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What Do Gender Equality Law and Policies Mean to Me?
Japanese Women Making Sense of Lived Experience
As They Watch Television Dramas About Women

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Eri Inoue was born in San Juan, Metro Manila and raised in Cavite City. She took her primary and secondary education at Atheneum Amcan Academy, where she championed the Elocution Contest in two consecutive years and received several academic excellence awards. She was an active member of the Glee and Dance Clubs. During this time, she was also a resident dancer of Teatro Baile de Cavite, a community theater and dance group. In 1998, she was admitted to the University of the Philippines Los Banos under the Doctor of Veterinary Medicine program. Later, she transferred to University of the Philippines Manila where she majored in Organizational Communication while maintaining her college scholar status. She received her Bachelor of Arts degree in 2003. In 2014, she was accepted to the Master of Development Communication program at the University of the Philippines Open University.

She currently lives in Japan and works as a TESOL-certified English Teacher in one of Osaka cities' Board of Education. In this role, she is responsible for creating and implementing engaging English lessons based on the set curricula of the Ministry of Education. She trains elementary school teachers on how to plan and conduct interactive English and Foreign Language classes. She also coaches junior high school students for speech contests.

In her free time, Eri loves to travel; photograph people, sights, and culture; read books; play video games; watch movies and musical plays; and cook. She is a self-confessed foodie. She is an advocate of gender equality, literacy, LGBTQ rights, and animal welfare.

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Dedicated to:

Vany, my rock, partner, and love

and

the memory of my beautiful mama, *Leni*

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ABSTRACT

The lack of women in core positions and political ranks, and the unequal treatment of men and women due to gender imparity continuously push Japan's rank down on the Global Gender Gap Report list. Despite the enacted laws and action plans by the government, the country still faces difficulties in achieving its goals to enable women economically, socially, and politically and to establish a gender-equal society for both genders. To support this development, the media has produced television dramas that focus on female characters and new plots. Past studies have focused almost exclusively on the representation of women and/or gender in television dramas. Thus, borrowing the phenomenological lens, this paper sought to advance our understanding of the meaning of the gender equality laws to Japanese women as they watch television dramas about women. Five working Japanese women agreed to participate in this study. The data collected through narrative in-depth interviews was analyzed using the Modified Van Kaam Method.

Two central themes that describe the essence of the meaning-making system of the participants became clear: *Women are Outside the Circle of Gender Equality and What Women Want: Commitment and Change*. Upon further review, two sub-themes emerged under theme 1: *Not Me: "I have never and will never experience that"*; and *To Be in a Leadership Position, a Woman Must Be a Man: "Now, I have so much work like my husband"*. Theme 2 has one sub-theme: *No gender equality at home, no gender equality at work: "My father decided that set-up, but my husband sees me as his equal and treats his staff equally"*.

This study concludes that Japanese women view themselves outside the scope of gender equality laws. However, current economic, social, and political challenges have started to initiate necessary changes in the Japanese mindset.

Key Words: Gender equality, Television dramas, Japanese women, Equal Employment Opportunity Law, The Basic Act for a Gender Equal Society, The Third Basic Plan for Gender Equality, Qualitative Research, Phenomenological Analysis, Modified Van Kaam Method

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

"Nothing ever becomes real until it is experienced." – John Keats

Before the Second World War, Japanese women had no rights. They could neither vote nor own properties. They could learn how to read *hiragana*, one of the Japanese forms of writing, but not *kanji* to restrict them from *"reading political, business, and literary"* materials (Friedman, 1992). Their situation only changed after the war, when the Americans occupied the nation and imposed a new constitution that bans war and protects gender equality and individual rights. In the current charter, Article 24 states that *"...With regard to choice of spouse, property rights, inheritance, choice of domicile, divorce and other matters pertaining to marriage and the family, laws shall be enacted from the standpoint of individual dignity and the essential equality of the sexes"* (The Constitution of Japan, n.d). Since the law was implemented, Japanese women have become educated. In the 2016 Global Gender Gap Report, Japan topped the indices for women's literacy and longevity (The Global Gender Gap Report 2015, 2016). Consequently, more women have postponed marriage and childbirth, and have chosen their career over starting a family. However, in 2012, the Liberal Democratic Party of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe drafted a new constitution that they claim to be more appropriate for the country instead of the US-written one. Aside from abolishing Article 9, which renounces war, the members of the Party want to revise Article 24 as well. This charter change is backed by the right-wing conservative group, Nippon Kaigi, who goes on saying that Article 24 weakened Japanese families due its focus on *"individual dignity and essential equality of sexes"* (Nippon Kaigi, 2016). They assert that "family" must be defined in the amended constitution. What is their definition of family then?

The group produced an "educational DVD" that shows *Sazae-san,* a Japanese anime series that portrays a three-generation family living in one house, as the "normal" and "ideal" family (Nippon Kaigi, 2016). The main character, *Sazae-san,* is a housewife and a mother who takes care of the three-generation family and has never worked outside her home. A group that opposes this change expressed that defining "family" will null gender equality, outcast single individuals, suppress freedom, and worsen discrimination (Nippon Kaigi, 2016).

An appointee of Prime Minister Abe and a board member of Japan's national broadcast network NHK, Michiko Hasegawa, wrote that "women's most important task was to bring up their children, and that this should take priority over working outside home" ("Holding back," 2014). Before becoming a prime minister, Shinzo Abe and some of his colleagues in the Liberal Democratic Party publicly announced their fear that if women were treated equally, family values and Japanese traditions could be put in extinction. In Japan, motherhood is highly regarded as the essence of womanhood. The party members said that if mothers or married women were kept at home, they could conceive more babies who will later join the workforce ("Holding back," 2014). Contradicting Prime Minister Abe's *Womenomics* agenda and his statements on making the women "shine", their party passed a bill that allows companies to "use temp workers – about 70% of which are women – for as long as they wish" (Ito, 2015). This does guarantee women our equal rights to be given the same trainings, promoted to core positions, and paid the same wage as men.

The economy, population, marriage, and birth rates are declining (Concern, 2015; Japan's, 2015) in the world's third biggest economy (Bajpai, 2017), Japan. This

is in contrast with the ascent in aging population, government debt, child abuse cases, radiation-related issues, violence against women, and women poverty ("Japan's 10," 2012). The country is still struggling with slow growth after it faced recession in 2012 (Shane, 2018). While Japan ranks the highest in indices for women's literacy and longevity, its low ratio of women in management and political positions has consistently pushed Japan down the list of the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report (The Global Gender Gap Report 2015, 2016). The organization reported that Japan ranked 111 out of 144 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index in 2016. It went down from 101 out of 145 countries in 2015, and a sharp descent from 80 out of 115 countries in 2006 when the first Global Gender report was published (The World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Report 2015, 2016).

Enduring unfavorable circumstances is a deeply embedded trait in the Japanese culture. It is believed to be a sign of "strength and morality" (Hayes, 2016). Japan's employment rate of women soared to 69.5% in 2013 (Koike, 2014). However, 60% of Japanese women choose to stop working after giving birth to their first child. Some resume work as part-timers, but many of them decide to retire for good, since fulfilling a dual-role proves to be rough (Wingfield-Hayes, 2013). These women's life goals may not be aligned with what the government wants to accomplish.

Recently, the Sumo Association drew criticisms over what many people perceived as blatant gender discrimination. The mayor of a city in Kyoto suffered from a brain hemorrhage and collapsed while giving a speech in a sumo match, the sanctified national sport of Japan. Three female nurses rushed to perform cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) but were asked to immediately leave the sumo

ring. This is because Sumo tradition dictates that women are not allowed to enter the arena for they may offend the goddesses of the harvest (Yoshida, 2018). In a separate occasion, a female mayor was not allowed to give a speech inside the ring for the same reason (Yoshida, 2018). However, the latter is not new because in 2000, the Japan Sumo Association rejected then Osaka governor Fusae Ota's request to enter the ring to deliver a speech (Yoshida, 2018). The two recent occurrences ignited numerous discussions and reactions online, which are mostly negative, and were the topic of news for several days. These events have put a spotlight on how women are regarded in this country.

Researcher's Phenomenological Lens and Context of This Study

I, the researcher, am Japanese-Filipino and was born, raised, and educated in the Philippines. My exposure to Japanese culture started a year after my university graduation when I migrated to Japan in 2004. I have worked as an English Language Teacher in 18 different elementary and junior high schools in three prefectures. My colleagues and friends from both private and public sectors include single, married, widowed, divorced, and single parents. Most of them work full-time, some part-time, and a few are stay-at-home housewives.

To learn the Japanese language, I listened to and memorized Japanese songs, befriended Japanese colleagues, and watched cartoons and television dramas. This is how I noticed the cultural, social, and economic differences in the media's portrayal of women. I am used to watching Filipino *teleseryes* that portray a variety of powerful and influential female characters. In Japan though, many TV dramas reinforce the

traditional portrayal of women such as housewives; mothers; romantics who prioritize love and relationship over career; desperate single women whose main goal in life is to get married and have children; and an indecisive, complicated gender.

Some of my women co-workers have experienced such gender discrimination. Despite their educational background, skills set, and work experience, some of them were not promoted at work because they have children. Some were given another position, usually something lower than their previous one, after coming back from maternity leave. I have friends who chose not to work anymore after giving birth to concentrate on motherhood. There were those who were pressured by their family, friends, and even themselves to tie the knot and have kids. I have also been asked numerous times why I am not married nor have children yet. Some of my friends do not want to work full-time after getting married because they are discouraged by the joint marital taxes.

Being a participant in the workforce, I also have experienced direct and indirect gender inequality. My previous supervisor suggested for my life partner, who is also an English Language Teacher at the same Board of Education, to obtain the proper teacher's license. Having this license guarantees lifetime employment at the Board of Education of his choice. He did not offer the same advice to me. He assumed that someday I may want to get married, have kids, and stop working. Growing up in the Philippines, which ranks 1st in Asia and 10th in the world on the 2017 Global Gender Gap Index (Philippines still tops, 2017), my Filipino upbringing began to wonder about this phenomenon. Japanese people are known for their discipline, ethics, and unity. How come they seem to fail in advancing gender equality? Another intriguing area for

me was, how do Japanese women view the men and women in their local television dramas? What messages do they receive from the narratives? How do they relate to the characters? What are the impacts of these characters and stories to their viewpoint? Wanting to better understand these experiences and the culture I am in, I decided to pursue this study for Development Communication 300.

Gender equality and women empowerment are two of my advocacies. Despite Japan's high rank in terms of Human Development Index, health, survival, and its perfect score or complete equality with respect to literacy and enrolment in primary and secondary education in 2013, it always ranks very low in terms of political empowerment; economic participation, opportunity, and activity. Through the phenomenological tradition, this paper aims to provide a different way of looking at people's view of the gender equality laws. This will be achieved by following the phenomenological approach on understanding the communication of the self and others.

This research also refers to the *researcher* as *student* and *author* when necessary. The three terms are used interchangeably throughout the paper without difference in their meaning. For Moustakas (1994), research participants are also called co-researchers because the essence of the study or meaning of the phenomenon under investigation is collected from them. Since absolute objectivity and singular interpretation of data are impossible, it is necessary for the readers to be notified where my viewpoint originated from. Hathorn (2009) outlines Moustakas' characterization of the researcher as, "...an instrument who collects and interprets data about phenomenon from a particular phenomenological perspective". This is my first time to

do a phenomenological study. The interpretations are based on my experience as a woman living and working in Japan.

What is Gender Equality?

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (n.d.) characterizes gender equality as men and women "*having equal conditions for realizing their full human rights and for contributing to, and benefitting from, economic, social, cultural, and political development. It is based on women and men being full partners in their home, their community and their society.*" According to the United Nations Entity for Gender Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (n.d.) the concept gives importance to the differences and similarities of men and women and is a critical requirement for a "*sustainable people-centered development.*"

On the other hand, gender equity is defined as the "*equal treatment or treatment that is different, but which is considered equivalent in terms of rights, benefits, obligations and opportunities.*" It strives to help women achieve fairness from their sociocultural, economic and political position (International Labour Office, 2007).

In development communication context, Ongkiko and Flor (1998) described gender equality as everyone having "equally provided with the opportunity to develop, to realize his or her full potential." Quebral (2012) wrote that women empowerment has two roles: to help develop the economy, and to accelerate the endorsement of human rights.

Gender equality and women empowerment has been one of the goals that the United Nations wants to achieve. It has been included in the list of targets since 2000, from its establishment of the Millennium Development Goals to the current Sustainable Development Goals. Along with combating discrimination, sexual violence, among others against women, it also aims to address disparity in labor, reproductive health, education, and holding political positions (Sustainable Development Goals, n.d.).

Dating back from the 1940's, the government has legislated policies to address the unequal treatment and opportunity for women. Through the years, some laws were revised, and more policies were enacted to make them conducive to both genders.

Gender Equality Law and Policies in Japan

Since 1947, various laws have been enacted to provide women with more rights and level the playing field with men, i.e. divorce; child custody; property ownership and inheritance; and political participation. From 1986, three more specific legislations have been drafted to respond to the incessant gender inequity: the 1986 Equal Employment Opportunity Law, the Basic Act for a Gender-Equal Society, and the Third Basic Plan for Gender Equality.

Equal Employment Opportunity Law. In 1986, the Equal Employment Opportunity Law (EEOL) was established to protect the women workforce and to provide them with more career opportunities. However, this was deemed incomprehensive of the other gender, thus making it not supportive of gender equality. The first revision in 1997 addressed indirect and direct discrimination in recruiting, hiring, job placement, and

promotion. The second revision in 2006-2007 targets sexual harassment in the workplace, which applies to both genders (OECD, 2012). The third revision introduced the "positive action" policies, which aims to advance the career of women through promotion and filling leadership positions in the by 30% by 2020. However, only 11 percent of today's managers are female. The current administration only managed to achieve 3% out of the 30% target (Tasker, 2014). Furthermore, the ratio of women to men in the parliament is 9 to 91 according to the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Report in 2016.

The Basic Act for a Gender Equal Society. In 1999, the Basic Act for Gender Equal Society (1999) was ratified. The main objective of this law is to decrease, and eventually void, the established gendered division of labor in Japanese society by encouraging men to actively participate in child-rearing at home and share household work. It also aims to help women in their career advancement even after giving birth. The government site in English provides the following specific definition:

> *A gender-equal society is a society in which both men and women,*
> *as equal members, have the opportunity to participate in all kinds*
> *of social activities at will, equally enjoy political, economical, and*
> *cultural benefits, and shared responsibilities. In such a society, the*
> *human rights of men and women are equally respected. Women who*
> *desire an active role in society may participate in activities of their*
> *own choosing, while men could enjoy a fulfilling home and community*
> *life. A gender-equal society is a society built by men and women as*
> *equal partners* (Basic Act, 1999).

To achieve the objectives of the Basic Law, the following policies were created: Support for the Promotion of Gender Equality in Regions, Elimination of All Forms of Violence, Gender Equality and Disaster Risk Reduction, Work-life Balance for Men and Women, Expansion of Women's Participation in Policy and Decision-making Processes in All

Fields in Society, and Positive Action. The government also established "intensive policies" in 2015 to advance the purpose of the law. Prime Minister Abe aimed to raise female participation in the workforce by up to 73% by 2020.

The Third Basic Plan for Gender Equality. This "practical action plan" (Summary of Third Basic Plan, 2010), enacted in 2010, targets the low participation of women in the decision-making positions in both private and public sectors. This law has three main objectives: to establish "*specific numerical targets and deadlines, and regularly monitor them*"; to eradicate "*social systems and structures based on stereotypical assumptions about the gender-based division of roles while promoting close government-wide cooperation across agencies working on related policies, such as the Work-Life Balance, Child and Child-Rearing Support, Child and Youth Support, and Human Rights policies*"; and to enforce actions that are in accordance to the international criteria and standards without disregarding its own culture and social context (Basic Act, 1999).

Television in Japan

In Japanese households, the television (TV) is part of the "three sacred treasures" alongside the washing machine and the refrigerator (Tobin, 2011). In a 2010 survey made by the NHK Broadcasting Culture Research Institute, the results showed that over 90% of the respondents watch TV every day. Moreover, nine out of ten respondents recognized that TV is influential (Hirata, Morofuji and Aramaki, 2010). Since the stereotypical setting of men working and women staying at home is still prevalent, the focus of the media is on producing more programs that portray the 'ideal

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wife' (Tobin, 2011). Tobin (2011) argues that even though these programs target the female population, they can also inevitably influence male's perception of women.

The women's role in Japanese society is mainly attributed to Buddhism, Confucianism, and Samurai-based feudalism. Due to heavy Confucian influence, the Japanese value group over individual identity, ideology, success, and needs. Based on the approaches on achieving gender equality (Millennium Development Goals, n.d.), some criteria to achieve this goal are unfulfilled by Japan. First, the political participation of women has not increased. Second, women hold less secure jobs than men. Third, women are assigned stereotypical social roles that direct them to vulnerable social status. Despite the Prime Minister's campaign on enabling Japanese women to be economically independent to hold key corporate and government positions, and to have a voice in this country, the government seems to be struggling in mobilizing the stakeholders and the women themselves.

Research Problem

In time with the reforms in the society the Japanese government is pushing for, this study serves as a medium for women's views and experiences in this contemporary era. The purpose of this study is to seek answers to the following question:

How do Japanese women view the gender equality law and action plans as they make sense of their lived experience when they watch TV dramas about women?

Objectives of the study

This paper will pursue data analysis by addressing the following objective:

1. To understand the meaning of gender equality policies to Japanese women

Significance of the Study

Newcomb and Hirsch (1983) consider television as a cultural forum. They go on saying that "*dominant messages are embedded in the pleasant disguise of fictional entertainment.*" Further argument states that this medium transmits and maintains "*the dominant ideology with the assistance...of those who control communications technologies and businesses*" (Newcomb and Hirsch, 1983). Many studies have shown that the more people watch TV, the more likely they are to adopt certain values, views, behaviors, and sex roles (Gerbner and Gross, 1976). This translates to a unified view rather than emphasize individual differences.

Considering the preceding concept, this study aims to enable Japanese women to express their views on the issue under investigation. Although Japan is considered a developed country with advanced technologies, it lacks the development

necessary for women empowerment and gender equality. The researcher attempts to fill the scarcity of researches with a similar phenomenological tradition as methodology on the matter. This paper hopes to bring meaningful knowledge and awareness to the stakeholders involved to further advance the development of a gender-equal society. Identifying how women see gender equality in the narratives of women can contribute to the growth of their economic, political, and social status.

In line with Development Communication, investigation of the lived experience of women touches its very core - art, science, communication, people, transformation, and critical social issues. One of the major interests of development communication is to provide "voice to the voiceless" (Quebral, 2012). Hence, this study is concomitant to this field. Findings of this research can be used to further advance the gender equality advocacies, policies, and campaigns in Japan or wherever useful.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

As an attempt to combat the shortage of workers, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe pushes to create a society that uses its most under-utilized resource – women (Prommegger, 2014). He said in an interview with Nikkei that "women have the greatest potential and allowing them to demonstrate their full abilities is the core of our growth strategy" (Tasker, 2014). The administration is trying to encourage more women—single or married—to work instead of to stay at home after they marry ("Holding back", 2014). Prime Minister Abe has launched three arrows of 'Abenomics' program to combat the economic problems of Japan. The two arrows are deemed successful due to the decrease in unemployment rate and better exchange rates. However, the third arrow that aims to rectify the societal structure to make it more gender-equal seems to be the most difficult. In this chapter, related literature and previous studies provide the foundation of this research.

Television as Communication

Since time immemorial, humans have been bound by the powerful and influential act of storytelling. It is a way for people to illustrate their everyday life. Stories are vital components of culture. Gerbner (n.d.) offers three types of stories. The first is stories about "how things work". Although they are about people's daily accounts in life, they are the socially constructed. The second kind is stories about "what things are". An example of this is the news. The last is "stories of action". This kind of stories wants to initiate actions from people. These stories have been embedded since the Pre-Print

Era and the Print Era up to our current generation, the Telecommunication Age (Gerbner, n.d). Since the invention of the television and up to this age, it has been a key agent in establishing and spreading any social or cultural norms, knowledge and information (Ahmed, 2012).

Television, as part of the mass media, has the capability to reach a large population of society. Hirsch (in Newcomb and Hirsch, 1983) goes on saying that it has become a "national medium" that replaced "film, radio, picture magazines and newspapers." We grow up in and with television that shows us representations of almost everything in the world. It has become an integral part of our daily lives. It informs, educates, allows cultural exchange, breaks down social barriers, and influences the audiences' perception of social reality (Ahmed, 2012). Our social knowledge is cultivated and managed by watching it. Studies have shown that it can affect how people perceive and interpret their world. Since media is a powerful tool to promote ideologies, it can also be used as a form of social control. Therefore, television is a vital medium of communication.

Regular television broadcasting in Japan started in the 1950s after several years of pause due to the Second World War (Goto, et al, 1991). Currently, nationwide broadcast networks are divided into two categories – public and private. The public division is the Nihon Hoso Kyokai (NHK) or public broadcasting by the government of Japan. The company is funded by collecting fees from almost every household and company with television. On the other hand, the private sphere is composed of 127 commercial companies including regional scopes. However, only five of them are considered major networks because of their coverage and reach. These are Nippon

Television Network Corporation (Nippon TV), Asahi Broadcasting Corporation (TV Asahi), Tokyo Broadcasting System (TBS), Tokyo Television Corporation (TV Tokyo), and Fuji Television Network (Fuji TV). In the white paper report of Information Media (Information Media Trends, 2016), television has the highest penetration rate at 98.1% as compared to personal computers and tablets.

In 2011, Hirata, et.al (2011) conducted a survey on the behavior and attitudes towards television, and behavior and attitudes toward various forms of media. The analysis of the 2,710 valid responses (out of 3,600) showed that TV dramas ranked third on the most viewed program. News and weather topped the ranking. Findings also revealed that "more than 90% of the respondents watched television daily". However, in the 2015 study administered by Kimura et al. (2016) on the television viewing behavior and attitudes, and media usage behavior and attitudes, the results affirmed the decrease in TV-viewing time of the polled valid respondents. TV dramas remained third as the most viewed, followed by news and weather forecasts. In fact, there is a slight increase by 3% from 47% to 50%. A decline in daily television watching from over 90% in 2010 to 79% in 2015 was discovered.

In television, the message that the producers intend to convey may be distorted or misinterpreted by the audience. The message teaches and cultivates values, behaviors, assimilation, and gender roles (Davis, 1990). However, in Patel's (1995) study of Representation of Women in Mass Media, she points out that media in general censor the messages they disseminate and reinforce them by repeating the messages. Many television critics focus on the possible "dominant" messages that it disseminates;

because these messages can have multiple meanings (Fiske and Hartley in Newcomb and Hirsch, 1983).

Given the social changes that have taken place and the strengthening influence of media on people's everyday reality, media companies have capitalized on these social transformations by supplying products that promise self-actualization, reflection of reality, and relatable contents. Television dramas are one of these products.

Television Drama

A television drama (TV drama herein after) is a serialized, dramatic fiction that has a continuous plot involving interpersonal circumstances broadcasted on television or radio (Twedell, 2012). It consists of ten to twelve episodes. In Japan, a single-episode known as *TV specials* are also produced sometimes as a teaser for a longer series or a specific event. Genres include action, mystery, crime, romance, among others. Japanese TV dramas are aired per season: winter, January – March; spring, April – June; Summer, July – September; and autumn, October – December. Morning and afternoon dramas are broadcasted daily, whilst evening dramas weekly. The latter are known as primetime dramas, and are televised between 8:00 pm and 11:00 pm. Usually, popular ones have a massive and "loyal" fan base (Ahmed, 2012).

TV dramas are, in fact, considered as cultural produce and at the same time significant in maintaining the status quo of women's place in the social order (Ahmed, 2012). Originally, these programs targeted housewives and other female audience (Ahmed, 2012). Although most of the storyline is fiction, TV dramas are believed to

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reflect how a woman sees herself and construct her role in the society. Portrayal of both men and women in TV dramas is said to be traditional and stereotypical that it reinforces gender roles imposed by the society (Ahmed, 2012). Ota Toru, a producer at Fuji TV, believes that a good story must be "5cm away from reality" (Ota in Iwabuchi, 2004). This means that the narrative should be within the grasp of reality. An example given by Ota was most stories regarding happiness are set in Tokyo because many Japanese dream to live, work, fall in love, and get married in this city. This notion was supported by Poerwandari et al (2014), citing TV dramas as "guidebook" for people who want to find happiness.

The main theme of the primetime television in the 1950's was centered on the concept of home (Goto et al, 1991). Japanese production companies created stories evolving on nuclear families with the father as the head of the unit. It was said to be patterned from the American view of family. This contrasted with the traditional family setting of the Japanese which was believed to be large. Goto, et al (1991) explain that through these stories, the society started to affix roles on men and women.

In the 1960s when the second wave of feminism was at its peak, the focus of stories of the TV dramas centered on motherhood (Goto, et al, 1991). Dramas that depicted women at home portrayed them as happy; but working women were portrayed the opposite. Muramatsu (2002) goes on saying that the message of the dramas was for women to remain happy, they should just stay home.

A drastic change of theme emerged in the 1970s when women began working. To reflect the activism of Japanese women, TV drama producers created stories about

unhappy married women (Muramatsu, 2002). Muramatsu's (2002) study shows that viewership has also decreased because women were busy for their career preparation.

The 1980s and 1990s TV dramas featured more stories about working wives and mother-child relationships. The concept of Oedipus complex (mother complex in Japanese), especially mother-son relationship, was magnified. Since the father is always working outside the home, only the mother and child are left at home. In turn, a tight bond is formed between them, and sometimes become unhealthy in the later part of the child's life. Another popular theme in this era was the *ren'ai dorama* or love drama. Although most of the lead characters were female, the stories evolved on love, romance, and their relationships, not their professional life, advancement, and contribution to the workforce.

From Trendy Drama to Japanese Josei Dorama. It was in the 1990's when soap operas, formerly known as 'trendy dramas', became popular in Japan (Darlington, 2013). The story lines promote a "specific way of life" especially planned for female audience. To quote one of the pioneers of trendy dramas, Ota Toru (in Darlington, 2013), said, "*we wanted to make a drama that showed a lifestyle and seemed to pop out from a fashion magazine.*" Currently, these dramas are more popularly known as *terebi dorama, J-Dorama* or *J-Dora*, or simply *dorama*.

Background on Women's Current Economic, Social, and Political Status

Comparing the data in 1970 and 2014, the mean age of women at first marriage and child birth has increased. From 24.2 years old, marrying age jumped to 29.4 years

old; whilst average age at birth of first child sprung from 25.6 years old to 30.6 (Cabinet, 2016). In the same report, survey results on the attitude of women's acceptance of continuing work after childbirth show that 45.8% of the polled women agreed that "it is better to continue work even after childbirth", and only 32.4% believe that "it is better to quit work after childbirth" (Cabinet, 2016). On the contrary, the actual behavior and attitude of women towards continuing work is inconsistent because most of them quit their jobs after giving birth. Kazumitsu and Ii (Kazumitsu in Ramos and Garce, 2005) go on saying that women are hesitant to work after marriage or childbirth because of how the social system works. If married women worked full-time or were promoted, aside from additional responsibilities and longer working hours, if their annual salary goes beyond 10 million yen (roughly $88,000), they will no longer qualify for spouse tax exemptions, social insurance, and pension. This is completely unattractive to both women and their spouses. Government policies such as this only reinforces the traditional setting and structure. Some go back to work but are hardly promoted because their time is believed to be divided between their family and career (Kumar, 2011). Companies do not want to promote them or give them more responsibility because they fear that these women will always put their family first over their work.

On record, women's employment patterns have changed. In 1960, the number of working women was 7,160,000 (Trager, 1982). In 1980, the number jumped to 13,540,000 (Trager, 1982). It further increased to 24,360,000 in 2014 (Still a struggle, 2016). Unfortunately, the positions are mostly part-time. Therefore, most housewives opt to work in *kagyo,* or household business; because they feel that they cannot compete with the men in corporate jobs (Trager, 1982). The labor force participation of women aged 25 - 29 years old in 1970 was 45.5%. The proportion rose to 80.3% in

2015 (Cabinet, 2016). In the 1.7 million increase in employment in 2016, 1.47 million of them were female (Cabinet, 2017). The female labor force in Japan has a distinct graphical representation, the M-shaped curve. After the women give birth, they customarily stop working, and only return to work after the child starts primary school. The 2017 white paper by the Japanese cabinet office (Cabinet 2017) reported that from 1986 to 2016, there is a notable rise in the lower point of the M-shape curve. This means that more married women have joined the workforce even after giving birth. As reported by the Japan Times Online ("More women", 2017), compared to the 33.1% figure in 2000, 54.4% of women surveyed in 2016 want to work again after giving birth. In contrast, from 37.6%, the percentage of women who want to stop working after childbirth and return to work when the child gets older dropped to 26.2%.

Although there has been a significant increase in female employment for the past decades, there is still an obvious imbalance when it comes to management-level positions. For example, in the field of education in 1970, 50% of elementary school, 25% of junior high school, and 40% of junior college teachers were women (Robins-Mowry, 1983). Regrettably, 1981 data results showed that 98% of the elementary school principals were men, and only 2% were women. Junior high school data showed 99.8% were male principals; whilst senior high school data yielded 97.5% of their principals were male. Career advancement of female teachers was obviously hindered somewhere along the path. Japan still ranks lower than most Western countries. For example, comparing the proportion of female administrative and managerial workers of Japan and Philippines, the latter scored 47.3%, while the former has only 13% (Cabinet, 2016). Likewise, the employment taken by women returning to work is often non-regular jobs. The current average salary of women is 27% lower than that of men

Japan, "the nail that sticks out gets hammered down", that reflects the Japanese' attitude towards being different or deviant.

In 2010, Williams (2010) conducted a qualitative study on the lived experience of Japanese women in managerial positions in Japanese companies. He found that working women struggle to cope with work-life balance hence they strived to achieve a managerial rank at their company. Once they are in a high-ranking position, they have better control of their time. These women also believe that being a woman is a drawback because of the gender role expectations in a male-dominated society. They feel that they should "work harder" to prove themselves worthy of the position and to fulfill their other responsibilities such as motherhood. Another obstacle they cited was the large pay gap between male and female employees despite the same workload and responsibilities.

Okoshi, et.al (2014) examined the gender inequality in career advancement for females in Japanese academic surgery. They collected their data from internal and public medical and faculty roster of Kyoto University Hospital in 2009, 2012, and 2013 and analyzed the data quantitatively. They found that there is an imbalance in the number of female surgeons. There are fewer certified female surgeons compared to male. Senior and tenured positions were occupied predominantly by male doctors. Furthermore, no female surgeon occupies a full rank professor status in surgical medicine. The primary reason of the disparity, as the authors suggested, was the long working hours a surgeon has to complete. They therefore concluded that a significant gap exists in the leadership positions in that area.

Interestingly, a research done by Nakazato (2016) on Japanese fathers who took a parental leave show that these men overtook the mother's role as the main caretaker of their child and helped significantly with household chores. The reasons and motivations of the participants as to why they took a leave are to support their wife's return to work, to spend time with their child, and to benefit the child as well. Their uncommon action was faced with the numerous obstacles such as reduction of income since they earn more than their wives; lack of information regarding leave entitlement; departing from the gender role expectation that mothers are primary caretakers and fathers are financial providers; "fear of negative workplace attitudes"; and concerns about dispensing their work responsibilities to their colleagues. They also went through some negative emotional experiences such as feeling bored and busy on certain situations and feeling anxious about being responsible for caring for an infant. Some fathers handled these unfavorable feelings by taking care of pets, receiving help from their parents and in-laws, and staying connected with other people through social networks and blogs. On a positive note, they also had the opportunity to be present during their child's development, which would have been impossible had they been working. The implications of their actions led to a change in some of the participants' work style. They now have a better understanding of how child care works thus, they became more considerate of their partner. Some fathers reported that they feel closer to their children. Some of them became more efficient at their jobs by not working overtime. Notable changes in three participants, who are managers in their company, are they made their department "overtime-free" and adjusted the time they spent at work. Clearly, these have effects on the advancement of gender equality at the workplace.

In a study done by Duignan and Iaquinto (2005) on female managers in foreign and Japanese financial service companies, the women in Japanese companies reported lower self-evaluation of the trainings they have received. They feel that their male co-workers were given more valuable trainings on the company's concerns and business forecasts. Female Japanese employees at the foreign workplaces on the other hand, reported higher self-evaluation. This means, they must work like men - work long hours, go out drinking after work to promote camaraderie and professional relationships, take a few holidays a year or none at all, and sacrifice their life for work. This leads them to hesitate to pursue a managerial position or going back to work after childbirth. This is in addition to the lack of support from their employers, families, and sometimes, husbands.

Previous Studies on the Portrayal of Women on Japanese Television

The rise of the trendy drama culture in the 2000s paved way for story lines aimed specifically for women, *josei dorama*. This type of TV drama is based on comics for female audience also known as *josei manga* (Darlington, 2013). Originally, the characters of the stories are "*successful, independent, educated twenty-something women pursuing glamorous careers who attempt to negotiate work and love against an urban backdrop that represents their stylishness and ability to break free from suburban domestic traditions*" (Darlington, 2013). Freedman and Iwata-Weickengenannt (in Darlington, 2013) describe these TV dramas as a source of education in the shifting roles of women. In the past years, the stories circled around housewives, mothers, or women who are looking for romance (Darlington, 2013). The

stories and themes of these dramas are usually the reflection of the day-to-day lives of Japanese. One of the most recurrent themes is gender relations.

Josei doramas that challenge the conventional portrayal of women has soared from 2010. Several serials have an all-female cast, which is uncommon in Japan. The female protagonists are characterized as strong, defiant of social gender expectations, and focused on developing themselves as individuals, which is divergent in the distinctly collective Japanese society (Darlington, 2013).

Since the 1970s, representation of women in media has gone through remarkable changes. Focusing on television, in the mid-1970s, married women were portrayed as strong and successful mothers, and single women were perceived as rebellious because they were trying to break free from the traditional roles they grew up with (Ang, 2007). The 1980s featured more independent women. Nowadays, a wide variety of stories that shift from the traditional portrayal to working women are presented to the audience.

Be that as it may, the female characters are often office ladies, part-timers, and involved in May-December relationships to play mentors instead of economically and socially-equal partners (Darlington, 2013). Iwabuchi (in Darlington, 2013) expounds that stories evolve around the framework of friendship, romance, and work in the city. Although the trend seemed to progress from the typical housewife to a more modern woman, the female characters always end up heartbroken, hence, the eagerness to focus their energy on work (Darlington, 2013).

The lead female characters of trendy dramas are portrayed as independent yet lonely, stylish yet unhappy (Darlington, 2013). This description fits the status of working women in Japan. They are torn between successful career women but single and child-less, and unemployed wives but married and with kids (Harden in Darlington, 2013). Since the early 2000s, these kinds of plots have been popular. Moreover, Darlington (2013) revealed three prevalent patterns amongst these kinds of stories: conventional maternal values in the workplace, unsuccessful female characters, and ridiculed heroine treated unequally at work place.

In Japan, Saito (2007) pioneered the investigation on whether Japanese television reinforces masculine cultural hegemony, or the status quo, by cultivating gender-role attitudes. His study claims that depending on the subgroups, television contributes to the reinforcement of conventional beliefs towards the women's role, thereby slowing down the development of the women's status in the society. Women respondents, amusingly, seem to tolerate the existing condition. Those who returned the survey with higher level of education and with impartial views on gender roles seem to be unaware of the dominant culture around them. Therefore, traditional beliefs are likely to be cultivated in them by mainstream medium. Ironically, conservative male respondents are influenced by television towards a more progressive stance. Saito (2007) explained that male conservatives view traditional portrayal of gender role as "less traditional by contrast" due to their extreme conservatism. Thus, heavy viewing lead them towards more 'liberal' point of view. Less educated male respondents who spend more time watching TV did not show any cultivation relationship. However, it could strengthen their initial beliefs. Finally, political conservatives were found to be more impartial of their position on gender roles.

Poerwandari, De Thouars, and Hirano (2014) in their study of Gender

Construction in Five Japanese Serial Dramas: Fantasy and the Real Lives of Japanese

Youth wanted to investigate whether the TV dramas represent the daily life of the

current generation of Japan. The *doramas* selected were from the years 2005, 2007,

2009, and 2010. Each *dorama* was aired on a different broadcasting channel. The

researchers also examined the construction of gender in the serials; and if the stories

demonstrate contemporary gender roles or not. The findings indicate that women are

still portrayed in traditional roles. Most of the characters were shown as trying to break

free from the conventional notions of their existence; but in the end, they succumb to

the stereotyped identities. Some of the main female characters, however, were

portrayed to be successful in establishing new identities. Aside from textual analysis of

the selected TV dramas, the researchers also interviewed key resource persons to

verify the status of gender relations in Japan. Since these *doramas* were also aired in

Indonesia, they interviewed three Indonesian women in their twenties, who watch

Japanese TV dramas and are fans of Japanese pop culture, to augment their analysis.

The interview demonstrates the Indonesian viewers' feelings and notions about Japan

and its culture. Aside from the online community that sprung for exchanging ideas,

many Indonesians find the food, language, music, fashion, artists, among others quite

interesting. They also said that Japanese serial dramas provide fantasy. Order, law-

abiding citizens, "rigid and monotonous life", courage, and such seem to be too far from

reality for the Indonesian participants. Regarding gender construction, they

characterized the female characters as "feminine, gentle, polite, while being intelligent

and strong at the same time." The study concluded that the five selected dramas

portray the daily of Japanese correctly. While the women in the serial were working,

they were still subjected to the same expected role of them in both the company they

work at and at home. Women were discouraged to succeed at work because that is the role of the men. Married women and housewives were depicted as unhappy, submissive to their husbands, and tolerant of their husband's infidelity. These characteristics are the ideal traits of a traditional Japanese woman. Men, on the other hand, face the current problem of career advancement and job stability, which are decisive characteristics of a future family man. They also succumb to being "*freeters*" or part-timers, instead of holding a regular job. This is an unfavorable image and situation for men due to the expectation of them to be the provider of his future family. Another dilemma that men face in the evolution of gender relations is their ability to cope with the changes. Japanese men are largely used to power that they lose their sense of value and worth since the changes occurred. Some of them experience severe stress, become depressed, and isolate themselves socially. Some decide to commit suicide.

A potential explanation for the deceleration of women's development was demonstrated by She (2017) in her assessment workplace dramas through the lens of Japanese feminism. She (2017) argued that men and women consistently conform to the Japanese culture of *wa*, or harmony, and do not prioritize themselves but the group. The findings demonstrated that the initial impression of the female characters seemed to exhibit Western feminist ideals. They appeared to break out from the conventional housewife, desperate girl wanting romance, and mother roles. However, the analysis confirmed that, at some point, the female characters succumbed to the society's expectations of them using "forced harmonious resolutions".

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

Design

This paper employs a qualitative research design. To gain understanding of the meaning of how Japanese women make sense of their lived experience, phenomenological analysis was used. In this study, communication is the experience of the "self" and "others" in dialogue. The women in the study are the "self" and the women in the television dramas they watch are the "others".

Participants

The set criteria for a potential participant were the following: female, between the age of 21-65, single or married, working or non-working, and TV drama viewer. Five Japanese women met these criteria and agreed to participate in the study. Consent to be recorded during the in-depth interview was obtained from them. I thoroughly explained the purpose of the study and emphasized their freedom to discontinue their participation should they wish to do so. This research was focused on the depth or thickness of the description. To protect the respondents' privacy, fictitious names were provided, and their place of work was withheld.

Table 1. *Profile and demographics of the participants by Anonym, Civil Status, Age bracket, Number of Children, Education Degree, Years of Work Experience, Employment Type, Occupation, and TV Drama Story Often Watched*

Anonym	Kae	Akiko	Sita	Iza	Yama
Civil Status	Married	Married	Married	Single	Single
Age	35-40	30-34	55-60	35-40	61-65
No. of Children	0	0	2	0	3
Educational Degree	Bachelor	Bachelor	Bachelor	Bachelor	Bachelor
Years of Work Experience	16	14	37	13	42
Employment Type	Full-time	Full-time	Full-time	Full-time	Part-time
Occupation	Prefectural Government Officer	Registered Nurse	Elementary School Principal	Elementary School Teacher	City government employee
TV Drama Story Often Watched	Career woman, family, romance	Family and romance	Career woman, biographical, documentary	Romance	Motherhood and family

Data Generation

The following steps were taken for data collection procedure: searched for qualified participants; contacted, corresponded with, and obtained their approval of participation; set the interview schedule; and conducted the qualitative in-depth interview. A total of five individual, face-to-face interviews using two smart phones and a semi-structured guide questionnaire were conducted within a span of seven weeks from February 2018 to April 2018. The interviews of approximately 20 to 45 minutes took place in mutually convenient places such as cafes, a park, the interviewee's home,

and place of work. Demographic information of the participants was recorded at the start. Prompt questions were asked when necessary to maintain the direction of the interview. The interviewer's personal descriptive and reflective notes were recorded on a separate notebook. Three of the interviews were conducted in Japanese, whilst two were in English and Japanese. I was solely responsible for data gathering, transcription, and translation to guarantee consistency and confidentiality of the data processing.

Data Analysis

For data analysis, Modified Van Kaam Method as described by Moustakas (1994) was utilized. The following steps below were applied to each interview dataset.

One: Horizontalization. Each interview was transcribed verbatim, line-by-line. The Japanese interviews were then translated into English. All lines were treated as of equal value. The right side of the transcription was used when noting for general meanings and preliminary coding for relevant quotes related to the phenomenon under study (Hycner, 1985).

Two: Phenomenological Reduction and Elimination. Approaching each data set with an open mind, personal bias was carefully suppressed while listening to the interview recordings and reading the transcripts several times. Non-verbal communication, pauses, emphases, and expressions were conscientiously taken into consideration. During this step, the participants' own words are kept. Then, by constantly referencing to the research question, statements and quotes that were

repetitious, unclear, and unnecessary to the participants lived experience were excluded, leaving only what is called invariant constituents (Hycner, 1985).

Three: Cluster and Thematize the Invariant Constituents. The themes can now be formed by analyzing the invariant constituent groupings. There were units of relevant meaning that obviously grouped together, whilst there were units that needed to be determined and sorted out.

Four: Check the Themes Against the Data. There was a constant need to review the transcript, the invariant constituents, and the cluster of units of relevant meanings to maintain the integrity and coherence of the data.

Five: Create Individual Textural Descriptions. This step involved extracting direct excerpts and quotes from each interview to describe "what" the Japanese women experienced (Hathorn, 2009). To clearly and accurately demonstrate the themes from each participant, a table outline was created. This helped in the analysis and discussion of the results.

Six: Create Individual Structural Descriptions. The interpretation of data started on this step. Using imaginative variation, which is "the acts of thinking, judging, imagining, and recollecting, in order to arrive at core structural meanings" (Moustakas in Hathorn, 2009), the researcher was able to *put herself into the shoes* of the participants. The contributing factors that led to what the participants have experienced were critically taken into consideration. Common elements of their lived experience were examined and described.

Seven: Develop Textural-Structural Descriptions. The essence or meaning of the lived experience of each participant was interpreted by combining her textural and structural descriptions. The rich description was based on the subjective knowing of the researcher. To illustrate the thematic analysis process done on each data set, an example of the textural-structural description of one of the participants is written in the following paragraph.

Iza mentioned that her mother likes to watch TV dramas about family, wives that were submissive to their husbands, and strong yet caring mothers. She commented, "*I didn't know any woman who worked full-time, what more in a supervisory position, and is a mother and wife at the same time. Growing up, my friends and I didn't know what we wanted to be.*" For her, everybody "*wanted to become a housewife and not work*" because that is "*what my mother, relatives, and neighbors are doing*". Some of the TV drama characters she watched were working, but "*they were either part-timers or they chose to quit their job to become a mother*". "*The workplace they were in had almost all male employees. It's like a mistake to be there.*" Iza's experience growing up surrounded by family members who are mostly housewives and friends who chose to quit their jobs after giving birth contributed to the lack of women role models in her life.

Eight: Establish Composite Textural-Structural Descriptions. By synthesizing the textural and structural descriptions, the meaning or essence of the lived experience of Japanese women was comprehensively understood and explained.

Chapter IV

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After exhaustively reviewing and analyzing the interviews, two central themes that describe the essence of the participants' lived experience of the gender equality law and policies became clear: *Women are Outside the Circle of Gender Equality* and *What Women Want: Commitment and Change*. Three sub-themes emerged upon further review. These are: *Not Me: "I have never and will never experience that"; To Be in a Leadership Position, a Woman Must Be a Man: "Now, I have so much work like my husband.";* and *No gender equality at home, no gender equality at work: "My father decided that set-up, but my husband sees me as his equal and treats his staff equally".* This chapter presents the detailed discussion of the results.

Table 2. *Overview of the Central Themes and Sub-themes of How Japanese Women View the Gender Equality Law and Policies as They Make Sense of Their Lived Experience When Watching TV Dramas About Women*

Central themes	Sub-themes
Women are Outside the Circle of Gender Equality	• Not Me: *"I have never and will never experience that"*
	• To Be in a Leadership Position, a Woman Must Be a Man: *"Now, I have so much work like my husband"*
What Women Want: Commitment and Change	• No gender equality at home, no gender equality at work: *"My father decided that set-up, but my husband sees me as his equal and treats his staff equally"*

Theme 1: Women are Outside the Circle of Gender Equality

The first theme represents the participants' descriptions of feeling excluded and hesitant. It also discusses their view of leadership positions.

Sub-theme 1: Not Me: *"I have never and will never experience that"*

The participants narrated their family's and friends' expectations of them as a woman; their experience of having no role models throughout their lives; and their effort of being one themselves.

Feeling Excluded and Unconfident. Although Akiko is happy about the government's action to promote gender equality, she said she sees these action plans as exclusive to just a few. She expressed:

> I prefer the TV drama stories during the Showa era.
> I don't get what the recent dramas want to convey. I
> can't understand the stories of the current dramas. The
> stories don't touch my soul. TV dramas before made me
> think about life...my life...they were about us. For women
> my age, my generation, current stories are unbelievable.
> For example, women characters don't want to get married.
> Women just keep working and receive high salary. The
> characters now look like they can do whatever they want...
> even after they get married, they still are free to do what
> they want...they are free...the women don't experience
> that much freedom or they didn't have the freedom to do
> what they want at all...

She admitted that becoming a nurse was not her ambition. She wanted to be a nursery school teacher. However, her cousins are all nurses. They told her that a teacher's salary is lower compared to a nurse's. Generally, there are more female nurses than male nurses. Moreover, nurses can work at both hospitals and schools if

they wish to; but teachers can only work at schools. Akiko's parents supported her cousins' suggestions for her to be a nurse because they are worried for her financially. They said that while she is single, she can save up for herself. She mentioned that her parents expect her to take care of them in their old age because she is the daughter. After senior high school, instead of pursuing childhood development, she took up a two-year course in nursing. Eventually she continued to finish a bachelor of the same course. She continued to say:

> ...children should always listen to their parents or family because they always know what's best...I was young then so I didn't know what's good for me. If I didn't listen, maybe I am unhappy now. When I got married, my parents were so happy because I was already in my 30's. They worry that I can't have children anymore. When I give birth, I want to give my 100% attention to my child and husband and lastly myself. My priority are my husband and child, not myself. Although there are many women who prioritize their work nowadays, when [I] have my own child, I want to become the woman in the past generation. Women before worked so hard for her family. The housewife worked hard for her family, to support her husband and children even if she didn't have free time for herself. I respect those kinds of women.

Here we see that marriage and childbirth result in prioritizing others over herself for this participant. She is willing to give up her economic independence, potential career growth, and time for herself to focus on motherhood. The other participants reflected on their childhood and growing up years and the impact of their family's and friends' expectations. They said they are in control of their life by being able to decide on their own. However, at the end of the day, they acknowledged that expectations from the people around them pressure them to gravitate towards traditional roles, thus making them uncertain of their own decisions. This made me realize that women in

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Japan are often forced to choose between being two paths - stay at home and be a full-time housewife and mother, or work outside. The father, however, does not have to face such a dilemma. Quitting his job has never been an option.

Before getting married, Kae's parents often asked her when she would find a husband. Her younger brother already had a family then, and as a daughter, they were expecting her to get married first. She shared that her parents suggested that she slow down at work, so she could have time to actively look for a partner. She said:

> I wasn't bothered by it at first because they are just being 'parents'. But all my friends around me got married...many of them have kids or are pregnant. So, I felt sad...so I joined Tinder. I thought, I'll try [to look for a partner] again. I'm not getting any younger. After all, I already did everything I wanted to do. Suddenly, I feel like I wanted to have a stable life with somebody. I thought this thing [marriage] is something I should get. For a long time, I gave up on the idea of being a wife...I just wanted a constant companion...not necessarily a husband. So when I got married, my parents were so happy. I felt that I fulfilled my duty as their daughter.

She recalled that some dramas she has seen made her feel insecure of her choices. She added, "*There were times when I felt that the character says what I feel inside...that we are on the same situation. In my mind, I want to be someone else.*"

Three participants raised that if male colleagues accomplished something or have completed a task at work, praises and recognition were almost immediate. However, if it was the other way around, they feel that their co-workers are timid to recognize their effort. It was as if it was impossible for them to accomplish something on their own without the help of their male co-workers. This treatment contributes to

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their belief that they cannot and do not want to be in a position of authority or control. These detailed descriptions of hesitation provide evidence that suggest self-doubt. As an elementary school teacher, Iza added that she does not want to be a vice-principal or principal someday, *"I'm not confident that I can be responsible for all the other teachers at school."* As she watches TV dramas, she described that the female characters are *"unreachable"* or someone she *"can never be."* This leads the participants to view themselves as excluded in the scope of the gender equality laws. Sita feels the same way when she said, *"I can see different kinds of life...life that I have never and will never experience."* They narrated that when watching TV dramas, they see equality from the outside. Meaning, they feel excluded in the scope of the agenda. They do not see themselves equal to men as the characters portray.

Where are the women? Finding Role Models and Being One. The participants recognize the lack of role models and female mentors in their life. Be it at home, society, or work, they rarely see women that they view as equal or has the same authority and control as men. The closest female in their circle are their mothers and female relatives and friends. Another belief is that women at work are of the same footing as them, not equal to their male colleagues.

One common factor across all the participants is that their mothers did not work while they were young, or only worked part-time when they were in pre-school. Kae's memory of her childhood was that only one parent was working and the other was in-charge of the children at home, *"My father was the one making money for all of us. He wanted my mom to take care of the children at home. They both decided that it's better that way. So, she was a homemaker."* Another participant, Iza, stated that on TV

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dramas, most teacher and school principal characters are male. Moreover, as mentioned as an illustration above, Iza explained:

> I didn't know any woman who worked full-time, what more in a supervisory position, and is a mother and wife at the same time. Growing up, my friends and I didn't know what we wanted to be. I didn't have a woman homeroom teacher in elementary school. I thought it was normal.

Sita described her experience of not having any role model while growing up because all the people working outside home are male:

> I didn't have any role model growing up. My mother was the only one supportive of what I wanted to be or do. She told me to be independent and self-reliant. But I didn't know what independence meant. We were all dependent on my father. My aunties did not work as well. On the streets, all the salarymen were guys. They wore suit or trench coat carrying a bag. I didn't see any women...no, well, I saw working women but they only worked at the supermarket. That was normal for everybody.

All participants said that their mothers and female relatives either completed a two-year vocational course or did not receive tertiary education at all. Kae added that her "...*mother and aunties only finished vocational courses because they moved to their relative's house in the city*", which was the usual case during her mother's generation back in the 1940's and 1950's. Her mother was the one who took her and her brother to non-academic lessons such as piano and swimming classes. During the participants' parents time, even if women educate themselves, companies only hired their counterpart. Thus, it was deemed a waste of time and resources to send daughters to university. Iza shared that her parents were born after the Second World War. They did not have the chance to go college as soon as they finished senior high

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school because they had to work immediately. On the other hand, most of the female characters the participants have watched ranged from high school graduate to highly educated.

Akiko adds that all her teachers in the university were male. During her elementary school days, there were more female teachers; but as she moved up to junior and senior high school, they became fewer to almost non-existent. Iza recalled that during her junior high school years, although there were a few female teachers, *"they were scary, but they were like mothers"* to the students. She saw them as nurturing. Hence, in her line of work, she feels that being a woman is an advantage. She expressed:

> I think that women teachers are more aware of their surroundings than male [teachers]. The experience of being a mother can make a woman more aware or attentive. It can make her see beyond the situation or deeper than the surface...actually, both male and female can do that because when they get married, have children, raise kids, and work at the same time they will gain valuable experience that they can use at work too. On TV, women are often the sensitive ones, and men are clueless.

At work, most of the participants expressed that since female supervisors, bosses, and decision-makers were uncommon, it was difficult for them to find a person whom they can follow, take inspiration from, and they deem to relate to them. If they did such to their male seniors or managers, their fellow workers may immediately assume that they like the person romantically. Most of their women colleagues have the same level of position as them. Thus, what they do is to try to break away from the norm and create a new path for themselves and other women as well. As a woman, it

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is offensive to watch women leaders portrayed as unkind, without a social or personal life, selfish, and arrogant. These unfavorable characteristics that put women leaders in a bad light may send a message to the viewers that to be equal with men, a woman must possess such traits. It further isolates women and creates division instead of empowerment amongst women.

Sub-theme 2: To Be in a Leadership Position, a Woman Must Be a Man: *"Now, I have so much work like my husband."*

This sub-theme constitutes the women's views of decision-making and authority positions. What awaits them on top? Who can attain it? How can they achieve it? It consists of three sub-themes: promotion takes away personal freedom, only single women and/or child-less women can be leaders, and if men permit women.

Promotion Takes Away Personal Freedom. Being a female manager on a TV drama who can balance work and family life is unrealistic for Yama. She emphasized that there is no way a woman can be an effective leader, housewife, and mother simultaneously because of the demand of each role. She stated her concern:

> I was so worried that if I become the sub kindergarten principal, I won't be able to become a mother...I won't have time for myself or my husband...I won't be able to do what I want...like go to my parents' house or meet my friends...I have to be at work all the time.

Iza maintained that managerial positions should be given to those who want it regardless of gender. Even if promotion is possible for a woman, it should also be her

choice and should not be imposed just because she is good at what she does. She expressed:

> I won't have time to do what I want…I won't have time to date or look for a husband…it's important, you know… Then if I want to have a child, I can't…I won't be free anymore…that's something I don't want for me.

Kae, in her current position as a Prefectural Government Officer, expressed that she does not like her position because she has no control of her time. Before getting married, she also feared that marriage may limit her. She said:

> When I was a teacher at school, I had a little bit of control over my time. It feels to me like getting married to somebody…it's just like trying to take away free time from me. Now, I have so much work like my husband…I'm not the big boss yet, but my workload is double compared to when I was just a teacher…If I get promoted to a higher position, I may not see my husband anymore because I'm always at the office. This is not a promotion. Somebody has to do this job…unfortunately, it's me.

Yama cited that from the start *"men cannot be pregnant, so they don't have to take a leave or quit working"*. She added that *"if women want the same treatment at work like be promoted or become a boss, they must not have kids and just work…just like a man"*.

Japanese men and women are bound by the same career-life choices even before they make such a decision. Men will commit to a lifetime-employment career track and work long hours. This exposes them to rigid trainings, intra-company transfers, and eventually age-based promotions. On the other end of the spectrum, women will work in a non-managerial career track until they get married. Because their

positions do not have the same course as that of men, they are not expected to work long hours and undergo numerous trainings that prepare them for management positions. Instead, they are expected to get married, quit their job, take care of the household, and maybe work part-time or another non-career job. Equal opportunities for women to be promoted to core positions are deemed as a threat to personal freedom. The workload and the scope of a manager's or supervisor's position is much heavier and wider than a regular employee. One must work like a man in order to carry out the responsibilities attached to the position. Sita recalled her time as the Department of Education head. She stated that there were instances when she stayed at the office overnight or two due to the problems at work. In Japan, a position like hers has so much expectations.

All five participants stressed repeatedly throughout the interview that they want the freedom to do whatever they want with their life. Kae, Sita, and Yama believe that those women characters in TV dramas were not given a choice whether they want the position or not. Japanese are dedicated workers. They strictly follow the rules of the society and their company. They work to the extreme that sometimes result to death. This death due to overworking is called, *karoshi*. All of them expressed that being able to choose whether to work or not gives them a sense of control in their life and time. They want to maintain the freedom to do the job they like and freedom to manage how they want their time spent.

Only Single and/or Child-Less Women Can Be Leaders. What does it take to qualify and hold such a position? Participants cited that most of the TV dramas shown when they were growing up evolved around family and married women. There were many

stories that portrayed women as working but most of those characters were part-timers or unsuccessful in their careers. Sita believes that resiliency and bravery will take a woman to a leadership position. Kae, on the other hand, said that it was discouraging to strive to be in a managerial position because of all the problems illustrated on the TV dramas she watched:

> There were [a] few dramas about the female character
> as the boss...but there [were] so many problems before
> and after they became a manager or something...Then,
> they couldn't be a good mother to their kids...and the
> husband becomes alone. Who wants to do that?

She continued to relate that some of her colleagues were not promoted because the company assumed that they will only leave in the future when they give birth. She added:

> I know there are a lot of women who gave up getting
> pregnant because they want to climb up the career
> ladder. There are some people who got married and
> have kids. They are not given the same amount or
> same quality of workload...single and married women
> with children. The workload is totally different. Most
> workload is given to single women...then married
> without kids, then married with kids. Married male
> workload is the same.

For Akiko, she has always dreamed of raising her own children. Thus, in the future when she gives birth, she plans to resign from her job because she wants to focus on child-rearing and her husband. She believes that she will not have a chance to be a head nurse anymore because of her decision to stop working.

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Yama's experience as a kindergarten principal and, currently, as a part-time employee in a city center that caters to elderly people gave her a different perspective. She asserted:

> I know that the women in the TV dramas are not real. Women did not need to decide or to be leaders then because everything was in order. It is our culture, tradition...in our blood to be at home and raise kids because we are better at it than men. On TV, if the women character is strong, she is feared or seen as mean or a bully. If she is a boss, nobody wants to follow her. But if she is a mother or very feminine [at the office], everybody likes her and respects her. So I had to prove myself as effective leader...because even at kindergartens, principals before me were all men.

Since married men in general have the wife to take care of the household and children, they are able to work long hours. Married women, on the other hand, must do a dual job if they want to work full-time and be a mother and wife at the same time. It is the norm for men to be in core positions. Thus, when women are placed in such a situation, both genders find it unconventional. Since it is considered an untraversed path for women, they suffer more due to the extra pressure to prove that they deserve the position and can perform the duties like their male counterpart. In the Japanese system, promotion is primarily based on the age of the employee. Skills, accomplishments, and contributions only come second. A woman in her 20s or 30s are hardly promoted because they are regarded as young and inexperienced. This age range is also the period they are expected to get married and give birth. Therefore, companies frequently offer them a non- career track employment, overlook their potential and do not consider them for promotion. On the other hand, a man in his 20s or 30s are almost automatically offered a career-track position. Even if they get married

and become a father, they are still considered for promotion and given more work because they do not have to stop working to give birth. They continue to work until they reach the age for promotion. They are not expected to take on child-rearing duties as well. This goes to show that for women to become leaders, they must follow a man's career path of continuous work and not having an active role at home.

Only If Men Permit Women. All the participants affirmed that the influence of their mentors, elders, and male counterpart usually bear more weight than their own. For instance, Sita stated:

> ...But it's difficult to achieve that number [the government's managerial position target for women] because if the woman is married and has kids, it's very hard to have more responsibilities at work and raise children at the same time. The system is also stuck or arranged to put a man in that [leadership] position. The ones in power decided this so it's not easy to change that.

She explained further that even if the female characters on TV were resilient, they were often the lone female in their department. There was no variety of female characters. She expressed the same situation she has been in since her first promotion to a leadership role. Relating one story that she has seen on TV with her work, she conveyed:

> Female school principals have our own group, but male school principals don't. Before, there were only male school principals. When two or more female teachers become principals, they formed a group for them so that they can discuss issues or ideas amongst themselves. I don't think it's fair because only women have that special group and men don't. But since the number of female principals is small, most of them feel that the group is necessary for them to be able to discuss because male and female way of thinking is

different from each other. I hope in the future, male and female principals can just be a one group and won't feel the need to make a separate group.

Yama realized that almost all the female characters on the TV dramas she has watched were either non-managers or part-timers. She mentioned that although the lead or major women characters portray leadership roles or narratives, she sees them as bound by stereotypical female duties such as "being motherly at work". She stated that TV dramas still uphold gender division of labor. She believes it is because the TV dramas are reflection of society:

> The dramas I watched, they portray the characters as strong, hardworking, and smart mothers. Even those who are working are devoted to their families, you know... it's not about rewarding your good work at the company... it's more on being a good follower to your male bosses... they [women] had to work to feed themselves...but they don't have to work when they become mothers...so if they want to work, they have to be part-timers. That's what happen so it's true to life.

Akiko said:

> At my previous clinic, all the doctors are men. At the hospital, there were women doctors, but there weren't many. Now, at the pedia clinic, the doctors are women. There are more women pediatrician...actually I guess because it's about taking care of babies. At the nursery school, it's the opposite...maybe 99% female teachers and nurses and only 1% male teachers...so, at the hospital and clinics, the doctors were the ones who decide on everything.

One participant mentioned that she had to join school parties, even if she was the only female in the group, because all the supervisors and directors were male. She said although they became more cautious of their words towards her or when she was

around, they also felt uncomfortable. There was the feeling of being an outsider even if she was in the same circle. Kae added:

> Inside TV dramas, actually they are trying to show that the women and men are equal but the reality is not really...we can see female doctors or lawyers or professionals in the drama, but there is a hierarchy... Only top positions are again dominated by male... police officers are the same...they're trying to promote some prominent female workers but there's always some barriers that don't make them shine. Barriers like people say that she shouldn't be the top. If we get pregnant and we got the chance to give birth, we are put behind the career course.

Akiko feels similar. She stated:

> [the] government...news are still dominated by men in general...decision making is still done by men. Gender equality is getting better but many older generations think that young people and women are weak. If women voice out their opinion, men and older generation people think their opinions are ridiculous and they just ignore them.

On TV, the female characters want to get the promotion thus, they work hard and fight for the position. When I asked Sita why she thinks it is ambitious and formidable for women to be promoted or assigned to a leadership position, she answered, "*The government set it up like that.*" The view of the participants displays a struggle to eliminate stereotypical gender roles. It is a struggle because there are numerous reasons why many Japanese still comply with the traditional system. The Japanese government and companies, which are decision-making positions, are held dominantly by males. Therefore, without their endorsement, women cannot go up any career ladder. When this happens, which is a rare occurrence, they could have the

opportunity to introduce some reforms. However, even then, their power and influence are not enough since there are outnumbered in such a position.

Theme 2: What Women Want: Commitment and Change

The second central theme reflects the views of my participants of gender equality at home and their workplace. It also captures their hopes or anticipation on how they want to be valued, empowered, and placed equally with men so they can fully use their potential to help their nation.

Sub-theme 3: No gender equality at home, no gender equality at work: *"My father decided that set-up, but my husband sees me as his equal and treats his staff equally"*

The women in the study described how they have experienced it with their parents, husband, supervisors, co-workers, and other men they interact with.

Mother stays at home and father works outside: the visible and invisible authority at home. Kae narrated her experience as a child and how she saw her parents. She said:

> My father was making money and my father wants my mom to take care of the children at home because he understands the importance of nurturing kids. They have decided that set up. She stays home.

She and the other participants were brought up in a household where the mother's role was to stay home and take care of the domestic chores; whilst the father's role was to work outside to support the family's economic needs. Traditional gender roles, wherein

the mother is the nurturer and the father is the provider, are ingrained in Kae's parents. Due to this arrangement, her mother was the constant figure who attended to their needs whether it was about personal issues, school, or extra-curricular activities. Kae shared,

> She [mother] was just doing ironing or something
> like that. My mom cooks well and cleans the house.
> She sometimes go to work, part-time job, but
> basically she is the one taking care of the whole stuff
> at home.

Yama explained, "*We were afraid of my mother, but when my father comes home, we were more afraid of him.*" The mother was the visible authority figure, but only when the father was not around physically. She also related that her mother always followed what her father wanted whether it was about the children or their relationship. When she was young, her father was not always at home. She said her parents' communication seemed "mechanical". They talked about dinner, his day at work, his plans for family vacation, what he wanted her mother to buy, and such.

Most of my research participants disclosed that they could talk to their mother more openly about their feelings or everyday life, but not to their father. The mother knows them better than the father because she has been with them since birth almost every day. Growing up with this setting made it normal and natural to see their mother in that role and their father in his.

Kae's father, an elementary school teacher, motivated her to complete a four-year degree because "*he thinks education is important*". When she could not decide what job to pursue, she followed her father's advice to take some education units and

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become a teacher. However, she also stated that she "hated" her father's work as an elementary school teacher, and eventually school principal, because "*he was not around*" and would often "*bring home his work*" and asked her mother to help him. Thus, time is important to her:

> ...but sometimes, like when my father has a long vacation or something, we could go camping or [to] the beach. We play fireworks. We had a lot of family events and we really enjoyed it.

Two of the participants were told by their father that being a wife and mother should be their purpose in life. Hence, education and employment are optional and not necessary. Some of my participants' parents were born before World War 2, whilst the others' parents were born after. They said that since their parents were born during this period and grew up with strict Samurai ideology, they do not see women as equal to men. They are stuck in that era. Samurai teachings specifically ordered women to "look upon her husband as if he were heaven itself" (Hane, 1986). Hence, the mother kept her role as the caretaker and the father worked outside. Sita's father was not supportive of her ambition. She revealed:

> Growing up, I was told by my father that education is unnecessary or I didn't have to study at all. I was told that I didn't have to go to college or even work. He wanted me to get married as soon as possible and be a housewife...he wanted me to be an obedient wife to my husband. My father believed that being a woman is enough - no need to study or be educated or work because she will only be arrogant...she will only be conceited, feisty, audacious...so he thinks that women should just get married soon.

She reiterated that she was considered a rebellious child because she often did what she wanted to do and not what was expected of her. Although she completed her

university education, she said that she only exerted minimal effort. Meanwhile, she certainly wanted to be a teacher, so she pursued the profession. Although this is the case for the two participants, they did not harbor any ill feelings towards their fathers. When she became a teacher, her father was happy. She said that she feels grateful to him because his discouragement motivated her to prove him otherwise.

On the other hand, three of my participants were encouraged by their parents, specifically their father, to complete their tertiary education and pursue what they want in life. Most of them shared that they it was unusual for their father to do chores at home when they were around. Based on the interviews I had with them, they view their mother as nurturing, supportive of their dreams, available, attentive to their daily needs, and somebody who stays at and takes care of the home. If the mother was the visible authority figure when the father was not physical present, that authority diminishes when the father comes home. They view their fathers as the silent and unseen authority. They described them as "*someone who worked all the time*". They mentioned that had their father been present or not worked long hours all the time, they would have had more time with each other.

Traditional families in Japan had an unbending structure. From the emperor and feudal lords to the head of the family, all of them are male. The man or the father is the head of the family. This is reinforced by the family registration system wherein it specifies who the head of the household is. Nowadays, women can be registered as the head of the household, but this is uncommon. Evidently, the older generation maintains the viewpoint of the woman stays at home, and the man works outside.

"My husband does not expect me to be the traditional wife who serves the husband and does all the household duties." For Sita, an elementary school principal, her husband is the biggest reason why she could be in a highly-demanding leadership position when she was the city department of education head. She shared that he has no qualms about doing household chores and child-rearing. She said,

> He never restrained me to do what I want in life or work. He sees me as equal. He also does it with his subordinates. We look at the person's ability and skills and their situation of course. Because everyone has different situations at home and work. I'm treated equally at home. In my family, we treat each other fairly. So, we do the same at work because it's like our second home.

Ever since, she decides how much time she spends at work and at home:

> After getting married and giving birth, my time was divided between my family and work...But because my husband lets me do whatever I want, I could work longer hours than the average mothers...But I didn't have much time for myself like I used to...But that is natural when you become a mother. When I was the city's Department of Education head, there were times when I couldn't go home because of the problems at work. I'm lucky because my husband took care of everything at home when I couldn't.

Another participant feels the same way. Kae related that both she and her husband are busy at work. Her husband can work at home, but her job does not permit her to do so. When her husband is at home, he cooks and cleans. When she comes home and he sees her tired, he would suggest dinner outside instead of cooking at home. He would also exert an effort for them to have their private leisure time especially when she is stressed at work. She emphasized,

> My father decided that set-up, but my husband sees me as his equal and treats his staff equally.

> My husband does not expect me to be the traditional
> wife who serves the husband and does all the
> household duties. I guess because their generation
> is different.

The two participants believe that when the husband sees and treats the wife as equal, only then will gender equality start; and it starts at home.

Akiko's husband helps with the household chores when he is at home. On the contrary, she does not expect her husband to take a paternal leave to share child-rearing responsibilities. She expressed that if her husband takes a leave, it would be bad for their finances. His "share" is to provide for their economic needs:

> No, no, no...for him to take a leave is bad. Where will
> we get the money to eat and feed our baby or me? He
> doesn't know how to work at home...I would just need
> to take care of two babies then, the real one and him.
> I will stop working because I need to and I want to.
> That's my choice. If he's working, it's easier for me
> because I just have to take care of him after he gets
> home.

Yama shares the same view and explained,

> No man in his right mind would take a paternity leave
> unless they are very rich or just don't care...If they do
> that, it will cause trouble to the other employees
> because their work will be distributed to the other
> employees. If he wants to help with the kids or with
> cooking and cleaning, he can do it on the weekends
> or when he has days off.

Although not married, Iza added that if her husband takes a leave, "*it kinda takes away his masculinity because they are supposed to provide for the family's needs...so it's strange.*" She related that to be equal, she will stay at home and take care of their child while he works and provide for them.

Here we can see the difference in the women's view of gender equality at home. My participants' generation is a mixture of people fully embracing gender equality by treating their spouses equally at home; and those who still embody the ingrained expectations on the gender role of Japanese men and women. Some of the women want to be included in the circle of gender equality; but when it comes to their husband, they still see him in his traditional role.

In Japan, the workplace is an extension of home. Kae narrated that at her previous workplace, she and her female co-teachers were asked by a male colleague to "*nurture the female students like a mother.*" They were told to "*check and make sure those female students are doing fine.*" This made her think that her role at that school is "*kind of an important job...so that it can be beneficial to the school.*" The male teacher sees the woman as the caretaker, who extends her stereotyped role from home.

The participants stated that the female characters on TV dramas view their male colleagues or supervisors as good examples because they are assumed to be ideal romantic partners and fathers. Many participants expressed that they enjoyed stories that depicted men as understanding fathers and/or partners and fair and supportive co-workers and/or leaders. Hence, when their manager is considerate of their needs as a woman and treats them fairly, they see him as someone who values gender equality. They described Japanese men as family-oriented in nature but can be reluctant to share household chores and responsibilities.

Akiko, however, noticed that some men have become willing to break the norm when it comes to sharing child-rearing responsibilities. She added her experience when she was working at a nursery school:

> Recently, even if the child is very sick, it's the father who brings the baby to the clinic and not the mother. The mother isn't the one who takes the day off, it's the father. At the nursery school, there are more fathers who picked up the child when he or she is sick instead of the mother...There are many families wherein both mother and father work at the same time. When I was in my 20s that kind of families are unheard of. One time, I was so surprised, 'The father is here!' (gasping)...more and more women are working nowadays. Before, when a woman gives birth, she definitely had to stop working...being a housewife was the norm. Nowadays, more and more women, after they gave birth, they go back to work.

Both men and women carry their expected roles to work. They narrated that their bosses, colleagues, and other men they know often work long hours; thus, can no longer help at home. Akiko stated that she preferred foreign TV dramas when she was younger because the "*male characters were more family-oriented...whilst Japanese men were boring and all the same*". Some participants shared that as they watch TV dramas, they realized that more male supervisors, colleagues, and other men have become willing to make efforts to achieve gender equality. Although, some described them as hesitant to treating or viewing females as their equal and unaccustomed to letting go of their expected or imposed gender role including being the decision-maker, the authority figure, the dominant person, the provider, and the loyal employee, among others. This could be due to the work customs and organizational structure in Japan.

Serious commitment of the government and business organizations. The enactment of gender equality law and policies was a revolutionary move for the participants. As women, we support the legislation and its programs. However, enforcement of the law is weak, and the government has not fully committed to realizing it. Kae explained:

> When the government started implementing those laws, since then women started being promoted or women started getting higher positions at work. I think when I went to the industrial high school, they used to only hire male teachers...only male teachers were able to work in those kinds of high schools... Maybe 20 years ago [there were] no female teachers. Now working at the professional office when I look around the office, the most important positions are actually occupied by men. I think the most important jobs are still occupied by men even at the other departments and offices. The head of the Board of Education has always been a guy. My next boss is going to be a female so I hope to see some changes.

Sita and Iza hope that with all the new approaches and strategies that the government have launched, the workforce can be 50% women and 50% men. However, due to the poor implementation of these law and policies, many companies and organization get away with not obeying the programs scot-free. Sita also stated that "lack of facilities where mothers can leave their babies, such as affordable day-care centers, prevent them from working full-time or pursuing a career-track employment".

Iza added,

> I hope the government become serious in committing to enforce the laws. When I become a mother, I want to work again...maybe. But I don't want my tax, my husband's tax to go up. Because it will go up if I get a salary like now.

The participants want to see relatable role models and TV characters, which is only possible if the laws are implemented strictly and the programs examined regularly. Another aspect which they think needs reform is the reinforcement of the household tax system.

When it comes to women in political positions, all the participants mentioned that they have never seen a TV drama about female public official or politician. There have been TV dramas wherein female characters portrayed the wife of a government official, but never the government official themselves. Sita said that she is curious to watch such a story because it will be a pioneer.

"There must be changes in the work culture." Some of the participants expressed that some women choose not to work and follow a career track or go back to working full-time after giving birth. In many TV dramas they have watched, they agree that motherhood is a full-time job itself. It is ideal to have both mother and father share child-rearing responsibilities equally. However, a full-time worker, in many cases the father, has so much workload that it is impossible to leave work at 5 or 6 pm. Therefore, only one of them can focus on raising the child. They explained that even if female lead characters increase or their portrayal is non-traditional, there are other factors that will not help in changing the perception and attitudes of Japanese towards gender equality.

Yama believes that much has changed compared to twenty or thirty years ago. She emphasized that "before, after the woman gave birth, she can only take ninety days of maternity leave. Nowadays, women are allowed up to 35.8 weeks of maternity leave and covers 66% of the mother's salary." After that, they can take a child-care

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leave and are paid up to 50% of a worker's regular salary. The latter also applies to the father. However, she admitted that most of the families she encountered at work or even her friends do not use the paternal child-care leave. She also mentioned that in the 80's and 90's many of the dramas she watched were about career women seeking romance, which were mostly true based on her experience. Nowadays, she cited that TV dramas are not engaging.

More open discussions and education, participated by both genders, are also anticipated by the participants. Kae believes:

> ...if the work culture changes, I think the male population will also have a change of mindset. [Because] they will be able to understand and experience life at home, right? Men can enjoy their hobbies and not just be at work all the time like my father. So, there must be changes in the work culture. The work hours of Japanese are very long. It's not good for our health. We can't enjoy life. Many Japanese don't enjoy life because they just work all the time.

We hope to see significant organizational structure changes and as cultural shift as soon as possible. Yama expressed that "*if more women are placed in leadership status, they can facilitate and fast track the vital reforms*".

Japan has advanced dramatically in the economic aspect ever since the Second World War ended. Many of their traits and a big part of their culture have aided their advancement. However, in these changing times when their population is aging, childbirth is decreasing, and economic growth is uncertain, the country needs to cope by committing to strict law implementation and revising laws that reinforce gender inequality and hinder organizational and cultural shift.

Chapter V

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Using the phenomenological tradition, my research is able to provide knowledge that cannot be achieved using any other approach. It has successfully addressed its objective to understand the essence of the Japanese women's lived experience of the gender equality policies as they watch television dramas about women.

This study concludes that we, women, view ourselves outside the circle of gender equality. As we watch television dramas, we view the laws as exclusive to only a few. Although there are men who treat women as their equal, both men and women are still having a difficult time breaking away from the traditional division of labor due to their embrace of life-long traditions and unwillingness to disrupt social harmony. Normalized traditional customs, gender roles, and occupational practices in organizations keep both genders from establishing improved communication and more significant relationships with their family. However, current economic challenges have started to initiate necessary changes in the mindset of men.

As a qualitative researcher who also lives in Japan, is covered by the gender equality law and policies, and watches TV dramas, I have personally benefitted from the findings of this study in numerous ways which will affect my understanding of the Japanese society and culture, as well as my attitude towards the norms, legislations and TV dramas.

For future research

A neglected area of research is the male experience of the phenomenon under examination. This brought up the question whether this phenomenon is also shared by men. Since this study is a combination of single and married participants, it would be interesting to conduct a research with a different set of criteria for the participants. Another interesting angle to examine is the non-Japanese residents' lived experience of the gender equality laws and their view of Japanese TV dramas. Furthermore, a study that focuses on younger generation as participants can be done to investigate the range and depth of the discussion through their views since this topic is not commonly talked about.

For the media

Representing women as successful, unrestrained, empowered, crucial players in helping the Japanese economy, and partners of men to relieve the pressure of the society's expectations of them as male must not come at rare on Japanese TV dramas. If TV dramas are a source of education in the shifting roles of women, such narratives and characters must be produced regularly to inform the audience of the essence of gender equality, to shape their thinking to take bolder actions, to illustrate various ways how they can achieve the goals set, and to inspire them to move faster towards a gender equal society. Furthermore, women should be depicted as themselves and not as "men" to demonstrate their own capabilities. It is necessary for this kind of TV dramas to be shown and viewed commonly for it to become the new norm. Since these are also viewed by the male population, it could establish to them the benefits of having a gender-equal society.

For the government and business organizations

The current administration's plan to build more day-care centers should be carried out as soon as possible. Massive organizational structure transformation in public and private institutions is highly recommended. Provision of pragmatic and effective support systems for both male and female employees such as in-house day care facilities; accessible parental and childcare leave; reformed work culture to end long working hours; and flexible work arrangements will be beneficial in the long run. Flexible work arrangements will not only help women, but also give men the opportunity to perform their duties to their family and to enrich themselves as individuals. Once this flexibility is achieved, more women will be encouraged to go back to work after giving birth and remain in the company. Moreover, more female stakeholders must be included in decision-making bodies and committees.

Private and public companies and institutions must be rewarded if they meet the target numbers set for women leadership positions. On the other hand, organizations that do not comply must be sanctioned accordingly to show the government's sincerity and political will. Furthermore, the issue of gender inequality, wide pay gap, workplace gender discrimination must be discussed openly. More accessible fora and channels where women can voice out their thoughts, experiences, and suggestions can encourage and train women to engage and participate in the discussion. Additionally, men should also be invited to openly address the phenomenon because they are as much a part of this necessary development. To establish a gender equal society, the platform, channel, and rights must be given not only to women but men as well. Although the information they need may differ from that of the women's, they are as much a part of this necessary development.

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