

# Culture and Gender :

## A Look at Japan and New Zealand

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American society at large has, in turn, taken hold of a “feminism” that assumes American cultural superiority, using the terms of feminist critique to assert the backwardness, the unworthiness, and the hopelessness of the non-white world. (Juliette Guilbert, 1998, p. 12)

In a response to the sentiments of the above quote, this study takes a less arrogant approach and assumes that there are no cultural superiorities, only cultural differences. This study is concerned with feminism and cultures other than American culture, in spite of the hegemony that that culture inflicts on the rest of the world. Unlike the quote above, this study is concerned with culture irrespective of *skin color* and assumes that the term *race*, and its associated *baggage*, is only appropriate in anthropological arenas.

### ***Relevant Literature***

Feminism is a much debated issue with much of the debate centering on the goals and methods of feminism (see Aldoory, 1997; Patai & Koertge, 1994). Within this debate and in research papers, concrete definitions of feminism are rarely given, instead, researchers are united by “themes or principles common to feminist research, rather than attempt[s at] one unifying definition” (Aldoory, 1977, p. 3) Therefore, a few definitions here may be useful. The American Heritage Dictionary on CD-ROM defines feminism as “belief in the social, political, and economic equality of the sexes” or “the movement organized around this belief.” Through extension of this definition, a feminist would be a person who believes that inequality is wrong and should be righted. Intermingled with this situation are the social or cultural distinctions between men and women (i.e., gender differences), which become confused with or substituted for biological differences. The feminist *movement*, by definition, seeks to eliminate gender-based differences.

Indeed the literature supports such an idea and stipulates some goals. As stated by Busby and Leichty (1993), some goals of the feminist movement have been (a) to remove inequalities in job categories, employment compensation, and division of labor in the home ; (b) to eliminate the use of females as “objects” to attract males ; and (c) to give

everyone the freedom to develop one's full potential. To achieve these goals, one must understand the process of how and why the inequalities exist.

Lewis and Neville (1995) borrowed from feminist social theory to postulate "that certain traditional notions of gender such as 'females are more nurturant than males' are not based on intrinsic or essential elements like biological structure. Rather, such notions of gender are considered to be social and cultural *constructions* of meaning" (p. 220). How such notions are transmitted is explained in the second theoretical concept central to their study. As they stated it, "in American capitalist culture, advertising-oriented gender displays in various conventionalized forms have become a pervasive and powerful part of the process of how notions of gender are constructed and maintained" (p. 220). Although there are many "conventionalized forms," Lewis and Neville were mainly referring to mass media generated forms. America may have been central to their study but other "capitalist cultures" may include the same process in the same way.

Focusing on one aspect of the mass media's role in that process, Lafky, Duffy, Steinmaus, and Berkowitz (1996) stated that one area of concern for feminist scholars is "about the negative effects of female stereotypes in advertising" (p. 379). In addressing that issue, the authors noted that the gender role socialization process "superimposes male-female differences on virtually every aspect of human experience" (p. 379).

Feminism assumes that those male-female differences are unidirectional. As Hegde (1998) stated, feminist scholarship "is driven by a common recognition of women's conditions of subordination and a commitment to the analytical centrality of gender" (p. 273). We can conclude that there are at least three unifying premises of feminism: (a) a person's sex does not affect that person's abilities, (b) women are treated as if they were inferior to men, and (c) societies must be changed to treat men and women equally.

One specific method suggested by Hegde to begin to achieve equal treatment of men and women is to "interrupt the canonical continuities that have contributed to the invisibility or distortion of women and their experiences" (p. 276). Much of that distortion comes through using Western assumptions and "norms against which to base the representations of cultural others" (Hegde, 1998, p. 287).

This process of representing "cultural others," as well as using assumptions and norms, can be more easily understood when looking at Susser's (1998) discussion of representing, which coexists with the concepts of essentializing, stereotyping, and othering. Representing, as Susser stated, has two aspects: political, in which the powerful speak for the powerless, and literary, the degree to which reality is abstracted. Precautions need to be taken so that the powerful faithfully speak what the powerless have said or need and so the abstraction is true.

Essentializing, as Susser defined it, is “the act of explaining or describing complex things simplistically” (p. 53). Simplicity helps in understanding, but care must be taken that important aspects are not lost in the simplification process (i.e., that it is the true essence of the complexity). Stereotypes are similar in their simplistic nature. Susser referred to the work of others, “stereotyping is ‘the process of ascribing characteristics to people on the basis of their group membership’ (Oakes, Haslam and Turner)” (p. 52).

Although he did not clearly define *othering*, Susser stated that it “is not by definition a malignant act ; [because] to know ourselves, we must differentiate” (p. 52). He stated that the error is when the *other* is interpreted “in the light of our own self-perceptions” (p. 52) and we cannot, then, truly know the *other*. By inference, othering is to view people not in our group as being outsiders who are different from us and not sharing our values, therefore, less worthy.

In other words, Susser showed how the four concepts, representing, essentializing, stereotyping, and othering, combine to give a simplistic, inaccurate view of a group ; he called for a reversal in the tendency to simplify portrayals of groups. Rather than simple, *reality* is very complex and diverse. Anyone who attempts to present reality needs to be cautious and strive to be true, or fair, to that reality. To avoid improper presentation, one must recognize that the nature of research, written papers, and presentations require limitations, such as time and space, which foster reduction and distortion. Another important step is to reject the notion of objectivity (Aldoory, 1997).

In addition to rejecting objectivity as a remedy to *narrowness* and guarding against reductionistic methods, Hegde stated that “research can no longer be conceptualized in insular and culture-bound terms” (p. 289). More specifically, research should become transnational, which “requires a progression from uncovering of universals to the representation of contextually specific material practices” (Hegde, 1998, p. 288).

Susser (1998) called for the use of diverse and specific *representations* of people and Hegde called for the use of difference (1998) when *representing* culture groups. Aldoory (1997) noted the need to show human diversity and report the sounds of many voices when conducting research. The study reported here has (a) assumed a feminist perspective, (b) attempted to get away from America as *the* standard and (c) sought to give voices to more women.

A better standard bearer might be New Zealand because it was the first self-governed country to give women the right to vote, in 1893. Therefore it was selected as one culture to study.

If Lewis and Neville (1995) were correct, about capitalist culture and the cultural construction of meaning, there should be similar views of gender within a capitalist cul-

ture and across capitalist cultures. A previous study had looked at Japanese voices (Dunham, 1978). Because of the availability of that data base and that Japan is a capitalist culture, similar to New Zealand, it was decided to use these two cultures for the current study. The aim was to measure the importance of gender related issues as perceived by women college students in Japan and New Zealand. As a follow-up to a previous study in Japan (Dunham, 1998), this study is further assessment of how important certain issues are in the lives of women in these two cultures and their impressions of the importance of those issues in their respective societies.

## Methods

A questionnaire, designed in the earlier study of only Japanese college students (Dunham, 1998), was administered to another group of students in Japan as well as to students in New Zealand. The original questionnaire had been developed by talking with a small group of women students at Tezukayama College, a two-year women's college in Nara, Japan, about the gender issues they perceived to be important for themselves and for Japanese society. The students were presented with a media-determined list of issues (as reported by Dunham, 1997). The list served as a starting point for the discussion where students were asked to comment on those ideas and were encouraged to make their own list of issues. The final, *negotiated* issues were then developed into a questionnaire format. The questionnaire, written in Japanese and English, instructed students to rate the importance of six issues as related to gender. The six items were listed twice, in two separate sections. One section was for each respondent to rate each of the six issues in relation to her life and the other section to rate each of the six issue in relation to Japanese society. (Section 1 : "In relation to gender, how important are the following things in your life?" and Section 2 : "In relation to gender, how important are the following things for Japanese society?") On the questionnaire, the students were to rate the items on an 11-point Likert scale with "0" being "not important" and "10" being "very important." Further, the survey form included a space for students to add her own item (i. e., *other* issue not on the list) and rate it for herself and society. The six listed issues were (a) job roles, (b) relationships between men and women outside the workplace, (c) domestic violence, (d) discrimination or sexual harassment, (e) pregnancy, and (f) birth control.

Although the initial survey was conducted a year prior to the current study and the results reported elsewhere (Dunham, 1998), the responses were included in the analysis conducted here. The students in the earlier study ( $n = 46$ ) and the Japanese students sur-

veyed here ( $n = 36$ ) were second-year students enrolled in a "Current English" course at Tezukayama College. The survey was administered during regular class time.

For the New Zealand phase of the current study, the questionnaire was revised by deleting Japanese language and changing the word "Japan" to "New Zealand" where it occurred on the questionnaire, so students would rate the six items for New Zealand society. The revised questionnaires were administered in March 1998 during regular class time to students enrolled in three different classes ( $n = 30$ ,  $n = 32$ ,  $n = 27$ , respectively) at Christchurch Polytechnic. The questionnaires were collected and the responses were entered into a Macintosh Powerbook 145B computer. The data were analyzed using SPSS 4.0, a statistical analysis software, on that computer. Because some of the New Zealand respondents were men and this study is about the voices of women, all responses from men were eliminated from the main analyses by using an SPSS "Select If" statement. The analyses are based on women responses in the three Polytechnic classes ( $n = 23$ ,  $n = 22$ ,  $n = 18$ , respectively) and the two classes from Japan, who were all women. In the statistical analyses, two levels were used to test statistical significance:  $p \leq .05$  for modest significance and  $p \leq .01$  for high significance.

## Results

The first analysis was to see if there were differences between the two groups of Japanese students and among the three classes at Christchurch Polytechnic. The results of t-tests (which statistically compare group mean scores) showed that any differences between the responses of the two groups of Japanese students were not statistically significant. Therefore, they were treated as one group for further analyses.

The results of analysis of variance showed that responses of the three New Zealand groups were statistically the same except in the case of their rating of *pregnancy* as an important issue for New Zealand society. There, the three groups differed significantly ( $F(2,59) = 3.645$ ,  $p = .032$ ). Nevertheless, the three classes of New Zealand students were grouped together for further analysis and appropriate comments are made in the case of their rating of the importance of pregnancy for the society at large. Using an SPSS "IF" statement, all the women students were put into two groups according to nationality (Japanese,  $n = 82$  and New Zealanders,  $n = 63$ ) and treated as such for further analyses.

The next analysis was to compare the groups from the two countries in their rating of the six issues. Table 1 shows the student responses, by nationality, to the request to rate the importance in her life and to the larger society of the six issues as they are related to sex/gender.

**Table 1**

Rating (Mean, Median and Mode) of Given Sex/Gender Issues in Student's Life and for Society by Japanese–New Zealanders

ISSUE	STUDENT'S LIFE			SOCIETY		
	Japanese · New Zealander			Japanese · New Zealand		
	MEAN	MEDIAN	MODE	MEAN	MEDIAN	MODE
Job Roles	7.15 · 7.11	8 · 8	5 · 8	8.08 · 7.21	9 · 7	10 · 10
Relationship	7.76 · 7.87	8 · 8	10 · 10	7.51 · 7.62	8 · 8	10 · 10
Domestic Violence	6.18 · 8.39	8 · 10	10 · 10	7.31 · 8.35	8 · 9	10 · 10
Discrimination	7.37 · 8.56	10 · 10	10 · 10	8.18 · 7.98	9 · 8	10 · 10
Pregnancy	8.00 · 6.35	9 · 7	10 · 10	7.72 · 7.03	8 · 8	10 · 8
Birth Control	6.19 · 7.98	5 · 10	5 · 10	5.84 · 7.67	6 · 8	10 · 10

As noted above, the survey instrument had a space for the students to write an *other* issue, and rate its importance, as an addition to the six listed on the questionnaire. Most students rated only the six given issues and did not offer one of their own. Of the all Japanese students, 19.5 percent rated the *other* category for themselves, and 18.3 percent did so for Japanese society. Of those who rated the *other* issue for themselves, 5 students did not specify the issue with regard to themselves. Of the 12 students who specified, 3 students wrote “salary”; 2 students each wrote “friendships,” “AIDS,” and “taking care of children”; and 1 student each wrote “rape,” “sex crimes,” and “single parents” as being the *other* issue. With regard to Japanese society and an *other* issue, only 1 student wrote what the *other* was (i.e., “Japanese Society”) even though she had not written or rated an *other* in her life. With regard to the 12 students who specified an *other* for themselves but not for the one they rated for Japanese society, it might be assumed that they were rating the same issue for Japanese society but merely failed to write it down. But such an assumption must be made with caution.

Only 11.1 percent of the New Zealand students rated an *other* issue for themselves and for New Zealand society, but all of them specified what issue they were rating. For 5 of those students, they wrote and rated the same issues for their lives as well as for New Zealand society: 1 student each wrote “sexual abuse,” “abortion,” “cultural awareness,” “racial discrimination” and “Jesus.” One student wrote and rated “family” for her life but did not specify or rate an *other* for New Zealand society. And 1 student wrote “sexual orientation” for her life and “cultural awareness” for New Zealand society.

The next step in analyzing the data was to look at the relationships between the ratings listed in Table 1. The first was a comparison between the rating of Japanese students and New Zealand students. T-tests revealed that there were a few significant differences. New Zealand students rated the importance of domestic violence ( $M = 8.39$ ) as

significantly more important ( $t(127.14) = -3.85, p = .000$ ) in their lives than did Japanese students ( $M = 6.17$ ). A similar relationship in student rating was found for the issue of discrimination ( $t(130.04) = -2.33, p = .021$ ) (New Zealand,  $M = 8.56$ ; Japan  $M = 7.36$ ) and the issue of birth control ( $t(128.56) = -3.48, p = .001$ ) (New Zealand,  $M = 7.98$ ; Japan  $M = 6.19$ ). Conversely, the Japanese students rated the importance of pregnancy as an issue ( $M = 8.00$ ) significantly higher ( $t(106.78) = 3.00, p = .003$ ) than the New Zealand students ( $M = 6.35$ ).

Similar to that above, the New Zealand students rated the importance of domestic violence in New Zealand society ( $M = 8.35$ ) significantly higher ( $t(125.11) = -2.51, p = .013$ ) than the Japanese students did for Japanese society ( $M = 7.31$ ). And the rating of birth control for the respective societies showed a similar relationship ( $t(126.98) = -3.64, p = .000$ ) (New Zealand,  $M = 7.67$ ; Japan  $M = 5.84$ ). On the other hand, Japanese students rated job roles for Japanese society ( $M = 8.08$ ) as significantly more important ( $t(125.33) = 2.38, p = .019$ ) than did New Zealand students ( $M = 7.21$ ). Otherwise, the rating of importance of issues was not statistically different between the Japanese students and the New Zealand students.

The next analysis was to look at the relative importance between various issues as rated by each student. Therefore, a Pearson Correlation (which calculates the amount that two items covary) was calculated for each pair of issues. The correlations for the Japanese students are reported first and then for the New Zealand students.

For the Japanese students in their individual lives, there was a significant correlation between their rating of the importance of job roles and their rating of man-woman relationships outside the workplace ( $r = 0.2604, p \leq .05$ ). The rating of domestic violence was significantly related to the rating of discrimination ( $r = 0.7563, p \leq .01$ ) and the rating of pregnancy was related to the rating of birth control ( $r = 0.4081, p \leq .01$ ).

When looking at the individual in comparison to Japanese society, the rating of the importance of job roles in their lives was significantly correlated to the rating of importance for Japanese society ( $r = 0.3023, p \leq .01$ ). Similar correlations existed between the importance for themselves and for Japanese society with regard to the issues of domestic violence ( $r = 0.6964, p \leq .01$ ), discrimination ( $r = 0.5335, p \leq .01$ ), pregnancy ( $r = 0.4759, p \leq .01$ ), and birth control ( $r = 0.4592, p \leq .01$ ).

For the New Zealand students in their individual lives, there was a significant correlation between their rating of the importance of job roles and the rating of man-woman relationships outside the workplace ( $r = 0.4324, p \leq .01$ ). The importance of job roles was also significantly related to that of domestic violence ( $r = 0.4176, p \leq .01$ ) and discrimination ( $r = 0.4753, p \leq .01$ ). Similarly, there were significant correlations in the ratings be-

tween the issue of man-woman relationships outside the workplace and the issue of domestic violence ( $r=0.2890$ ,  $p \leq .05$ ), the issue of discrimination ( $r=0.2726$ ,  $p \leq .05$ ), and the issue of birth control ( $r=0.3597$ ,  $p \leq .01$ ). In addition, the ratings for the issue of domestic violence were significantly related to the issue of discrimination ( $r=0.7832$ ,  $p \leq .01$ ) and to the issue of pregnancy ( $r=0.4249$ ,  $p \leq .01$ ).

When looking at the individual in comparison to New Zealand society, the rating of the importance of job roles in their lives was significantly correlated to the rating of importance for New Zealand society ( $r=0.4032$ ,  $p \leq .01$ ). Similar correlations existed between the importance for themselves and for New Zealand society with regard to the issue of man-woman relationships outside the workplace ( $r=0.3203$ ,  $p \leq .05$ ) the issue of domestic violence ( $r=0.3760$ ,  $p \leq .01$ ), the issue of discrimination ( $r=0.2965$ ,  $p \leq .01$ ), the issue of pregnancy ( $r=0.5203$ ,  $p \leq .01$ ), and the issue of birth control ( $r=0.2858$ ,  $p \leq .05$ ).

## Conclusions

In looking at the similarities between Japan and New Zealand, all six of the issues were rated as relatively important for the students in her life and for the society. Table 1 shows that all of the mean ratings were higher than 5. Both groups of students were statistically similar in their rating of job roles and relationships between men and women outside the work place. With regard to their respective societies, both groups of students were statistically similar in their rating of relationships between men and women outside the work place, discrimination, and pregnancy. (Note that there was statistically significant diversity among the three groups of New Zealand students and their rating of pregnancy as an important issue. Therefore, the just noted similarity between the Japanese and New Zealand students may not be correct.)

With regard to differences, the New Zealand students rated discrimination as more important in their lives than the Japanese students did. In addition, the New Zealand students rated domestic violence and birth control as more important both in their lives and for their society than the Japanese students did. Conversely, the Japanese students rated pregnancy as more important in their lives than the New Zealand students did, while rating job roles as more important for Japanese Society than the New Zealand students did for New Zealand society. (Again, caution must be used in looking at the issue of pregnancy.)

One tentative conclusion is that these New Zealand students are either receiving more discrimination than the Japanese students or that they are just more aware of it in their personal lives. Similar conclusions can be drawn about the Japanese students and



pregnancy in their lives.

Because the New Zealand students rated domestic violence and birth control as more important both in their lives and for society than did the Japanese students, one could conclude that (a) these are specific problems in their lives and in New Zealand society (b) that they are very aware of these issues for themselves and those around them, or (c) that the importance in their lives is such that they have projected it on the society at large.

In rating job roles as more important for Japanese society than the New Zealand students did for New Zealand society, the Japanese students may be anticipating encountering this when they enter the job market or may be sensitive to mass media or other accounts of such problems they have heard.

In looking at how the ratings between issues correlated for each student, as part of a group, some conclusions may be drawn. As issues in their personal lives, the Japanese students tended to rate job roles similarly to man-woman relationships, domestic violence similarly to discrimination, and pregnancy similarly to birth control. One may see some logical connection between each of these pairs of issues. Although work and home may be separated in some respects, how men and women relate outside the workplace may carry over into the workplace and job roles. These two issues are connected in some respects. Similarly, domestic violence may be a magnified form of discrimination. Again, one may find these are different manifestations of the same issue. In fact, the ratings of the New Zealand students showed a similar relationship between job and man-woman relationships, and domestic violence and discrimination. The lack of a relationship between pregnancy birth control for New Zealand students may be to the statistical diversity among the three groups of students in rating pregnancy as an issue.

The New Zealand students went beyond the Japanese students in connecting the ratings of various issues in their lives. In addition to the two correlations occurring for the Japanese students, the New Zealand student ratings showed the importance of job roles was connected with domestic violence and discrimination, and that the importance of men-women relationships was connected with domestic violence, discrimination, and birth control. The question is how are these issues connected in the minds and lives of the New Zealand students but not in the minds and lives of the Japanese students? Indeed, they may not be connected at all, but that the covariance is merely coincidence.

With regard to the lives of the students and the larger society, there was a correlation of importance between each issue for the New Zealand students. In other words, if the issue was important in her life, she rated it the same importance for society. For the Japanese students, this was true of all issues except for male-female relationships. There

are at least two conclusions: that the students projected their personal importance onto that of the society or that they are representative members of the society. Yet, the Japanese students did make a distinction in their rating of men-women relationships for them and for Japanese society.

With regard to the *other* category, some interesting issues were brought up. However, the number of students who mentioned them was so small that the overall importance is uncertain. It could be that these issues are also important to other students but they failed to think of them while filling out the questionnaire or that they were too lazy to write anything beyond the minimum, or the six issues *covered the waterfront* for most students.

As cultures or societies, Japan and New Zealand seem to be similar in regard to some gender issues. Overall, the six issues were rated as quite important for the students and for their society. The relative importance of each issue for the individual seemed to parallel that for her society. Yet the issues of domestic violence, discrimination, and birth control seem to be a bit more important in New Zealand than in Japan.

## Discussion

With regard to the implications of the results here, there are certain limitations created by the methods of the study. The survey was a convenience sample of a very specific aspect of Japanese society and New Zealand society. The data here were generated by Japanese and New Zealand women enrolled in college. Those groups are fairly unique within the societies and may not even represent the student population from which they came. However, those students were produced by the society in which they live. Therefore, there must be some connection between the values as reported by the surveyed group and the values held by the larger society. The difficulty here is to determine which characteristics are common and which are unique.

The conclusions noted above are very tentative but can serve as a measure of some gender issues and their relative importance in the two societies. The results of this study can serve as a launching for further study that can help contextualize these findings and expand on them.

One area that will help the most with contextualization is the area of definitions. What do each of the six issues mean? Are those meanings the same for everyone? If not, are they very individualistic or are there a few broad, common meanings. Do the meanings vary with biological sex, or with gender? Further, what is the meaning of importance? Why does one person rate an issue as "5" while another rates it as "7"?

Questionnaires tend to reduce and limit information. And the results here must be looked at from that point of view. Individuals must be interviewed so that their voices can be recorded and disseminated. The results here can serve as a starting point for asking questions in conducting such interviews and can serve as a gauge from which to measure the responses of individuals. Only then can we begin to know what issues are important for different cultures and begin to know what gender is really about.

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