming mothers and prioritizing their husbands (Dalton, 2013; Hayakawa, 1995; Koyama, 2012; Takahashi, 2011; Borovoy, 2001; Kuo, 2015; Valutanu, 2011).

During this time of traditional gender oppression, Japanese feminists aimed to gain women's suffrage and political rights in the domestic, private, and public aspects of the culture; women's suffrage was achieved at the end of World War II, but political rights were still limited and feminist involvement was overshadowed by the occupation of American forces (Kuo, 2015; Quataert & Wheeler, 2014).

Despite the minimal progress through the first and second wave of feminism, it did not deter women from meeting politically and petitioning for change in the face of their limited political prowess (Hayakawa, 1995). In their continued efforts, there was evident focus on motherhood and sexuality when it came to political rights, due to the role confinement that Japanese society placed upon women, as the Association of New Women, which were primarily upper and middle class citizens, and other feminists from separate organizations addressed in their advocacy (Burman & Aono, 2011; Umemoto, 2010; ZerbeEnns, 2011).

In the mid-twentieth century and into the modern era, Japanese feminism shifted its focus on a myriad of issues once they gained more political liberties and rights. One primary and ongoing issue resulted from post-World War II legal progresses in regards to rights and feminist theory applications. The issue of 'comfort women,' or what Japanese scholars and activists call sex-slavery, rose from the Japanese government forcing Korean, Chinese, and other groups of women to serve as prostitutes to give relief to Japanese male soldiers (Kazue, 2016; Muramoto, 2011; Ueno, 2003). Japanese feminists still continue to address the lack of progress being done for the victims by the Japanese government and understand the victim's perspective despite the cultural divide (Burman & Aono, 2011; Kuki, 2013; Kitagawa, 2011). One such instance comes in the form of The Women's International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan's Military Sexual Slavery in 2000, where victims and feminists came together to symbolically testify to judges in order to overcome the hardships they face as victims and as women (Mackie, 2005).

The movement promotes more laws that protect or give more rights to Japanese women aside from suffrage and equal citizenship. For example, anti-prostitution laws and marriage equality were some of the first legal issues that Japanese feminists tackled, which resulted in anti-prostitution laws in 1956 and the Prostitution Prevention Law in 1957 (Kiyosue, 2000; Muramoto, 2011). Muramoto (2011) also points to laws that now prohibit gendered violence against women, such as sexual harassment, stalking, and domestic violence. To counter anti-prostitution attitudes, modern feminists also argue that it is against their interests to prevent sex workers from staying in their profession. Kiyosue (2000) argues that by thinking negatively of sex workers, they uphold the Japanese sexist and patriarchal view of women who use their sexuality as worth less than other women, and as such, that by understanding the differences of all Japanese women regardless of their profession or how they are exploited, the feminist movement can grow more unified. The government instituted the Basic Act for Gender Equal Society of 1999, which called for more equal treatment towards Japanese women and received backlash alongside its feminist supporters (Maugère, 2010). This led into the Gender Equality Basic Plan of 2000, where Fujita (2006) explains that women were more openly encouraged to participate in law-making and other improvements that could better decrease discrimination towards women in companies, education, and other institutions. There was also a feminist agenda in the Diet, or Japanese parliament, decision to make the office of the Gender Equality Bureau to make efforts to address a myriad of women's issues and gendered violence after the Gender Equality Basic Plan (Eto, 2008; Fujita, 2006; ZerbeEnns, 2011). Lastly, when it comes to the application of Japanese feminist theories, much of it comes in the form of focusing on the worth of Japanese women and treating the psychological problems that come with the societal oppressions or gendered violence that they face (Muramoto, 2011; ZerbeEnns, 2011). Japanese feminists have implemented therapy offices to address these issues since the 1980's, such as Kiyomi Kawano's Society of Japanese Feminist Counseling Practices and Studies in 1994, Kuniko Muramoto's Feminine Life Cycle Institute in 2000, as well as other psychological and research institutions that focus on gendered issues unique to Japanese women and treatment (Burman & Aono, 2011; ZerbeEnns, 2011). There is also dialogue shared between feminists to change the philosophical discussion as well to use a feminist lens that includes the women's viewpoint and position in society, as well as allows women to question their own role within the culture and in politics (Kanai, 2011; Kitagawa, 2011).

Unfortunately, as Dales (2010) points out, these changes leave out women who do not ascribe to the typical life patterns that the Japanese government expects of the female population, such as women who do not marry, do not have children, or women who marry without a desire to have children. Despite the efforts of improving the Japanese woman's life politically and culturally, there are other shortcomings when it comes to the progress that Japanese feminists have committed themselves to as well.

Childrearing, for example, burdens women due to the heavily influential ideal of *ryosaikenbo*. Despite its dismantlement, resulting in a lack of childcare centers and parental leave for the mother, Japanese society still sees the responsibility of childcare to fall on mothers' shoulders (Burman & Aono, 2011; Dales, 2010; Fujita, 2006; Takahashi, 2011).

Another issue that Japanese feminists are working against is the sexualization of young girls within the culture, which contributes to underage prostitution and problematic pedophilic behaviors (Chizuko & Shockey, 2010; Lam, 2003; Ueno, 2003). However, the underage prostitution, or *enjokosai*, is argued to be empowering for young girls who use their sexuality to undermine the value of purity and to exercise some control over the Japanese patriarchy by benefitting economically from men (Chizuko, 2003; Lam, 2003). As Chizuko (2003) points out, *enjokosai* is two-sided in that the young girls and men involved inadvertently uphold the patriarchy despite their feminist claims. Moreover, there is a negative public perception regarding women more generally in Japanese society as well, especially when it concerns the violence that women face and the victimization that they encounter (Takahashi, 2011). In a study conducted by Uji et al. (2007), they found that professionals who hold onto traditional ideas about women's roles display discriminatory attitudes that may affect how they treat female victims of rape or other assaults. York (2011) also found this to be true in the United States where traditional gender role attitudes were statistically significant in predicting rates of intimate partner violence, rape, and sexual assault.

This research explores the historical progress made by Japanese feminists including legal changes, institutional change, and areas that have seen little to no progress in reaching equality and how it relates to young Japanese women in their experiences. The existing research does not include qualitative data from Japanese women. As such, this study provides insight regarding young Japanese women's perceptions of the feminist movement, their reflections on history, and their comparisons of Japanese and Western feminism at their point in life as college students. This research addresses four questions: 1) What is a Japanese feminist? 2) What is Japanese feminism? 3) Has Japanese Feminism been successful? 4) How is Japanese Feminism different from United States Feminism?

Methodology

Participants

The participants in the study were ten young adult women attending Chukyo University, in Nagoya, Japan, with ages ranging from eighteen to twenty-two. All participants had a proficient understanding of the English language in reading, writing, and speaking. However, two participants had difficulty answering the questions regarding the feminist movement entirely, and as such, only eight young women participated.

Data

Interviews with participants were recorded and transcribed after they signed a consent form. Due to the language barrier, the transcribed interviews were translated and put into coherent English without altering the answers. This research aims to provide a current and cultural context for future research. This research is a qualitative content analysis of interviews of young Japanese women in college. After initial contact with interviewees, emails were sent out to each member to set up a time, date, and public place, in order to conduct the interview. During the meetings, two consent forms with a verbal explanation from the researcher were given alongside a list of the survey questions. After gaining consent and answering any questions the interviewee may have had, the interview was conducted to completion, with the researcher pausing the recording if the participant asked or had any concerns. The optional question of the differences between United States feminism and Japanese feminism was asked at the end of the interview, with no obligation of needing an answer from the participant. The researcher then reminded the participant about confidentiality and their ability to withdraw from the study.

Results

Japanese Feminism

From the eight women who were interviewed, seven stated that Japanese feminism was a movement for the equality between men and women. As one interviewee described, "It's like a movement or advocacy to have equal rights with the men in terms of their social life, politics, education, and in many other fields."

Contrary to this, one said that feminism was about providing women with a position better than their male counterparts in society. In her interview, she made the statement, “There is really few people who try to get equality for guys and women, male and female, but people who try to push feminism in Japan kind of... different from making it equal. Like they try to make the position better for women and not the male.”

When prompted about how Japanese society as a whole perceives the feminist movement within the country, there were a variety of answers among the eight interviewees. However, five did note that the majority of the public are either not fully aware of the movement, as it is not commonly known or discussed amongst the Japanese public. As one interviewee answered, “They don’t think about it so much, they just think about society, economy, and politics. They don’t focus on the Japanese feminists and those problems so much.” When expanding on how the Japanese public perceived feminism, one stated that the government saw the movement as troublesome due to the call for changes in laws, another woman stated that Japanese men found the movement annoying, and a different woman said that the people she knew considered it to be a positive movement. Furthermore, two interviewees also pointed that the Japanese public saw it as radical due to “women requesting to be more than men as the best way for women.”

Goals of the Feminist Movement

All of the interviewees agreed that equality for the sexes was the purpose of the feminist movement, and the women proposed that there were other objectives as well. Two of the eight women stated that equal employment opportunities and work status was one such goal, with an additional interviewee mentioning that the issue of unequal pay. One of the aforementioned two, as well as another interviewee, brought up the issue of nurseries and child care facilities. One woman described it, “In terms of nurseries, they’re trying to increase the number of nurseries, so that the women can start working. Like, not only taking care of their children. They can do both, they can take care of their kids while working is one of the goals.”

In one specific employment aspect, one interviewee described how there has been demand from both feminists and the government to include more women in the Japanese Parliament. Another woman also brought up the traditional gender role expectation that women are expected to stay at home and do chores. This interviewee said that ‘equality in treatment and chores, as women should not just have to cook and clean,’ were one of the goals, but also brought up the point that it may differ individually. For example, she does not like doing housework and her mother enjoys housework. One interviewee mentioned the goal of equality in education; however, another interviewee pointed out, that in order to achieve these goals, Japanese feminists should raise awareness of the movement. She stated, “It’s, in that sense, this focus, like making women aware of the inequality, it hasn’t changed from the past, like the past era.” This same woman then went on to describe Hiratsuka Raichō, an early Japanese feminist, and how she utilized making magazines in order to make women aware or ‘awake’ of societal role.

Feminist Progress

Seven of the eight interviewees stated that they believed the Japanese feminist movement had been successful and mentioned specific accomplishments, but one said that she saw no progress from the feminist movement. In her words, she said, “No, I think they haven’t done anything.” The progress noted by the interviewees ranged in its effectiveness on differing cultural aspects, such as the worth of their work or handling of sexual violence, and institutions, such as employers or governmental bodies. Three mentioned that, in regards to employment, there has been demand to make workplace opportunities more open and available to both men and women. One woman stated, “The economy forces both [men and women] to work so they can meet their income in their life... The companies are trying to promote [women working] and also trying to have the system that the women also can work for a long time.” Rather, she explained that companies were aiming to involve more women in white-collar work in life-long careers as opposed to them leaving their employer in order to fulfill their societal expectation of motherhood. Two stated that progress has been made in allowing male Japanese employees to take paternity leave. “Some companies give paid vacation for raising their children... But women tend to get that system.” In this same line of discussion, one woman noted that there is encouragement to build more nurseries so women could seek more employment opportunities. In some jobs, one woman said that there are women who receive higher positions in their companies. “In the past, the president of companies was mainly men, but in recent years, I see many people, like many women as presidents of companies. Especially for apparel, because women are really good at that kind of stuff.”

Another interviewee brought up how there has been momentum for new laws that make equal pay for the same jobs mandatory. There was also one interviewee who brought up a new law that was implemented to prohibit stalking and sexual harassment. “There is a new law about stalkers. Japan makes a law when something happens many times. The women were murdered many times, and then finally we got the law.”

Another interviewee pointed out that there has been push to change and make new laws pertaining to the government, but there has been no progress. This same woman went on to state that there are magazines raising awareness of the feminist movement. Lastly, one interviewee said that feminist progress was found in the way that women are more readily able to receive education than before.

Interviewee’s Perceived Gender Inequalities

The interviewees were questioned about whether there were perceivable gender inequalities that affected Japanese women; of the eight, five stated that they felt that there were gender inequalities. One woman stated that inequality was in ‘everything,’ or rather, in every aspect of their lives. In one particular aspect of the culture, five women felt that there were inequalities within familial expectations. “Men have the idea that men should work for families, so women don’t need to work. It’s just an older idea, we need to change minds, especially the men’s.” As part of these expectations, one interviewee mentioned that marriage was expected of women more so than men and at an earlier age as well. “It’s okay to be in their thirties where they don’t get married, it’s because of – they just think it’s because of the men. But the women still have more expectations to get married earlier than men because they are supposed to have a baby.”

One interviewee also brought up the issue of domestic abuse, and how victims of such crimes are typically thought to only be women. Similarly, three interviewees also brought up rape and sexual assault and how victims are treated. One interviewee said:

“I learned that America is very... has a really good law about it. But there is like a care center... But I thought Japan should do that too, but there isn’t anything like that... Japanese women don’t say it if there’s been violence. So I think there should be more – there should be a space or a place where women can get advice for it.” However, another interviewee also talked about how victims can be male too when it comes to this violence. Two women, including the formerly mentioned interviewee, stated that men are told not to talk about their victimization. As one said, “Men feel very embarrassed to talk about it and even if they speak about it in public, there will not be people who care. It’s because it’s based on the social expectation of men and women.” One stated that it is hard for male victims to come forward to authorities to disclose the violence they have faced. Another form of gendered violence that an interviewee brought up was that of train molestation. One woman stated,

“The train line has a women’s only car to avoid ‘chikan’ or molesters. I experienced it and it is not too bad, but it is very creepy and gross. An old man touched me inappropriately. The system at this line – it is not good because it does not stop them. The system is not the best way to stop it.” Employment is another aspect of the culture that the interviewees discussed. Five of the eight interviewees felt that there was gender inequality in regards to women in the work force. One provided an example, “Japanese women tend to be supportive to men – in the workplace. Also, if they make a team for work, I guess the men tend to be leader and women can be a sub-leader.” Three specifically stated that this gender inequality came in the form of income differences. Aside from employment, there was also the institution of education. Three noted that there were differences in treatment and expectations of students. One interviewee stated that there would be lists of students, in which parents’ names would appear, but only the father’s name would typically be listed and the list would state if a student did not have a father. Aside from early education, one interviewee brought up her own family, in that her parents did not want her studying abroad due to her being a woman, which limited her educational opportunities. When asked if they felt these gender inequalities were different from the past, two stated that they felt that it had changed. Contrary to this, two felt that there was little change and another two felt that there was no change.

Differences with American Feminism

When it came to the optional question pertaining to the feminist movements in Japan and America, five of the eight interviewees answered.

All five agreed that there were evident differences in feminism between the two countries, which then led them to discuss what aspects of each movement, country, and feminism separated the two movements, despite having the same goal.

In discussing the feminist movement in Japan, one interviewee stated that feminists and the government face a stronger cultural sense of gender role expectations than what is experienced in America. In her words, “Japanese people have a strong image for women and men, like men are strong and women are weak,” and she went further by saying, “They have this typical image – strong typical image for both sexes.”

When it came to figureheads in the feminist movement, two interviewees observed that Japan had fewer notable women than did America. This led them to believe that Japanese feminists were not as strong as the feminists in America. Another interviewee noted the inequality in political representation. In Japan, there are around two hundred men, but only four women in the same political position. She further explained: “In the past, Japanese women weren’t supposed to state their opinion, that they had to stay quiet and it is a beautiful thing. And that’s another reason why not many women politicians are in Japan, so they don’t – we cannot give the women’s side of the opinion to the government, so we cannot really change the law or something.” Regarding the feminist movement in America, two women stated that, from their perspective, American feminism and feminists were stronger in comparison to the Japanese feminist movement. One of these interviewees said that American feminists “have a more strong voice and more media coverage,” as a way to explain why she thought American feminism was strong. This same interviewee also pointed out what she believed was another difference, in that American feminism was more radical than Japanese feminism as a result of this ‘strength’. A single interviewee also pointed to the fact that, in 2016, there was a female candidate running for president of the United States and that there was more female political representation, in the forms of mayors or other politicians than there was in Japan. Another difference between the two countries’ movements relates to racial diversity, in which she stated, “In America, feminism is different from race, like black feminists and white feminists. They have different types of claiming racial identity. Japan doesn’t really have the racial difference, so it’s a difference between Japanese and American feminism too.” One woman stated that American women are more independent and expressive in their movement and their views, thus leading to another difference between the two movements. Lastly, one woman clearly stated that America had more equality for women than Japan did.

Discussion

This research has provided insight into the history of the Japanese feminist movement, the achievements of the movement, and the gender inequality that women endure through the eyes of young Japanese women. Data analysis of the interviews with these young Japanese women portrays different perceptions and an array of knowledge regarding the Japanese feminist movement. Experiences with gendered violence were illuminated and, lastly, these women discussed differences between the Japanese and the American feminist movement. With these results, this study sought to answer the following questions: 1) What is a Japanese feminist? 2) What is Japanese feminism? 3) Has Japanese Feminism been successful? 4) How is Japanese Feminism different from American Feminism?

The majority of the interviewees agreed that feminism in their country was a movement for equality amongst the sexes that demanded change in several aspects of their culture, such as politics and employment. One interviewee said the following in order to summarize what they thought the movement was about, “Equality for sexes, for income, status in the workplace, and role in the house. Equality in treatment and chores, but women should not just have to cook and clean.” Only one interviewee dissented from this definition, believing that feminism was more about uplifting women to a standard better than men, which mirrors some conservative views that Japanese people may have (Chizuko & Shockey, 2010). Contrary to those conservative views, Japanese feminists are advocates who aim to gain equality for the sexes in their country, and as such, their movement reflects this goal and philosophy. Although not representative of the general Japanese population, this provides an example that young women have in their varied understandings of the movement when discussing specificities.

The interviewees explained how they perceived that society felt about the civil rights movement. The majority stated that they thought the public was not truly aware of the feminist movement and its goals, leaving way for misconceptions. In regards to the study, one interviewee thought that Japanese feminism was not about equality. Other interviewees attributed the feminist movement to the current progress that the government and companies were taking to address the outcries of inequality that the public, mainly women, were making.

It reflects the first and second waves of feminism in Japan, as the efforts towards women's suffrage was taken on by those who were in the public eye from the feminists, such as male politicians, (Tomida, 2005). Moreover, European and American influence, be it governments or feminist movements of their own, is credited for Japanese women gaining suffrage and improvements in their movement, effectively discrediting their years of hard work (Quataert & Wheeler, 2014; ZerbeEnns, 2011). One interviewee stated, "I can say the Japanese government can try to make men and women equal." In other words, the feminist movement may not be successful in its public outreach, especially in regards to raising knowledge regarding issues that affect women.

This is largely due to the patriarchal, male dominance in Japan, making the protest of unfair treatment towards women seem unimportant. This dominance is reflected in the lack of female representation in the Diet, with the majority being men with conservative views on women's issues (Eto, 2008; Dalton, 2013). Eto (2005) also points to how the Diet and the Japanese government as a whole focuses on the standards set by men due to the patriarchal view that men are more keen to authoritative roles. With the interviewees attributing some of the progress of feminists to the patriarchal government reflects what shared earlier: that the public has profound misconceptions of the feminist movement, their goals, and their progress.

Although interviewees seemed to be in agreement regarding the definition of Japanese feminism through their social standing, they were deeply divided in their opinions when discussing the goals of the feminist movement. Despite the myriad of answers, each of them addressed different cultural aspects such as education and employment that needed to be reformed in order to achieve gender equality. Due to the differences in opinion of what Japanese feminism addresses, it rather displays that the movement tackles many issues and depending on which one, what young women, like the interviewees, will see depending on their exposure. Based on the literature, the current wave of feminism addresses work discrimination in pay and treatment, sexual violence, mistreatment of victims, and motherhood, to name a few (Fujita, 2006). Three interviewees discussed the gender classes that they had taken in the past, but rather than breaching on the topic of the history of the feminist movement, the interviewees instead highlighted issues with gender inequality that Japanese feminists address. From Maugère's (2010) interview with Ueno, classes such as the ones the interviewees were taking in their college serve as one way to allow students to become familiar with gender inequality and its issues, but it does not mean that these issues are attributed to the feminist movement as their goals.

Conservative groups, however, protest education on such issues, in aims of diminishing the influence of the feminist movement and enlightening people to these issues in order to uphold traditional sex roles (Chizuko & Shockey, 2010) Despite conservative efforts, two of the three interviewees discussed the sexual violence that both men and women face to exemplify how education helped spread feminists goals, with one going so far as to say, "What I heard in gender class is that many men as well suffer from rape and domestic abuse. But [people] don't really hear [about it]... It's because of the social expectation of men and the women." The sexual violence against women and men, such as the issue of comfort women, prostitution, and other sexual assaults, have been addressed by Japanese feminists through demands for more laws and assured accountability (Chizuko & Shockey, 2010; Kiyosue, 2000; Macki, 2005; Muramoto, 2011; Takahashi, 2011). The awareness that sexual violence is an issue that feminists address by these two interviewees display one aspect of feminist goals they knew. As aforementioned, the other interviewee, who was in a gender class, discussed the issue of unequal pay between men and women by companies. The unequal value placed on women's work is an issue that has long been addressed by feminists, starting with the ideal of *ryosaikenbo* that places women below men and the treatment of working mothers who must leave their jobs due to lack of childcare (Fujita, 2006; Hayakawa, 1995; ZerbeEnns, 2011). The interviewees were not in agreement regarding the successful outcomes of the movement as well. These accomplishments of feminist work that they identified ranged from improvements in employment opportunities to gendered roles in the home. One woman described a change in employment opportunity by stating, "The company is trying to promote, and also trying to have a system where women can also work for a long time. This is an achievement." These improvements to working conditions present Japanese women an opportunity to break through the glass ceiling and dispel traditional gender roles, which can be noted through laws passed like the Equal Opportunity Act and the Basic Act for Gender Equal Society, providing for places of employment without discrimination of sex (Fujita, 2006; Maugère & Ueno, 2010). Unfortunately, due to the pressures placed upon women by Japanese society to fulfill the role of motherhood, the bias that women cannot work for a long time exists as a result of institutional constraints that prevent mothers from leaving their children with care centers (Aono & Kashiwagi, 2011; Fujita, 2006).

In other words, the lack of provisions for working women with children results in women having to leave their workplaces and dedicate themselves to the traditional expectation of being a housewife, putting their being a mother and a submissive and supportive wife at the forefront of her independence and reputation (Borovoy, 2001). Therefore, discrimination based on the worth of Japanese women's work, both independently and traditionally, are placed below the work of a typical Japanese man. This is also something that the interviewees noted, despite not all of them being in the work environment, displaying that this issue has been prevalent and unaddressed despite feminist efforts.

In addition to workplace and work value discrimination, there was also discussion surrounding law-making in Japan, the influence of women's issues, and the civil rights movement. Despite the movement's perceived lack of effectiveness by the interviewees, the fact that the government has addressed issues unique to women shows that the feminist movement may have a bolstered platform to further raise awareness of these issues and change laws. Therefore, the Japanese movement has arguably been successful in branching out and addressing several issues that deeply affect the quality of life that women lead within a patriarchal society by confronting the lack of public awareness surrounding the feminist movement and the aforementioned issues. Such progress could be attributed to the laws in place that address prostitution, stalking, and domestic violence (Kiyosue, 2000; Muramoto, 2011). However, another aspect of this political improvement may also come in the form of more women taking on governmental roles locally and nationally; the involvement remains small, unfortunately, and there remains the traditional expectation that, despite their independence and motivation, these women are encouraged to focus on motherhood or their femininity undergoes ridicule (Dalton, 2013).

The trend amongst the interviewees when it came to comparing the American feminist movement to that of feminism in Japan focused on the actual activists and the type of people they were. Interviewees argued that the feminist movement in the U.S. was 'stronger', which may be supported through larger numbers of historically acknowledged women and the greater involvement of women in politics (Mettler, 2014). According to Maugère's (2010) interview with Ueno, Japanese feminists also see the American movement as more organized. Muramoto (2011) and ZerbeEnns (2011) describe Japanese feminists in their focus on the psychological effects that societal pressures have on women as opposed to the political focus that American feminists have adopted. Feminists in Japan have created institutions that assist trauma victims, educate the public through these institutions or universities, and ultimately focusing on the individual rather than the political (Burman & Aono, 2011; Muramoto, 2011; ZerbeEnns, 2011). This difference is seen when an interviewee described Hilary Clinton running for president, which is in stark contrast to political representation in Japan as the Diet have a larger male population. The differences in feminist activities and philosophy among activists in the United States could be explained by the diversity in race and ethnicity. Due to Japan focusing more on the community and collectivism, rather than individualism that America adheres to, tackling issues that could benefit a community may take more importance than the individual freedoms and equal access to opportunity that American feminists tend to focus on.

Limitations

Available research within Western academia focuses on the issues and gender inequality that Japanese women face without giving them a voice. This research focused on Japanese women's attitudes and knowledge toward and about the historical feminist movement. Other studies, such as ZerbeEnns' (2011) work and Muramoto's (2011) article, focused on individual and historical contributions that the Japanese feminist movement has made without drawing on the opinions and interpretations of modern women. The current study fills the gap in the literature by interviewing Japanese women. Unfortunately, there were several limitations in pursuit of this goal. These interviews are small in sample size and include only young women in college. Therefore, generalization to other demographics of Japanese women cannot be made. The language and cultural barrier between the researcher and the participants may have limited the answers that some of the interviewees gave regarding Japanese feminism and the content of the questions. To address these limitations, future research should interview more women and aim to attain a more representative sample of the Japanese female population. In addition, an in depth understanding of the language and culture should be acquired by future researchers to bridge the differences between a Western researcher and Japanese participants.

Conclusion

The interviews of the Japanese women provide insight into how the Japanese feminist movement has affected their outlook and highlighted the issues they face within their culture. This is an important aspect that is commonly overlooked in Western academia. This research also describes how American feminism affects Japanese women's views on their own civil rights movement, showing how each country's activists interact and affect each other despite the distance and differences.

As such, this study allows young Japanese women to explain their views on both Japanese and United States' movements, both of which function under different types of patriarchal societies. This research also allowed the participants to reflect on their own inequality and their philosophy of gender equality and equity.

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