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School education and development of gender perspectives and sexuality in Japan

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to evaluate changes in the attitudes of Japan's post-war youth towards gender equality and sexuality, and to examine whether these attitudes bore a relationship to school education. Different generations were delineated based on changes in courses of study and year of birth, and semi-structured interviews were conducted enquiring about experiences and opinions during secondary school days. We examined sexuality education in both junior high school (ages 12–15 years) and high school (15–18 years), views on premarital sex, views on marriage and divorce, and views on gender roles. Fifty-three survey participants were involved in the study: 30 women and 23 men. The characteristics of each generation were examined in relation to corresponding courses of study and the textbooks available in junior high and high schools, identifying both homologies and differences between the messages courses contained and the expressed beliefs of different generations of informants.

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Background

According to a recent report from the Japanese Association for Sex Education (2013), young people in Japan are becoming increasingly polarised into those who have no sexual experience at all and those who engage in sexual activity from a comparatively young age. The report indicated that while the incident rate of experiences such as dating, kissing and sex among high school and university students increased from 1990 to 2005, it declined significantly in 2011. The 2011 survey also indicated that few girls took the initiative in their first kiss or first sexual experience, indicating that the gender norm of boys taking the lead in sexual behaviour remains firmly rooted in society. Kitamura (2011) argues that this norm places pressure on *okute no wakamono* (late-blooming boys) and may contribute to the growing aversion to partnered sex among young people.

This trend may be influenced by several background factors, including negative sentiments towards one's own or others' sexuality resulting from underdeveloped interpersonal skills, a low degree of self-affirmation or self-efficacy, and a lack of sexuality education in the school or home that accommodates the realities and needs of young people. A particularly notable factor concerns the 2002 backlash against sexuality education, which stalled progress in the development of a sexuality education programme for schools (Hashimoto et al. 2012). As a result, sexuality education in Japanese schools is poorly developed when it comes to presenting the facts about sex, reproduction and human diversity, including LGBT youth. In contrast, at an international level, there has recently been a spate of research on educational practices concerning LGBTQ people (see, e.g. Meyer, Taylor, and Peter 2015).

In April 2015 and 2016, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) issued a notice to teachers, urging them to consider the needs of LGBT children/students (MEXT of Japan 2015, 2016). Nevertheless, heterosexism continues to underpin existing courses of study in such subjects as moral education, and health and physical education (PE). Over the passage of time, revisions to these courses of study are incorporated into authorised school textbooks in Japan. Because of this, the generation that learns from such textbooks has a common cultural experience informed by the curriculum. For many years in high schools in Japan, home economics was mandatory only for girls, and PE classes such as martial arts were mandatory only for boys.

Clarifying the relationship between attitudes towards gender equality and sexuality held by Japan's post-war youth and school education should prove useful in understanding the sexual activities of young people in Japan today. Accordingly, we decided to conduct a study among different age cohorts to elicit their perceptions of what they were taught and its perceived influence of attitudes and behaviours.

To achieve this aim, we examined the characteristics of six different generations of Japanese people who spent their high school days at different times, and collated these with the corresponding courses of study and school textbooks for both PE and home economics in junior high and high schools. While we were aware that gender attitudes and a person's sexuality are not affected by school alone, we believed that findings from our study could be illuminating. The reason for this was because, up until the 1989 revision of the courses of study, PE and home economics were gender-segregated in junior high and high schools. Furthermore, while schools in Europe often teach about human sex and reproduction in biology classes, schools in Japan teach these issues primarily in PE classes and teach about sexual norms and gender relations in home economics classes.

Several recent studies in Japan have focused on gender and sexuality in school textbooks (see, e.g. Motegi 2012; Tsuruta 2012). With respect to an earlier period, Haavio-Mannila, Kontula, and Rotkirch (2002) explored issues of autobiographical content to ascertain changes in each generation's attitude towards sexuality. The study that is perhaps most relevant to the present one is an interview-based retrospective study conducted by Hashimoto et al. (2013). This attempted to ascertain the influence of school education on the development of gender attitudes in different generations. The study showed that changes in the curriculum content for gender-segregated home economics, and PE bore an unexpected relationship to gender attitudes and the acquisition of housework skills.

Table 1. Personal attributes of participants.

Generation	Male	Female	Total	Year of birth	Place of high school
G1	3	7	10	1940–1946	Akita, Tokyo, Niigata, Yamagata
G2	6	4	10	1947–1956	Hokkaido, Aomori, Tochigi, Tokyo, Kanagawa, Chiba, Kyoto, Okayama, Hiroshima, Yamaguchi
G3	2	8	10	1957–1965	Aichi, Gifu, Fukuoka, Saitama
G4	6	7	13	1966–1977	Gunma, Chiba, Saitama, Tokyo, Ohita
G5	6	4	10	1978–1986	Saitama, Nagano, Kagawa

Research methods

Study participants of both sexes who had graduated from high school in various parts of the country were selected using snowball sampling. We divided the sample into different generations based on the years when the courses of study were revised. We then prepared an interview guide featuring questions about interviewees' experiences and views on gender and sexuality during their high school days as well as the general public opinion of the time. Using this guide, we conducted approximately 60-minute-long semi-structured interviews with members of each generation. Simultaneously, we ascertained the major characteristics of the courses of study and the textbooks corresponding to the relevant generation.

We identified six generations in all, comprising the generation that was in school during the transition to the post-war system (which we called the Transition Generation), and Generations 1–5. This paper presents the findings relating to Generation 1–5. Generation 1 (born between 1940 and 1946) was the first generation to have entered the first year of elementary school after the beginning of the new system. Generation 5 (born between 1978 and 1986) was the generation that entered schools after junior high and high schools abandoned gender-segregated classes (see Table 1).

Since the interview includes topics regarding participants' sexuality, we anticipated that obtaining enough participants would be difficult. Therefore, we recruited mainly by snowball sampling. Furthermore, since this was a retrospective survey, we attempted group interviews (2–5 people) among peers such as classmates or those who had shared experiences. Where we were unable to do so, we also employed individual interviews. Thus, their descriptive data are not representative of the opinions of each generation but offer a glimpse into the experiences of each generation.

We clarified discrepancies or obvious errors among interviewees' recollections by comparing these with written sources from the corresponding time. However, we based our study on a social history perspective, which acknowledges the increasing importance of oral sources amid the development of oral history (Thompson 2000), and recognises that the history comprising the 'facts' that remain in people's minds constitutes these same people's living history.

Main topics covered

We formulated a series of questions to ascertain the sexual norms and views on gender equality that existed among young people at the time, as well as other relevant information inside or outside school. Questions addressed the following topic areas: (1) personal attributes (gender and type of high school attended); (2) the type of sexuality education the interviewees received during junior high/high school; (3) how the interviewees acquired

information about sex; (4) views on pre-marital sex; (5) views on marriage and divorce; and (6) views on gender roles in the family, career paths, work, etc. There were other items, but in this paper, we focus chiefly on the type of sexuality education the interviewees received, and on their views about pre-marital sex, marriage and divorce and gender roles in career paths and work.

Methods of analysis

For each generation we created a matrix detailing the discussion topics described above and interviewee's comments, so as to identify the characteristics of the generation. We then looked for links and synergies between the characteristics of each generation and the characteristics of corresponding courses of study and school textbooks.

Findings

Participants' attributes

Key personal attributes of the interviewees are shown in Table 1. The gender breakdown varied somewhat by generation, but there were 23 men and 30 women in total, and each generation contained multiple members of each sex.

Characteristics of the courses of study and textbooks

Health and physical education

The transition generation. In November 1949, the Japanese Government issued draft Guidelines for Implementing the Health Education Plan in Junior High/High Schools (Chuutougakkou Hokenkeikaku Jisshiyouryou Shian). This identified 'reaching maturity' as a learning theme to be taught as part of the PE curriculum. Health education textbooks in junior high and high schools were prepared in line with these guidelines. From 1951 onwards, 'reaching maturity' was the learning theme under which schools taught sexuality education-related content.

Generations 1 and 2. The Japanese Government revised the health education content in 1956 by issuing new learning guidelines on health education for junior high school and also the document PE in High Schools, Revised Edition (Koutougakkou Hokentaiikuka hen Kaiteiban) for high school. Under these revisions, the sexuality education content in PE textbooks for both junior high and high schools became less detailed. For example, figures of reproductive organs were omitted and explanation of the mechanism of pregnancy was simplified.

Generations 3 and 4. Amidst the 1970s boom in sexuality education (a shift from sexual purity/abstinence-centred education to more forms of progressive sexuality education), information on birth control started appearing in PE textbooks from 1973, which were compiled in accordance with the 1970 revision of the high school courses of study. From 1982 onwards, textbooks described ever more detailed content on birth control, being compiled in line with the 1978 revision of the high school courses of study. Furthermore, from 1972,

junior high school PE textbooks, informed by the 1969 revision of the junior high school courses of study, included an overview of sexually transmitted diseases. Thus, the amount of sexuality education content in textbooks grew in the 1970s as compared to the 1960s.

Generation 5. In 1989, the government further revised the elementary school courses of study in the wake of the AIDS panic of the late 1980s. Since 1992, sexuality education has been taught in science classes to fifth-grade elementary students (aged 10–11 years) under the rubric of ‘How humans are created.’ Additionally, health education textbooks, which were previously not used in elementary schools, started being used from the fifth grade onwards. As for junior high school, a textbook that came into use from 1997 provided content on AIDS, and following the 1998 revision of the junior high school courses of study, information on AIDS and STDs was provided to third-grade students (aged 14–15 years) from 2002.

Home economics school

The transition generation. The Japanese Government first introduced the subject of home economics in 1947, through the ‘Courses of Study General Edition (Draft).’ The subject was designed for both boys and girls, and was intended to foster family and community life based on democratic family relationships. However, high school home economics (which commenced from 1949) primarily targeted girls.

Generations 1 and 2. The 1956 revised edition of the high school courses of study recommended that girls receive home economics, stating that ‘it is desirable for schools to require girls to complete four units in home economics.’ However, following a 1960 revision, it became compulsory for girls registered in general education to attend home economics classes. This revision stipulated that the subject ‘general home economics’ should be taught from a household management perspective, that is, the housewife’s perspective, and it suggested that women should only work in society to the degree that this does not detract them from housewife duties. As for junior high, the 1958 revision of the junior high school courses of study (implemented in 1962) created a twin-track system in which boys would learn technical skills and girls would learn home economics. Premised on monogamy, the textbooks featured statements related to sexual purity/abstinence and eugenics.

Generation 3. Following the 1970 revision of the high school courses of study (implemented in 1973), the general education subject ‘general home economics (4 units)’ became compulsory for all girls. Textbooks emphasised women’s role as the mainstay of the household. They also stated that paid work outside the home could negatively impact on childrearing. Furthermore, content in textbooks about the physiological aspects of pregnancy and delivery increased.

Generation 4. Following a 1977 revision of the junior high courses of study (implemented in 1981), technical skills and home economics became interconnected. The 1978 revision of the high school courses of study (implemented in 1982) stipulated that general home economics should be an ‘elective for boys.’ Therefore, since 1982, the content of home economics textbooks began to shift from targeting girls to addressing the needs of both girls and boys.

Generation 5. The 1989 revision of the courses of study (implemented in 1994) stipulated that high school home economics should be provided to all students, regardless of gender. In 1993, junior high schools dropped the gender segregation of technical skills and home economics. The new co-educational format prompted the inclusion of progressive content such as how gender bias can be corrected, and new content on sexuality. Another characteristic of this period was that it saw the introduction of discussion about 'love and sex during adolescence' and diversity in family structures.

Interviews

What kind of sexuality education did you receive in school?

Across all generations except the most recent one, it was noticeable that most informants reported having 'no memory or only a vague memory of sexuality education.' This trend was particularly obvious with respect to sexuality education experience in high school.

A few interviewees vaguely remembered receiving sexuality education in high school but testimonies such as the following were more abundant: 'At my high school, we did PE, but not "health education"' (G1, Yamagata, M1)¹; 'There was no sexuality education at all' (G2, Kanagawa, M1); 'There was no sexuality education at high school; that is to say, in my high school at least, there was "rainy day health education," so we never really learned much health education content' (G3, Fukuoka, F1); 'I have no memory of it' (G4, Saitama, M2).

Those informants who did remember receiving sexuality education described a sense of reluctance among teachers to teach the subject. For example, 'I remember the young male teacher being so squeamish about the subject; he floundered around and his face went bright red' (G3, Gifu, F1).

More positively, a Generation 1 informant who received sexuality education in junior high school under the theme of 'reaching maturity' reported: 'We learned about "the mechanisms of men and women's bodies" in the health education textbook' (G1, Akita, F2). In addition, interviewees from Generation 4, the 'post-AIDS panic' generation, recalled hearing about the risks of sexual activity and STDs. They did not learn this in the classroom, however, but got this information from the school nurse. As for Generation 5, having no memory or only a vague memory of sexuality education was the exception.

The 1968 revision of the elementary school courses of study introduced menarche education as part of health education. This revision took place during Generations 2's time. We observed many statements from Generation 2 and successive generations recalling lessons about menarche that were restricted to girls: 'About periods, when I was in fifth grade of elementary school, the teacher gathered just the girls together and taught us about what happens during a period' (G2, Tokyo, F1); 'I remember hearing about periods in the upper grade of elementary school; the teacher spoke about it to the girls only' (G2, Chiba, F1); 'I heard about periods from a teacher in junior high; the teacher was female and she spoke about it to the girls only' (G2, Yamaguchi, F1).

Survey findings revealed that in sexuality education for boys a change took place from Generation 4 onwards. School-based education about sex and relationships had been largely non-existent until the end of Generation 3's time, as evidenced by the comments of interviewees from Generations 2 and 3 that boys were most usually 'playing games' or 'doing PE' outside, while the girls learned about menarche. Even in Generation 4, there were comments

such as 'The boys were left alone' (G4, Saitama, M3). However, from Generation 4 onwards, a growing number of interviewees described how both boys and girls received sexuality education in PE classes, albeit separately, from a teacher of the corresponding gender: 'Sexuality education was separate for boys and girls, at least at junior high school' (G4, Gunma, F2).

Generations 4 and 5 informants who described sexuality education taking place for boys, also described the experience of receiving sexuality education in a co-educational setting. One of them reported, 'It was taught in junior high to boys and girls in one group; I remember the school nurse telling us about the mechanisms of the body' (G4, Gunma, F3); 'Most of all, I remember the sexuality education lesson delivered to girls and boys together during a health education class in elementary school; it left an impression on my memory' (G5, Saitama, M2).

Finally, condom use in relation to contraception and STD prevention had become a feature of sexuality education by the time of Generation 5, the post-AIDS panic generation. Interviewees recalled that the teacher showing actual condoms in the class. Interviewees also recalled the teacher's advice regarding its use: 'The teacher told us to be sure to wear a condom, because ejaculation can occur involuntarily' (G5, Saitama, M4). The same interviewee also described how the teacher 'did not speak disapprovingly of masturbation' (G5, Saitama, M4).

Views on premarital sex, marriage and divorce

Interviewees in Generations 1 and 2 reported that both they and the wider society around them had a low opinion about premarital sex; 'I think it was socially unacceptable at the time' (G2, Hokkaido, M1). Another interviewee recalled students having to leave 'school for reasons such as pregnancy' (G1, Niigata, M1).

On the other hand, sexual norms among adults appeared to be looser in certain rural areas, where premarital sex was often treated as a subject of gossip: "I hear that such and such a person goes out with someone at nighttime" – people [used to] engage in this kind of salacious tittle-tattle, even when children were present' (G1, Niigata, M1).

Female interviewees of Generations 3 and 4 tended also to adopt the view that premarital sex was wrong, believing that it accorded with their own values and those of society: 'I believed that, until marriage, there is a line that must not be crossed, particularly by girls' (G3, Fukuoka, F1); '(Sex among high school students) was a taboo subject; I don't think anyone wanted to bring it up. (...) I felt that it was something you'd start doing after graduation' (G4, Gunma, F2).

Others did not feel quite so reluctant about premarital sex: 'If a pregnancy did occur, you could just take responsibility at that time' (G3, Aichi, F3); 'I was influenced by TV dramas; I got the idea that this sort of thing goes on' (G3, Aichi, F1). A few interviewees spoke about refraining from premarital sex, not out of moral qualms, but because it might inconvenience their exam preparation or threaten an unwanted pregnancy: 'I didn't think that sex was wrong *per se*, but having a child would mess up my life' (G4, Oita, F1); 'I was prioritising exam preparation, so I decided to hold back for the time being' (G3, Fukuoka, F1).

Among boys, the atmosphere was much more positive towards premarital sex: 'Actually, I think those who adamantly opposed sex before marriage were in the minority' (G3, Aichi, M1); 'There was a strong notion of chastity in the society and among high

school students, but the seniors who graduated would sometimes take the younger boys to adult entertainment facilities, saying “you’ve got to become a man!” (G3, Fukuoka, M1).

In Generation 5, both male and female interviewees described high school dating in which sex played a part: ‘I think there was quite a permissive atmosphere, like “go and do as you please”’ (G5, Saitama, M2); ‘I had the impression that those who were dating must also be “doing it”’ (G5, Kagawa, F1). However, they felt that their parents would not approve: ‘I’m sure my mother was opposed to that sort of thing’ (G5, Saitama, M1). One interviewee mentioned, ‘Having a boyfriend meant having status’ (G5, Nagano, F1) and the same interviewee also said, regarding a friend’s pregnancy, ‘I did not say anything about the right or wrong of it’ (G5, Nagano, F1).

Among Generations 1 and 2, there were many cases of arranged marriage: ‘An overwhelming majority had an arranged marriage’ (G1, Akita, F2); ‘My parents decided on my marriage partner when I was a junior high student, and then I met him at a high school age’ (G2, Chiba, F1). This practice was underpinned by the belief that ‘marriage is not a union between two individuals, but a union between two households’ (G1, Akita, F3). However, arranged marriage had declined by the end of Generation 2’s time: ‘I don’t think many people were interested in having an arranged marriage’ (G2, Hokkaido, M1). None of the interviewees from the subsequent generations drew a distinction between an arranged marriage and love-based marriage. In Generations 4 and 5, some of the interviewees mentioned that they had considered the option of unmarried life: ‘I thought there was a possibility of getting married one day, but I didn’t feel like proactively seeking marriage’ (G5, Kagawa, M1).

Finally, the view that divorce was undesirable and that one should therefore put up with difficult things, was widely shared among Generations 1 through 5, but we did observe differences between the generations in terms of the extent to which they might see divorce as an option. Generations 1 and 2 firmly believed in the idea of marriage as a union between households. There was a strong tendency among interviewees of these generations to view divorce as shameful: ‘Divorce was shameful and looks bad in the eyes of society’ (G1, Akita, F3); ‘You were expected to put up with a bad marriage for the sake of the household and the children’ (G2, Chiba, F1). However, other interviewees reported that there was a tension between public reputation and personal beliefs/actions: ‘Divorce was considered socially reprehensible, but those who underwent a divorce presumably had their own good reasons for doing so’ (G1, Yamagata, M1).

When interviewees in Generations 3 and 4 spoke about divorce, they did not display an aversion to divorce *per se*, but described making a level-headed assessment of how a divorce might affect life prospects thereafter: ‘My wage was very low, so I didn’t feel I could raise a child by myself’ (G3, Aichi, F2); ‘I observed my mother; she put up with the marriage, believing that she could not survive if she divorced’ (G3, Aichi, F3). As for Generation 5, while we noted opinions such as ‘during my high school days, I believed that if you married, you should in principle not divorce’ (G5, Saitama, M4), there were many who while not holding a negative view of divorce did not go so far as to anticipate divorce as part of their future life plans. There were also interviewees who did consider the possibility of divorce: ‘In my high school days, I thought there was a possibility that I might divorce one day’ (G5, Kagawa, F3).

Views on gender roles

In Generation 1's time, going on to university was not considered a valuable career path for women, as reflected in statements such as the following:

At the time, it was felt that going on to college would make it difficult to find a candidate for an arranged marriage. Even boys were leaving education after high school and heading off to work, so I felt it was sufficient to finish education at the end of high school. (G1, Akita, F3)

This trend was particularly prominent in rural areas. Furthermore, we observed the following opinion: 'When I was in high school, I did not have any doubts about traditional gender roles, whereby women do housework and childrearing' (G1, Yamagata, M1). The view that women did not require higher education was also reflected in the recollections of Generation 2 informants: 'My plan to go to a four year-long university was opposed by my uncle because junior college was sufficient for women' (G2, Yamaguchi, F1).

On the other hand, one Generation 1 female interviewee said: 'I was raised in a single-parent household, just by my mother. I saw how she struggled, and that made me determined to advance to university and obtain qualifications' (G1, Niigata, F1). Another female interviewee, who observed that her mother, a full-time housewife, lacked economic independence and was subservient to her husband, said: 'I was determined that, after graduating, I would go to university and become able to stand on my own two feet' (G1, Tokyo, F2). In addition, another female interviewee described how her mother supported her through her university education, but could not realise her own dream of going to university: 'My mother, having suffered under a patriarchal society, told us children that it is good for girls to go out to work, and she supported my efforts to live such a life' (G1, Tokyo, F1).

In Generation 2, we observed several statements that were supportive of women engaging in waged work, and by the time of Generation 3, this view had taken root, as was evident from the following narrative: 'I wanted to find a job that would allow me to balance childrearing and work' (G3, Fukuoka, F1). However, with segregated gender roles remaining largely unreformed, this view was premised on women taking on a 'double burden' in the form of waged work and domestic work. Furthermore, one interviewee reported that, amidst the increasing understanding towards women's advancement in education and employment, 'my mother told me that she would do my home economics homework (needlework), so I should focus on study in return' (G3, Gifu, F1).

In Generation 4, some interviewees described their vision of future family life along more progressive lines, 'When I told my parents that I'm thinking about going to university, they were not particularly opposed to the idea. I wanted to be in work throughout my life' (G4, Saitama, F1), and 'during my high school days, my parents both worked, so I hoped that my future wife would work' (G4, Tokyo, M1). However, the influence of family upbringing had a strong impact on views up to the time of high school: 'My image of women's life course was informed by my mother, who quit work after marriage. Therefore, during my high school days, I had the idea that [after marriage] a wife should leave work' (G4, Saitama, M3).

By the time of Generation 5, an increasing number of people thought that a woman would continue work throughout her lifetime, as evidenced by opinions such as: 'I thought I should continue work even after marriage and childbirth. I didn't want to lose my point of connection to society' (G5, Nagano, F1) and '(to work) is to have a normal life' (G5, Kagawa, F2). However, the reality of working women still not properly being valued in society was represented in the following: 'Women have made some headway in society, but that does not

mean we are valued. Many people around me are wondering whether their place might actually be at home after all' (G5, Nagano, F1).

Discussion

The finding that each generation had no memory or only a vague memory of sexuality education was probably the result of schools (and to an extent pupils) belittling health education topics that are not primary entrance examination subjects, as suggested by the 'rainy day health education' statement. Other likely factors include the reluctance to address content on sex as part of public education, and the fact that, since sexuality education was not included in the teacher training curriculum, teachers were unable to teach about sex in a way that would leave an impression on students.

Sexuality education at the time of Generations 2 and 3, in particular, was characterised by girls only receiving menarche instruction, and their male peers receiving little or no sexuality education at all. This situation may explain why older boys' guidance, such as 'I'll take you to an adult entertainment facility and make a man of you,' had such a great influence on boys. This phenomenon was also reflected in the beliefs of boys regarding premarital sex at the time of Generation 3. By this time, health education textbooks provided an overview of STDs for junior high students and content on contraception for high school students. Nevertheless, it is likely that many students did not learn about these topics or not to the extent that their sexuality education made much impression. The textbook on general home economics introduced in the time of Generation 3 contained statements about family planning and the behaviours expected of men and women after adolescence. However, the subject was compulsory for girls alone.

On the other hand, we did observe positive statements about the sexuality education experiences from Generation 1, who used textbooks containing detailed sexuality education-related content until junior high school, and from Generations 4 and 5, who were affected by the enrichment of sexuality education-related content following the AIDS panic of the late 1980s. Particularly notable were the statements of interviewees from Generations 4 and 5 describing their experiences of sexuality education in a co-educational setting. A quantitative survey conducted by the Japanese Association for Sex Education (1983) towards the end of Generation 3 also revealed that the majority of high school students (55.2% of boys and 75.5% of girls) received sexuality education at school. However, findings from this study reveal that the sexuality education content provided consisted largely of the biological aspects of sex and reproduction and did not teach the content that students were really interested in, such as 'relationships with the opposite sex,' 'what is love?' or 'what meaning does sex have in my life?'

Were the norms of male–female relationships and sex, as reflected in high school home economics lessons and textbooks, perceived as influencing high school students at the time? The first point to note is that, up until Generation 4, there was gender segregation, which likely affected boys and girls differently (i.e. we must consider how girls were influenced by attending the lessons, and how boys were influenced by *not* attending the lessons). Secondly, a kind of moral discourse seen in other countries (see, e.g. Kebede, Hilden, and Middelthon 2014) also existed in Japanese society around the time of Generations 1 and 2, and served to restrict people's sexual behaviours.

Textbooks at the time of Generation 1 contained statements such as ‘proper relations between men and women’ and ‘the obligation of our cultural society to uphold monogamous life.’ Similarly, textbooks at the time of Generation 2 stated that the purpose of marriage was to build families and raise children. In the narrative data from Generations 1 and 2, we could see interviewees regarding marriage as a union between households rather than individuals, and divorce as socially shameful. However, a few interviewees also believed that divorce was understandable if there was a sufficiently compelling reason. Moreover, one participant who was at the end of Generation 2 referred to love-based marriage. Thus, the values of people and the textbooks were fundamentally in accord; however, a few people had started to think of marriage and family as individual relationships.

Textbooks from the time of Generations 3 and 4 onwards contain fuller descriptions of the biology of pregnancy and childbirth, and also contained content on ‘family planning’ and the behaviours expected of men and women from adolescence onwards. This change was probably related to the fact that 1980 witnessed the largest number of recorded teenage abortions in Japan, at 19,048 (MHW of Japan 1980). Narrative data from these two generations indicates clear differences in boys’ and girls’ views on premarital sex, and that girls’ rationale for avoiding premarital sex shifted from moral qualms to personal reasons such as fear of pregnancy and the devastating effects it could have on their life plans. Arguably, this phenomenon was the result of girls learning about the biology of pregnancy and childbirth in home economics, making them more circumspect in their sexual relations. However, the same data also reveal the influence of other factors such as the media (‘I was influenced by TV dramas; I got the idea that this sort of thing can happen’) and siblings. The data also show that, with a growing number of divorces around them, both boys and girls were starting to assess the rights and wrongs of divorce based on how it would impact their lives thereafter.

Textbooks at the time of Generation 5, when students had started receiving sexuality education in a co-educational setting, contained statements about ‘love and sex in adolescence,’ a topic of interest to high school students and other topics such as diverse forms of family. The narrative data reflect this development in some respects, with interviewees mentioning their openness to high school sexual relations, diverse models of marriage and family and the anticipation of future divorce. However, while we do not focus in details on these beliefs in this paper, high school students in Generations 4 and 5 could access information on sex not only from television dramas but also from adult videos and from the Internet. Thus, it is unclear as to how much the textbooks themselves influenced these students.

High school students’ views of gender roles

An important issue from a gender equality perspective was the differing ways in which people perceived traditional ‘women’s work’ such as housework and childrearing, and how they related this to waged work. Therefore, it is important to clarify how high school home economics textbooks communicated this matter, and whether they accorded in some way with the experiences of female high school students up to Generation 4, and the male and female high school students of Generation 5.

Textbooks in the time of Generation 1 were premised on the idea of women managing the home as housewives. By the time of Generation 2, textbooks were giving some recognition to working women, but said that women could work only if ‘the children and other

family members [were] not sacrificed as a result.'The narrative data align with the statements of the textbooks; some informants regarded the segregation of gender roles as natural, while others adopting a more positive stance towards women in waged work.

Textbooks at the time of Generation 3 reported the finding from a 1973 survey that 'more than half' of women were engaged in waged work. However, the textbooks also stated that the burden of housework should be divided among the family on the grounds that 'housework cannot be performed efficiently through the knowledge and efforts of a housewife alone.'The same principle generally applied to Generation 4 as well. Textbooks during the time of Generation 5 contained more content about life planning, and portrayed work as part of the life course, irrespective of gender. There was also a shift in emphasis from the family to the individual.

Thus, the home economics textbooks during the time of Generations 2 through 4, in response to the labour policies of the time, called on female high school students to take on the 'double burden' of work and family. The narratives of Generations 2 through 4 overlap with this description but whether this denotes the influence of the textbooks and lessons is uncertain. Regarding Generation 5, on the other hand, the narrative data do appear to suggest that this generation's views were informed by the more individualistic approach to life planning, the life course, and other matters that could be found in textbooks.

In this study, we sought to collate the content on health education and home economics textbooks with the narratives of the corresponding generations, but because the interviewees only discussed sexuality education-related questions in connection with health education, we were unable to gain much data that could provide insight into how sexual norms and beliefs about the family were related to home economics textbooks/teaching content. This situation reflects the trend whereby sexuality education in Japan has been largely considered from a biological perspective. To further enrich teaching related to gender and sexuality, it will be necessary to focus on changes in the composition of home economics teaching in addition to health education, incorporating a range of issues more attuned to current day conceptions and understandings of sex, sexuality and relationships.

Note

1. Informants are identified by generation, city/district name, gender and code.

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