

# Empowering Female Students through Women's Studies

## A Case Study of a Women's Junior College in Tokyo

by

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### Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explain how we researchers in Women's Studies teach the discipline in practice at a women's junior college in Tokyo, to clarify how our daily practice contributes to Women's Studies education and, drawing on this case study, to examine its possibilities and challenges. Each of us closely examines her classes in Section 3-1 and Section 3-2. Our contributions to Women's Studies can be summarized into five aspects: "raising awareness of sex discrimination in society," "raising awareness of one's own gender bias," "psychological recovery from sex victimization," "widening students' perspectives," and "elimination of discrimination and action to change society."

Key Words: Japanese female students, Women's Studies, junior colleges, empowerment, gender

### 1. Introduction

As in other industrialized nations, youth in Japan have deep anxiety over the unforeseeable future, while women have been unable to exhibit in society the capabilities they have developed. How could women's studies courses help young female students preparing to go out and work in society and to handle such harsh realities?

The purpose of this paper is to explain how we researchers in Women's Studies teach the discipline in practice at a women's junior college in Tokyo, to clarify how our daily practice

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contributes to women's studies education and, drawing on this case study, to examine its possibilities and challenges. This paper is outlined as follows. It first reviews the social conditions surrounding women in Japan and Japan's education system including junior colleges, as well as a brief history of Women's Studies in Japan. Then we will report on how each of us is teaching Women's Studies and the topics and themes covered in our classes. Lastly, in light of our findings in our case study with regard to the problems current female students face and the curricula of our Women's Studies courses, we will summarize the challenges of Women's Studies in higher education in Japan. Concurrently, we will argue what the future role of Women's Studies should be.

## **2. Women in Japan and Japan's Education System**

### **2-1 Women in Japan today**

Women in Japan today are in living under unfavorable social conditions. Japan's Gender Gap Index (GGI) ranking was 98<sup>th</sup> in 2011 out of 135 countries (World Economic Forum 2011: 11) despite their rather high education level. Japan's HDI (Human Development Index) ranking was 12<sup>th</sup> in 2011 (United Nations Development Programme 2011: 127). Japan scored significantly low in terms of economic participation and opportunity (100th) and political empowerment (101st), as opposed to the first place in health and survival. Thus, Japan continues to be among the lowest-ranking OECD countries.

### **2-2 Education system in Japan**

Next we will briefly explain the Japanese education system. In Japan, compulsory education starts at age six and lasts nine years, encompassing the six years of elementary school and three years of lower secondary school. In 2011, more than 96 percent of lower secondary school graduates (96.2 percent for male, and 96.7 percent for female) went on to public or private upper secondary school (high school) (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science & Technology (MEXT): 2012)<sup>1</sup>. There is no gender gap among those going on to high school. As for high school graduates, 56.0 percent of male students and 45.8 percent of females went on to university, while 10.4 percent of female high school graduates went on to a women's junior college in 2011 (Cabinet Office 2012: 112)<sup>2</sup>.

### **2-3 The role of junior colleges in the Japanese education system: past and present**

What then is the role of junior colleges in the Japanese education system?

In the history of women's higher education in Japan after World War II, the establishment of junior colleges in 1950 changed the educational context as an institution of short-term higher education, apparently targeting women (Tanki Daigaku Koho Iinkai, Nihon Shiritsu Tanki Daigaku Kyokai 2000). Since then, women wishing to receive higher education have been given the opportunity to choose either a four-year university or two-year or three-year junior college. The former awards bachelor's degrees, the latter associate's degrees<sup>3</sup>.

Junior colleges have long been considered to provide an appropriate course of study for women because of higher admission rates, short-term education, and less tuition, compared with four-year universities.<sup>4</sup> Under the traditional gender division of labor, junior colleges were thus incorporated into the ideal life course of women in Japan, that is, to find employment after graduating from junior college, work for several years looking for her prospective husband at her workplace, retire early, and become a full-time housewife (Matsui 1997; Ito 1991). In other words, the junior college system has negatively contributed to the gendering of Japan's higher education system and polarization between junior colleges and universities, as expressed by a typical quote from ordinary parents: "My son has to go to a university, but as for my daughter, junior college is enough."

Recently, however, a drastic change is taking place. According to the result of a 2011 survey of graduates from our women's junior college (Sugano 2010), which will be the subject of our analysis, more students go on to a higher education institution after graduating, unlike in the past when more students chose to work (Sugano 2010: 69). The result also shows that a lower percentage of graduates chooses to become a full-time housewife after marriage, while the percentage of those working is on the increase (Sugano 2010: 74).

### **2-4 Women's Studies courses in Japan**

Women's studies as a discipline was first introduced in Japan's higher education in the early 1970s (Inoue 2011: 10) as it is taught in the United States. Soon a few universities began to offer Women's Studies courses (Tachi 2005).

According to the statistics compiled by the National Women Education Center (NWEC)<sup>5</sup>, in the academic year of 2008, 614 universities and junior colleges had those courses. By school

type, this breaks down into 330 private universities, followed by 141 private junior colleges, 70 national universities, and 52 public universities. On average, each national university, private university, public university offered 12, 8, 5 courses related to Women's Studies, respectively, while there were only about three for each junior college.

### 3. Practicing Women's Studies

#### 3-1 Introduction of Women's Studies at our Junior College<sup>6</sup>

The two-year women's junior college we will analyze in this paper is located in the heart of Tokyo and was established at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, motivated by traditional Christianity. It consists of six departments: Japanese Literature, English Literature, Home Economics, Liberal Arts, Art, and Childhood Studies. For those who would like to continue their studies for one more year after graduation, the school offers a special third-year program. The number of students enrolled is approximately 2,100; the annual tuition is approximately 1 million yen as of 2011.<sup>7</sup>

Women's Studies courses were first introduced in this college three decades ago back in 1983. Originally it was offered as a specialized course for English majors. Below is the syllabus of that particular course. Instructor Michiko Obayashi (MA in Sociology) studied women's studies at the California State University, Sacramento during the late 1970s; she has been specializing in historical study of childbearing.

Course title: "Wife/Mother/Woman"

Instructor: Michiko Obayashi

Outline: "In this course students will analyze both historically and cross-culturally the problems of marriage, childbearing, motherhood, and family which are closely linked with the lives of we women, and thereby examine the relationship between social systems and conditions and women's attributes. In the process of this examination, they will identify sex difference and sex discrimination and learn the methodologies of women's studies."

(Aoyama Gakuin Women's Junior College cir. 1983: 135)

In 1986 Prof. Elizabeth J. Clarke from the United States began to teach Women's Studies in English. Below is her syllabus.

Course title: "Women's Studies"

Instructor: Elizabeth J. Clarke

Outline: "Women have many roles in society: daughter, wife, mother, consumer, student, worker, citizen to name only a few. In the first semester, we will examine the experience of women in Japan as they themselves have seen their roles at different stages in their lives, personally and historically. In the second semester, we will extend our scope to include women of other cultures: women in the American/European societies, as well as selected Asia, South American and African nations." (Aoyama Gakuin Women's Junior College cir. 1985: 156)

As you can see, our school created a Women's Studies program as a direct import from the United States, earlier than most other colleges/universities in Japan.

### **3-2 Current Courses related to Women's Studies Offered**

In the academic year of 2011, there were seven courses related to Women's Studies. Courses titled "Women's Studies" are offered as electives in general education subjects every year, two for each semester. Yuki teaches Women's Studies I and II, while Fujita teaches Women's Studies III and IV; all these four are general education subjects. Students can take any number of them in any order. These four courses are so "popular" among students that as many as 100-200 students aged between 18 and 20 register for our courses every year.

### **3-3 Practicing Women's Studies by Fujita<sup>8</sup>**

The themes covered by Women's Studies III and IV during the past 12 years can be broadly categorized into four: "sexual violence and the commercialization of sex," "women's self-representation," "formation of gender norms and their transformation," and "women and laughter." The theme changes from year to year. For the reasons of space, the paper will omit "women's self-representation" and report on my teaching sessions on the rest of the themes.<sup>9</sup>

#### **3-3-1 Sexual violence and the commercialization of sex**

The sessions on "sexual violence and the commercialization of sex" take up the issues of sexual violence, which includes sexual violence at school and workplaces, stalking, sexual molestation, and rape, and domestic violence (DV) and discuss what is at stake in terms of the law, the actual situations and psychology of victims, support for victims, and rehabilitation of

perpetrators. Students also re-examine the sex representations and information on sex, which proliferate in various types of media, including magazines, newspapers, and videos, and also the current condition of sexual violence in sex industries, and consider how we women can actively re-construct gender as actors and create a society without sexual violence. Many students who are, or have been, victims of sexual violence attend these sessions, which ranges from sexual harassment to sexual molestation, rape, and DV. They seem to be motivated to find out how they should overcome their mental sufferings.

Among the students I have taught were victims of a systematic group rape incident that once captured the headlines of Japanese newspapers. The fact that the crime was committed by not a few male students from prestigious universities and that a large number of women fell victims shook the nation<sup>10</sup>. It had such a tremendous impact that the Japanese government proceeded to revise the penal law for the first time in a hundred years in 2004.<sup>11</sup> Some of my students who have been a victim of sexual violence choose to describe in their written assignment how the media gave distorted reports of their victimization, in an effort to overcome the experience of victimization and to come to terms with the painful past.

Another topic to examine under this theme is the implications of a part time job in sex industries, which is now highly popular among female students today. The majority of the students who are not in those industries are shocked by the gap between the image of fashionable and glamorous women and the reality of sex workers forced to work under exploitative conditions, when hearing the first-hand experience of those workers. Many of the students work at a sex industry establishment called “*cabakura*” from the English words, “cabaret” and “club,” where male clients enjoy pretended love. It is surprising that current female students in Japan do not regard working at *cabakura* as a shame because it is widely but wrongly considered that “*cabakura*” workers are more highly paid compared with other part-time workers and that they are never asked to have sex directly with customers. Young women’s magazines and other media created an image of *cabakura* women as gorgeous with their fashionable and beautiful dress and hair-making, which caught the attention of young women. In 2007, it was ranked eighth as what female university students aspire to be (Miura 2007; Miura and Yanauchi 2008).<sup>12</sup> The hair style that was once unique to *cabakura* women became so popular among young women that we are witnessing the strange phenomena where at Coming-of-Age celebrations held nationwide in Japan, almost all young women attending them are dressed in

kimono with their hair like *cabakura* women's.

Such female students were once attracted by the gorgeous image of *cabakura* women and chose to work at *cabakura*, but now they are afflicted and consumed by a gap between their dream and the reality. They seem to participate in the Women's Studies sessions to reconsider the choices they have made.

Instead of a one-way lecture, I make efforts to create a place for students to exchange their thoughts and have discussions, by asking the students to write on paper their comments on my lecture or open-ended questions I posed during the class, which I would read them out in class in the subsequent session. My task is to organize the on-going arguments about a particular topic in a way that allows them to connect those arguments with their prior knowledge, ask them questions, categorize students' written responses, present them in the following session, and pose new questions which could be developed for deeper understandings. These steps form a cycle of mutual learning, which increases students' engagement within the constraints of a large lecture hall.

Many students write about their serious experiences as victims of sexual violence, although I do not particularly ask them to do so. Sharing the experiences of fellow students proves to be an effective way of learning for both victim students and other students. For female students, women's studies is not merely a discipline to be learned; it offers them opportunities to contemplate on the serious consequences of the problem they are facing. In my class, I never tell them what is good and bad, nor provide them with the single answer. In the process of sharing experiences and feelings with each other, more than 100 students who have wide experiences and suffer deep emotional pain feel relieved or make a new discovery about themselves and the world they live in. Eventually, those students reinterpret their experience as a victim of sexual violence as a problem of sexual discrimination that concerns society at large, instead of keeping their sad, bitter experience to themselves. Students show great satisfaction with my class, as evidenced by typical answers to students' evaluation of the course and instructor, such as "Although the theme covered was serious, I gained a lot from it."

### **3-3-2 Formation of gender norms and their transformation**

The sessions on the formation of gender norms and their transformation take up "feminine beauty" and look into its trends as exemplified in fashion, cosmetics, diet, and cosmetic surgery.

The students enrolled in my course as of January 2012 are most interested in “cosmetics and fashion” (63%), followed by job seeking (41%), diet (37%), and love (29%), whose percentages are much lower.<sup>13</sup> It has now become a daily routine for students to come to school with their makeup on.<sup>14</sup>

Although the junior college where I teach has no school uniforms, the students dress very alike. In the summer of 2011, I was appalled at the sight of almost all students wearing black tights. They are highly homogeneous in their fashion, while almost all of them are or have been on diet and thus are thin<sup>15</sup>. Some are suffering from eating disorder. About 40% of students said that their friends have had cosmetic surgery performed. They may have said so, because they were hesitant of telling other people that they themselves had.

None of these female students has ever thought “feminine beauty” they are desperately yearning for is related to discrimination against women, because they believe it is the latest fashion and it is natural to follow it. It is important to note here that while some students enjoy running after the fashion, others abhor it and try to be in fashion because they feel it is their obligation to do so. About a couple of years ago, some students began to come to school wearing a white disposable mask used for prevention of a cold. These students are afraid of letting others see their natural face, because they have no makeup on, contrary to the tacit understanding that students have to wear makeup.

With these things in mind, I ask my students, especially those who are threatened to face “feminine beauty” on a daily basis, to define “feminine beauty,” which holds them spellbound. By re-examining “feminine beauty” from various viewpoints such as the way “beauty” is created, the media, and women’s health, students come to realize that what they had thought as their self-made choice was otherwise. Every one of my students explores the definition according to their interest and needs. Examples include how to liberate oneself from the concept of gender which had obsessed her mind, how to interpret a new form of “beauty” which cannot be simply dichotomized into total acceptance or rejection of beauty, how to accept one’s natural self, reconsideration of the meaning of self-made decisions, and the kind of feminine beauty that does not oppress women nor cause health damages. Here are excerpts from my students’ responses: “I learned there is a wide range of standards for beauty.” “It was a lot of fun and gave me a chance to think.” “The lecture had an impact on my future life course.” “I felt liberated attending this class.”



### 3-3-3 Women and laughter

Thirdly, at the sessions on “women and laughter,” students learn how women performers have confronted sex discrimination and struggled to overcome it in the contemporary Japanese culture, by harnessing the power of “laughter.” It was their strategy to eliminate sex discrimination. These sessions illustrate how women performers of such comic folk art as *rakugo* (traditional Japanese storytelling performed by a solo artist) and *manzai* (a Japanese comedy conversation usually performed by two artists) have delivered women's claims to the Japanese society by basing their story on such themes as gender equality, sexual harassment, DV, and Japan's Equal Employment Opportunity Law<sup>16</sup>, while in the field of literature, photography, fine art, and popular music, women artists have attempted to transgress gender norms through “laughter.” Students are asked not only to appreciate and criticize their works but also to create their own work of “laughter.” Examples include composing a parody of Cinderella, well-known as a happy marriage story, and a uniquely Japanese short epigrammatic poem usually consisting of 17 syllables (5-7-5 pattern), called *senryu*. In November 2011, I entered a contest of *senryu* on gender equality organized by a municipal center for gender equality in Minato Ward in the Metropolitan Tokyo and submitted several students' works that I had selected as excellent, one of which won the second highest award: “Beauty is only skin deep. So you have to have an inner confidence about yourself.”<sup>17</sup> Students' other works that I think are similarly witty include: “Femininity is only what society tells us it is.”; “The husband is admired as an *ikumen*, or a cool man taking care of his children, and he is proud of it, while the wife supports him from behind.”; “I won't marry you if you want me to be a full-time housewife.”<sup>18</sup> Everyone in class was greatly pleased at the news. We received an award certificate and a book gift certificate amounting to 500 yen. But what pleased us most was that the award-winning work was posted on the wall of the center for gender equality and even in the concourse of major stations in metropolitan Tokyo; it was even printed in the center's monthly journal. It was a precious experience for our students to express their thoughts to the public.

Typical responses collected after the end of the last session include: “In this course I learned to examine women's issues through the feeling of laughter; I was surprised to find that I became more aware of how women are represented in our daily life. ”

While “laughter” has the potential to give people comfort and the will to live with a positive outlook, without doubt, it is neither a universal weapon nor a panacea. But it is also true that

“angry self-assertion” alone cannot move the heart of others. In order to break down the thick walls of sex discrimination prevalent in Japanese society, I feel it is necessary to devise various approaches, one of which is use of laughter. As the theme of “sexual violence and the commercialization of sex” is a heartbreaking matter, I wanted students to relax and experience the joy of learning by focusing on laughter. This way of teaching is only possible when several courses are available in the field of Women’s Studies in one semester like here at our college.

The academic year of 2011 was different from previous years; students were deeply concerned about the impact of Japan’s triple disaster and hence pursued the role and possibilities of “laughter” as a healing force, with a number of students who are victims/survivors of the Great East Japan Earthquake participating in class.

### **3-4 Practicing Women’s Studies by Yuki—gender-sensitive career-building education<sup>19</sup>**

I am teaching Women’s Studies I and II in the first and second semesters respectively. Women’s Studies I focuses on women and work in the field of labor economics and labor sociology, whereas Women’s Studies II centers on themes in family sociology such as marriage and formation of families. These two courses are similar in their attempt to approach the way women live and work in both the public and private spheres. The rest of this section concentrates on Women’s Studies I.

In this section, I will describe who are my target students and how I teach them. I also mention important points to keep in mind when giving lectures.

#### **3-4-1 The target students**

The tendency among female students taking my course can be summarized as follows:

First, their life and career plans are heavily shaped by the traditional social norms, before they attend my lecture. These female students are led to believe “women’s happiness lies in marriage,” because parents and the media tell them it is the socially accepted norm. In fact, when asked to write about “a future life plan” in the first session, many students say that after graduating, they expect themselves to get employment, work for a couple of years, get married, quit work, and then either become a full-time wife, or devote to household duties once a child is born and begin part-time work when the child reaches a certain age. This is the very reflection of the M-curve pattern of employment that characterizes women’s employment in Japan, which

remains unchanged even after more than 25 years since the Equal Employment Opportunity Law was enacted in 1986, and more than a decade since the Basic Law for a Gender-equal Society was established in 1999 whose objective was to create a gender-equal society.

Second, they are keenly interested in matters in the private sphere, such as how to make their physical appearance attractive, like fashion, cosmetics, and diet, and personal relationship with people close to them, including boyfriends, girl friends, and parents. In contrast, they have poor knowledge on the real society and are indifferent to it.

Third, as they are unable to envision their life and career plans on their own, they are hesitant at starting job seeking activities, which will be discussed in detail in the next section.

### **3-4-2 Students' fear: getting employment**

Regarding the third characteristic mentioned above, recent students appear to be intensely interested in, or more precisely, afraid of, job-seeking activities<sup>20</sup>, which are close at hand.

Let me briefly explain the steps of job seeking university graduates in Japan generally go through, which usually take as long as one year (Morioka 2011: 2-6). Customarily Japanese companies recruit those graduates as regular employees during the fixed period of the year. First, students submit entry sheets or CVs to 50 to 100 companies. Those who have passed paper screening are eligible for interviews, which they have to attend one after another until they obtain an employment position. Such rigorous steps drain students of all their energy.

In case of two-year junior college students, this would mean that first year students are required to start their job seeking activities as early as the second semester. Because of this recruitment system that emphasizes "new graduates," students need to continue job-seeking activities until they obtain a job offer. Students put their energy into them because they know it is the best time in their lifetime to get stable employment.

Until the early 1990s, the youth labor market was characterized by a rapid transition of school leavers into stable employment, low unemployment, and low job turnover (OECD 2009: 9). However, the situation has turned for the worse particularly since the bubble burst in the mid-1990s when university seniors had to face the so-called second "ice age" in the job market. This makes it extremely difficult for female students to pursue job seeking activities because they have been discriminated against in job seeking from the first place.

The deteriorating labor market manifested as a declining demand for new school graduates

is not the only reason for increasing pressure on job-seeking students. There are a number of other factors that promote such a change. The Japanese education system is partly to blame; it has emphasized general education but paid less attention to vocational education. Upon entering the 2000s when the youth employment problems emerged (OECD 2009: 9), the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science & Technology (MEXT) came to call for the need to introduce “career-building education” at the early stage of education. Independently, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) proposed the concept “Fundamental Competencies for Working Persons” in 2006 to refer to basic abilities commonly required in all types of jobs, consisting of three abilities: “ability to step forward,” “ability to work in a team,” and “ability to think through.” (METI 2012) The aim of this concept seems to be to help students develop such skills before entering a company, so that companies can reduce the costs of training and education. Previously Japanese companies used to improve the human resources mainly through on-the-job training (OJT); however, in step with the economic recession, companies increasingly began to seek people who are ready to work. Last but not least, universities are offering various programs and seminars related to job placement ostensibly for career development, but actually for raising employment rates of their graduates.

In other words, previously students have not had an opportunity to consider how to earn their living. In spite of this, soon after entering a university or junior college, they are pressured into planning career according to their aspirations and achieving self-actualization through working. The students cannot help but be perplexed by the question which has never been asked. Particularly, the recent students, who tend to have low self-esteem, are extremely apprehensive about seeking a job in a highly competitive job market (Yuki 2010).

### **3-4-3 What I teach**

With these students in mind, I give lectures on the theme of “women and work,” covering topics mainly addressed in labor economic economics and sociology. The specific topics covered include: “present job seeking conditions,” “youth employment conditions,” “changes in the Japanese employment system (eg. Why are men obliged to support their wife and children?),” “required human resources,” “working as a non-regular employee (eg. Do women choose to work as part timers out of their volition?),” “women’s career choice and career development (eg. Why is the number of female managers small?),” “working poor and women and poverty,”

“The Equal Employment Opportunity Law,” “work rules,” and “sexual harassment and power harassment (eg. Are women expected to experience sexual harassment?).” What is unique about my course is that it includes gender perspectives and places emphasis on issues that female students are likely to face in the labor market later in their life.

The goal of this course is for the students to acquire knowledge on the society they live in as well the current industrial structure, employment system, and labor market, to recognize that current problems in society might one day occur to them and to have an opportunity to consider possible solution to those problems. Ignorance to one's own rights means participating in an extremely unfair labor market without any protection. This is all the more important for women considering the fact that one in two women is in non-regular employment.

#### **3-4-4 How I teach**

In the first 80 minutes, I call the female students' attention to what they have “taken for granted,” namely the reality that women are disadvantaged, and explain the current conditions surrounding women in relation to social structure and employment practice, using statistics, newspaper articles, and videos. In the remaining 10 minutes, I ask the students to describe the new insights (objective facts) they have gained from the lecture and write comments to the lecture (subjective views) as a response paper and turn it in for each class session. This assignment is intended to stimulate the students' interest, develop the ability to “think on their own” and express their view in words, which coincides one of METI's Fundamental Competencies for Working Persons mentioned earlier. I lay undue focus on giving my students as much basic knowledge as I believe necessary to equip them with sound judgment because this is something many students today are lacking, whereas Fujita's emphasis is on developing insights on one particular topic.

#### **3-4-5 My teaching philosophy**

When giving a lecture, I keep the following points in mind:

First, I earnestly wish the students be able to design their future life by themselves, after learning about socially constructed gender as a fact and make it part of their knowledge. Yet, amid the present employment conditions, young women in particular are vulnerable and are bound to face a “harsh reality.”

In fact, many of my students' responses to my lecture relate how they were forced to confront this harsh reality. To cite: "Today's lecture made me face the harsh reality," "It was hard on me, but it is better to know about it than not," "This is the only lecture I have attended which has opened my eyes to such a grim reality."

Second, I make my efforts to help my students expand their interests to incorporate "social concerns" in addition to "personal concerns" and perceive themselves as a social being. Armed with the power of essential knowledge about society, my students are able to relieve themselves of a vague sense of unease and thereby tenaciously struggle through job-seeking activities. This is why I am practicing "career-building education" by introducing a gender-sensitive perspective.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Despite young women's widespread "disengagement from feminism" in recent years as many have noted, we have never perceived as such in our daily teaching experiences at our junior college. As a matter of fact, we feel that our students' first encounter with Women's Studies is so stimulating, that they are highly motivated to continue their study with enthusiasm and keen interest. Indeed, many of our students say they "enjoy" Women's Studies.

Finally we will summarize our contributions to Women's Studies education and the challenges ahead within the limited scope of our study.

##### **4-1 Our contributions to Women's Studies education**

Let us summarize unresolved issues in Women's Studies education that have been identified through our case study and need to be addressed in the future. Our contributions to Women's Studies education at our women's junior college can be summed up into the following five points:

- 1) Raising awareness of sex discrimination in society: In many cases, young women, having been raised and living in Japan where discrimination against women is pervasive, do not realize they are discriminated against because they are accustomed to it and take it for granted.
- 2) Raising awareness of one's own gender bias: Discrimination also stems from one's self. Students' increased awareness of gender bias is likely to lead to personal transformation and has a significant impact on them during their formative years.

- 3) Psychological recovery from sex victimization: In our class, a victim of sex discrimination can share her own experience with many classmates of the same age and sympathize with each other. This would cheer up her already broken heart, encourage her, and give her the will to recover herself.
- 4) Widening students' perspectives: By infusing an adequate knowledge about society and employment into young women who are living in a very small world, i.e. the intimate sphere from gender-sensitive perspectives, we allow them to realize the harsh employment situations faced by women as well as to shape their own life plan from a broader viewpoint.
- 5) Elimination of discrimination and action to change society: The experience of sharing and discussing her own concerns with many of her fellow students in the classroom would benefit our students in becoming an agent of social change in her later life. Individuals cannot change society.

These points suggest that Women's Studies, with its commitment to uncovering the harsh realities of discrimination and exploring approaches to overcoming them, would help women empower themselves, in increasing their interest in society they live in as well as in their own selves and in enhancing their understanding of human dignity and women's rights.

#### **4-2 Future issues identified through our case study**

Our case study has also revealed the following challenge in Women's Studies education.

Ideally, with the "knowledge" they have gained, students would achieve their personal transformation and ultimately social change as well; however, teachers cannot provide students with all the necessary skills and knowledge required. In order for students to delve into the themes covered in class and improve their problem-solving abilities by themselves, we should need a multi-tiered curriculum. Our junior college has the limitation in that it does not have systematic courses on Women's Studies and the courses are primarily offered as general education subjects.

Even with these limitations, we endeavor to inform our female students of possibilities and approaches to solving the problems they have faced or might face. Our mission as teachers is to dedicate ourselves to help our students maintain their self-dignity and tackle any discrimination they will encounter. We would like them to be able to express in public their views on such injustice and disseminate it to share it with others, instead of being thrown into despair and

keeping silence with grief.

#### 4-3 Pursuit for better education in Women's Studies

The final goal of Women's Studies is not only to familiarize students with the serious problems women today are facing but to allow each student to hammer out a concrete solution to women's problems independently of others. Our passion as teachers is to encourage students to raise their voice in public and act as an agent of social change, instead of passively waiting for someone else to bring about a change. We are determined to keep studying what we can do "today" toward problem solving, instead of what we can do in the "future," together with all our students. Our job then as teachers is to constantly pay attention to students' needs and address those gender issues that our students are facing now, which will be the starting point of our pursuit for better education in Women's Studies.

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## Empowering Female Students through Women's Studies

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## Remarks

This paper is based on our oral presentation titled, “Empowering Female Students through Women’s Studies—a Case Study of a Women’s Junior College in Tokyo” at the 8<sup>th</sup> European Feminist Research Conference in Budapest on May 19, 2012.

## Notes

- 1 The figure does not include upper secondary school-level correspondence courses.  
<http://www.e-stat.go.jp/SG1/estat/NewList.do?tid=000001011528> <accessed on July 21, 2012>
- 2 The figure does not include university-level or junior college-level correspondence courses.
- 3 [http://www.mext.go.jp/english/highered/\\_icsFiles/afieldfile/2011/02/28/1302653\\_001.pdf](http://www.mext.go.jp/english/highered/_icsFiles/afieldfile/2011/02/28/1302653_001.pdf)  
<accessed on July 21, 2012>
- 4 MEXT, *Japan’s Modern Education*, [http://www.mext.go.jp/b\\_menu/hakusho/html/others/detail/1317444.htm](http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/hakusho/html/others/detail/1317444.htm) <accessed on July 21, 2012>
- 5 <http://winet.nwec.jp/jyosei/search/outline.php> <accessed on July 21, 2012> (in Japanese)
- 6 Section 3–1 is written by Fujita.
- 7 For more details, see Aoyama Gakuin Women’s Junior College (2011).
- 8 Section 3–3 is written by Fujita.
- 9 See Fujita (2012) where the author discusses women’s studies education in relation to the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster in 2011.
- 10 This so-called “superfree case,” allegedly perpetrated by the members of a circle formerly authorized by Waseda University, was publicly disclosed in May 2003.
- 11 The revised penal law stipulates “group rape and lethal injury resulting from group injury” as a crime.
- 12 Kamise refutes Miura’s argument in Kamise (2011).
- 13 The percentages do not add up to 100%; respondents checked all the answers that applied.
- 14 Among Fujita’s Women’s Studies students, 42 percent of them said they make themselves up before school, followed by those who said they do so every day (32 percent) and sometimes (21 percent).  
This trend is not unique to this particular junior college, but is observed among junior college students in general. See the result of a consciousness survey conducted by Nihon Shiritsu Tanki Daigaku Kyokai (Hakusho Sakusei Shoiinkai, Tanki Daigaku Koho Iinkai, Nihon Shiritsu Tanki Daigaku Kyokai 1995).
- 15 Fujii (2009) demonstrated that over 70 percent of female university students were either severely or moderately thin.
- 16 first enacted in 1986 and revised in 1999.
- 17 The original Japanese was “Gaiken no bi wa issun da. Jiko wo mote.”
- 18 The original Japanese was “Onnna rashii, sekenno tannaru oshitsukeda,” “ikumen da, sotto tasukeru tsuma no futan,” and “Kekkon go sengyo shufu wa okotowari.”
- 19 Section 3–4 is written by Yuki.

## Empowering Female Students through Women's Studies

- 20 This tendency is also demonstrated by our survey conducted at the last session of our lecture in January 2012. The respondents were asked to give select the two from the five choices regarding their interest. The highest ranked answer was "job seeking" (76 votes) followed by "cosmetics and fashion" (73), "boyfriend/love" (44), "diet" (37), "relationship with parents" (5), and "others" (14).