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# How to Be a Girl: Mainstream Media Portrayals of Transgendered Lives in Japan

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## Citizenship and the Transgendered Condition

Just before the turn of the twenty-first century changes to Japanese laws concerning the modification of reproductive capacity resulted in the removal of some legal barriers to the surgical modification of sexed bodies. These operations are variously known as “sex change” [*seitenkan shujutsu*], “sex adjustment” [*seibetsu tekigō shujutsu*], or “sex reassignment” operations [*seibetsu saihantei shujutsu*].<sup>1</sup> Medical facilities that perform such surgery usually do so only after the client has spent a substantial period of time living as a member of the gender they wish to acquire.<sup>2</sup> There is now a significant number of individuals in Japan who have undergone such surgery or are planning to do so. These include both male to female (MtF) and female to male (FtM) transformations. In addition, there are those who live transgendered lives without undergoing radical surgery, some who undergo hormone treatment, and some who simply modify their dress and deportment and modulate their speech patterns.

Gender identity is intimately linked to citizenship. Someone whose gender identity is ambiguous will have problems with all of the social systems that monitor individual identity. This may also lead to difficulties in gaining the kind of stable employment that is an important aspect of citizenship. This is one of the reasons why transgender individuals have often been found working in the entertainment and hospitality sectors, where regulations and paperwork may be looser than in permanent full-time occupations. According to the system of family registration [*kooseki*] in Japan, personal records can also affect the fate of whole families, for it is often necessary to present an extract of the family register as verification of one's

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identity on employment or marriage. In the *koseki*, children are listed according to birth order and sex: eldest son, second son, eldest daughter, second daughter, and so on. For this reason, if one sibling changes their sex, this will affect the description of any younger siblings.<sup>3</sup>

States regulate such practices as sex reassignment surgery as one aspect of the management of populations, which in Foucauldian terms is referred to as “biopower”.<sup>4</sup> Operations that modify the sexual organs are seen to be problematic because they affect the individual’s reproductive capacity. Participating in family life and contributing to the reproduction of the next generation are also assumed to be part of the citizen’s participation in the national community. To wilfully modify one’s reproductive capacity, and to refuse to participate in reproductive activity can seem like a renunciation of the duties of citizenship in a nation-state where there are concerns about the reproduction of the population (Mackie, 2002, pp. 200–29).

Normative gender identities facilitate participation in the heteronormative reproductive family system, and thus the cultural production of masculinity and femininity can also be linked to the management of biopower. Individuals who seek to develop a new gendered identity make reference to culturally approved models of masculinity and femininity, whether this be to affirm such models in order to “pass” as male or female, or to challenge such models. As the concept of transgender comes under the attention of the medical and legal professions, transgendered individuals may also be subject to normative expectations and prescriptions (Valentine, 2007).

### Representing Transgender

The stories of transgendered individuals have recently moved from small-scale newsletters and support groups and into the mass media, in a pattern that is familiar from other spheres such as the women’s movement, advocacy for minority rights, and various kinds of support groups.<sup>5</sup> Visibility in literal and metaphorical public space is another important element of citizenship. Or, to reframe according to a slightly different theoretical framework, narratives of transgendered lives have moved from the “counter-public” of non-government organisations, support groups, newsletters and the internet, and into the mainstream public sphere (Fraser, 1997, pp. 69–98).

The manner of this incorporation is also changing. There are still places in the popular media where gender variant individuals are treated as curiosities or made visible for their supposed entertainment value. Several individuals of ambiguous gender presentation make regular appearances on variety programs or talk shows. There have also, however, been some recent publications and drama and documentary programs that have treated transgendered lives with some seriousness and attempted empathy, as individuals with working lives and family lives. Some recent media portrayals have depicted individuals who have “passed” and have managed to find work in more mainstream occupations. While this increased visibility is to be welcomed, as potentially recognising the citizenship and belonging of such individuals, there are also generic constraints in mainstream media forms that may circumscribe the kinds of stories that can be narrated and that will be listened to.

In this essay I will consider some recent narratives of transgendered lives which have appeared in relatively mainstream media venues. These narratives of how some individuals born in male bodies acquired a feminine gender identity can also shed light on more mainstream performances of femininity, where possible disjunctions between sexed body and gendered identity are not so easily perceived, and the work that goes into the development of a gendered identity is not so easily accessible to conscious reflection.

Nomachi Mineko's (2006) book *O-kama dakedo OL yatte masu* narrates the everyday experiences of a male-to-female transgender individual who is employed as a clerical worker in an office. The narrative is a combination of text and illustrations. The language of the text is generally colloquial; the illustrations are in manga style; and the tone is comedic. This style reflects the genesis of the book in a weblog (blog).<sup>6</sup> Most descriptions of transgendered lives place them firmly in the nether worlds of the entertainment industry, but this book is unusual in presenting a performance of femininity that takes place in the least glamorous site of contemporary life, the office. Nomachi has undertaken one of the least glamorous occupations, clerical work. Women who perform such work are popularly known by the epithet "Office Lady" (or "OL").

I will also consider a recent television drama, *Watashi ga watashi de aru tame ni* (So that I can be myself), which was shown on prime-time television at the end of 2006 (within weeks of the publication of Nomachi's book) and which also concerns a male to female transformation. The drama was shown on a commercial television station in prime time, in a series of weekly self-contained dramas focused on social issues. Several high-profile actors appear as the members of the main character's family, and the transgendered characters are portrayed by transpersons.<sup>7</sup> This program might be characterised generically as family melodrama (Kamikawa, 2006).

### Becoming an "Office Lady"

The narrative of Nomachi Mineko's book is shaped by the fear of being unmasked as a transgendered individual. The frontispiece shows a cartoon of a woman with an accusatory expression, and the word "*mitsukatta*"! (Caught out!). That is, Nomachi is afraid that her workmates will discern the gap between *his* sexed body and *her* performance of feminine gendered identity.<sup>8</sup> The book opens with Nomachi's self-introduction, accompanied by cartoon illustrations.

Pleased to meet you. I am Nomachi Mineko.

I work as an OL in the city, but actually, I have a dick.

Nobody in the company knows this.

I spend every day as an ordinary female employee (Nomachi, 2006, pp. 4–5).

Nomachi's anxiety is clearly spatialised. The office is the space where she experiences the threat of disclosure and thus can allow no lapse in control of her clothing or deportment and the modulation of her voice; at home she can lounge around naked or semi-naked, free from the inquiring eyes that might focus on the ambiguities of her body.

Strangely enough, in the office, the threat of the revelation of the gap between body and gender identity does not primarily focus on Nomachi's body itself, but rather on discourse and memory. Nomachi Mineko's reflections on becoming a woman demonstrate that femininity is a matter of daily performances, which nevertheless draw on embodied memories. This can also shed light on more mainstream performances of femininity. Embodied memories construct both individual and collective identities.

Nomachi is anxious when she is unable to join in on discussions of schoolgirl memories – about experiences of adjusting school uniforms to the current fashion, or the wearing of particular fashions such as loose, long socks. Even the mention of swimsuits causes anxiety, for Nomachi's experiences are of wearing bathing trunks rather than feminine swimsuits (Nomachi, 2006, pp. 30–31). Nomachi also worries that the women in the office will discuss menstruation in her presence, something of which she has had and will have no experience. Should she pretend to share the experience, or should she claim some menstrual irregularity? She buys the relevant products to satisfy her curiosity, although she will surely have no need to use them. Despite her fears, this discussion rarely eventuates. The only occasion is when a female workmate uses a conventional euphemism to explain her absence the previous day. Because of Nomachi's unfamiliarity with the relevant euphemisms, there is an awkward moment until Nomachi can decode the comment (Nomachi, 2006, pp. 32–35; pp. 112–15).<sup>9</sup>

These experiences reveal that gender identity is about the narration of shared experiences. A person who is unable to share in the exchange of stories will not be interpellated as belonging to that group, and will not recognise him or herself in these narrative exchanges. This is also likely to be true of those who have a relatively stable gender identity throughout their lives, but is brought into relief by Nomachi's account of someone who cannot take these shared memories for granted.

### **Becoming a Lady**

Nomachi's modification of her dress, deportment and hairstyle and her use of cosmetics reveal the constructedness of masculinity and femininity. In a double-page spread with the English-language title 'HOW TO BE A LADY' [in Japanese '*sutekina redi ni naru tame ni*'], she outlines the steps she needs to undergo in order to be transformed into a woman. Step one is to remove the beard through electrolysis. Step two concerns language and gestures; Nomachi advises against the overuse of "feminine" styles of speech. Step three advises on wearing skirts: they conceal the shape of the body more effectively than trousers, but it becomes necessary to deal with leg hair; it is also advisable to wear a style and length of skirt suitable to one's age. Step four involves make-up, with advice on not wearing too much make-up. Step five concerns sweets: forget that there are some women who do not like sweets; it is advisable to profess a liking for sweets, to share them with workmates, and to keep up to date with the latest products. Step six involves changing spectacles to a more feminine style. Step seven involves joining in with gossip about other women (Nomachi, 2006, pp. 64–66). The process thus concerns the modification of the body, the training of the body, and the adoption of stereotypical feminine behaviours (such as demonstrating a "sweet tooth"). Except perhaps for the removal

of facial hair, most of the advice would also be applicable to women born as female who nevertheless wish to emphasise their femininity. In other parts of the text, Nomachi provides an introduction to the argot of the transgendered world, introducing such phrases as “full-time” or “part-time”, for those who live as the opposite gender for all or part of their lives (Nomachi, 2006, pp. 40–41).

Nomachi’s “baritone” voice is at first a problem, but much can be achieved by the modulation of pitch and intonation. She is pleased when she can “pass” as female on the telephone, without the cues of her feminised visual presentation. Nevertheless, there are some limits to social and cultural construction. Most individuals learn to modulate the pitch of their voice quite effectively, and much of the difference in pitch between masculine and feminine speech styles is due to voice production rather than vocal chords. Hiccupping and sneezing, however, apparently reveal the limits of conscious control, and Nomachi must learn to suppress these involuntary eruptions (Nomachi, 2006, pp. 16–19; p. 55; pp. 92–93).

Nomachi’s book traces the steps to be undertaken in order to live convincingly as a woman. By contrast, the main character of the television drama *Watashi ga watashi de aru tame ni*, “Hikaru”, is already successfully performing a feminine gender identity at the commencement of the drama (Kamikawa, 2006). She has lived away from her family for two years, and they are surprised at her transformation when she returns to the family home. She is skilled in applying make-up. Her clothes are in pastel shades and chosen carefully to suggest feminine curves. Her demeanour is exceedingly cute. We see none of the efforts described by Nomachi (2006), and none of the lapses that might reveal her secret.

### **Becoming Myself**

In the television drama *Watashi ga watashi de aru tame ni*, memory is the source of tensions. Hikaru’s childhood is recalled by her father in a poignant flashback. The father is unable to reconcile his memories of the boy with whom he played “catch” with the overly feminine person who now seeks his approval. Meanwhile, the main character’s mother and sister reconstruct their own narratives of Hikaru’s childhood. They page through the family album, and remember incidents where Hikaru’s ambiguous gender identity was apparent. It may well be that they could not admit these incidents into a coherent narrative until they accepted Hikaru’s desire to live as a woman. Narrative is also important to Hikaru, who must undergo counselling before she can commence hormone treatments and prepare for surgical modification. Counselling involves the construction of a coherent narrative of her past in which a series of incidents concerning gender ambiguity are placed in a teleological narrative that has sex reassignment surgery as its endpoint.

### **Re-Orienting Sexuality**

Nomachi’s narrative is also one of emerging sexual orientation. She moves from being someone who has a masculine gender identity and an apparent attraction to females (the so-called “opposite sex”) to being someone who has a feminine gender identity and an attraction to males (once again, the so-called “opposite” sex). For Nomachi, however, the “truth” of her sexual orientation is in the body. When he

was a young man, there were women with whom he enjoyed spending time, a pleasure that he understood as a romantic attachment. He never, however, felt any physical manifestations of desire, and later reinterpreted these attachments as friendships rather than romantic relationships. Indeed, the young Nomachi had an extreme physical reaction when he attempted to sleep with one woman. At this stage of his life he also rejected a sexual approach from a man. Later, when living as a woman, Nomachi embarks on romantic relationships with men. The “truth” of her attraction to men is once again revealed by her bodily reactions, when she feels a “tingle” [*kyu~n*] at the touch of an attractive male (Nomachi, 2006, p. 45; pp. 48–53; pp. 72–74; pp. 108–09; pp. 118–19).

These retrospective reflections on sexual attraction reveal the extent to which the categories of “sex”, “sexuality”, and “sexual orientation” are mutually dependent on each other. The category of “heterosexual”, for example, is meaningless unless there is an individual of stable female sex and feminine gender identity who is attracted to an individual of stable male sex and masculine gender identity, and vice versa. Similarly, the category of “homosexual” is meaningless unless there is an individual of stable male sex and masculine gender identity who is attracted to an individual of similarly stable male sex and masculine gender identity. Furthermore, the category of “lesbian” is meaningless unless there is an individual of stable female sex and feminine gender identity who is attracted to an individual of similarly stable female sex and feminine gender identity (Ishida and Murakami, 2006, unpaginated; Riggs, 2006, p. 58).

Once any one of these categories is destabilised the others also start to fall apart. However, in relatively mainstream narratives of transgender identity, the patterns of normative gender identity and heteronormativity are largely preserved. Those with the condition known as “gender dysphoria” will be encouraged to perform normative femininity (in the case of MtF), to adjust their body to that of a normative female (once again in the case of MtF), and there may be an expectation of entering into relationships that seem to follow the patterns of heteronormativity (Aizura, 2006, pp. 292–93). Nomachi’s story, one that is available in relatively mainstream bookshops, follows this pattern. This is also largely true of the television drama *Watashi ga watashi de aru tame ni*. It can be posited that in order to be marketable to mainstream audiences, there are generic constraints on how much “queering” can take place. (By “queering”, I mean the deconstructive and activist technique of resisting binary classificatory systems.)

The drama *Watashi ga watashi de aru tame ni* takes a highly sympathetic stance with respect to the transgendered condition. Negative reactions are portrayed by some of the characters, but this hostile behaviour is not endorsed. However, these sympathetic attitudes are constrained within a particular discursive framework. The transgendered condition is largely framed in medical terms as a disability (Kamikawa, 2006). There is thus a ready-made frame of reference through analogy with campaigns on the treatment of persons with disabilities, which were carried out under the slogan “barrier free”.<sup>10</sup>

With respect to sexual orientation, however, the narrative fails to challenge homophobic attitudes. That Hikaru has a male body is revealed in a curious early scene. As Hikaru’s close male friend, Ryōta, walks her home along a dark street at night they are attacked by a gang of men. It seems that they are about to

assault Hikaru, but do not go through with this when they realise that Hikaru has a male body under her pink frilly clothes. They express disgust at Hikaru's male body, a disgust that is internalised by Hikaru when she examines her body in a mirror in a later scene. As she looks at her reflection in the mirror, memories of the attack come back to her, and the men's voices are overlaid on the soundtrack. Such gang attacks are actually rather unusual in the Japanese cultural context. In plot terms, however, this scene allows for the dramatic revelation of Hikaru's secret. It also, however, perhaps unwittingly suggests some of the complexities of assuming a feminine gender identity. Did the producers really mean to suggest that one of the implications of adopting a feminine persona is the danger of sexual assault?

Ryōta goes on to marry someone else. He explains to his wife that he did not have a sexual relationship with Hikaru because Hikaru's body is that of a man. It seems self-evident to Ryōta that he would reject sexual contact with a man. Ryōta's new wife also confronts Hikaru and expresses disgust at the mere thought that her husband might have had any sexual contact with another man. Hikaru expresses her envy of the woman who can bear her husband's child (Kamikawa, 2006).

Both texts under consideration here preserve some semblance of heteronormativity by having the main MtF protagonists seek romantic attachments with men, who are now their "opposite" sex. Both texts stop short, however, before portraying the consummation of these relationships. In each case, the narrative is of a progression towards the decision to modify the main character's body so that it will match the protagonist's imagined gender identity. The actual surgical procedures, however, are not portrayed.

Hikaru is thus rejected by one potential boyfriend who succumbs to parental pressure, enters a conventional marriage, and produces a grandchild to please his parents. Hikaru eventually becomes involved with a male childcare worker who overcomes his shock at her coming out as transgendered, and expresses his desire to provide whatever emotional support she needs. There is a final kiss scene between Hikaru and her new boyfriend, but Hikaru states her need to live a self-sufficient life where she is not tempted to become dependent on anyone else. Hikaru and her friend walk off in opposite directions, Hikaru walking towards the camera with a purposeful stride. This is a slight twist on conventional romantic narrative conventions. Rather than simply ending with the conventional romantic kiss, the drama ends with Hikaru walking alone into her chosen future.

### **Coming Out**

Both of the texts under consideration here are narratives of "passing". There is a constant fear of unmasking. In each case, it is only in the privacy of one's own room that the gap between identity and body can be confronted. Each character also has one or more confidants who are trusted with the truth of their situation. These narratives reveal the mutual imbrication of the concepts of "passing" and of "coming out". The act of coming out is meaningless without a prior period of concealment. This concealment, in turn, is necessitated by societal uneasiness with ambiguities of sex and gender.



Both texts include scenes of “coming out”. In Nomachi’s book, she comes out to her family, a close female friend and potential male romantic partners. In the television drama, there are several “coming out” scenes. There is a scene of mutual recognition between Hikaru and her transgendered friend, Rin. Hikaru comes out to a medical practitioner, a counsellor, her university friends, and her family. The singer, Rin, comes out in public before her recording debut. In a further layering, the drama itself provided an opportunity for the “coming out” of its transgendered actors, whose comments on the experience of acting in the drama are included in the extra sections of the DVD release (Kamikawa, 2007).

The narratives of gender variant lives that have appeared in these relatively mainstream outlets contrast strongly with Kim Longinotto’s documentary film *Shinjuku Boys*, which documents infinite variations on the possible combinations and permutations of “sexual category”, “gender identity” and “sexual orientation” (Longinotto and Williams, 1997; Maree, 2003, unpaginated). These relatively mainstream narratives also contrast with the drag practice of “genderfuck”, which revels in ambiguities such as feminine dress paired with extravagant make-up and “five o’clock shadow” (as seen in the documentary *Ladies, Please!* [Saw, 1995; see also Elliott, 1994]).

### Old and New Narratives, Old and New Labels

There is one way, however, in which Nomachi’s book challenges mainstream discourses. This is in the choice to refer to her non-normative identity as “*o-kama*”. As will be well known to most people familiar with Japanese culture, the word “*o-kama*” is a sometimes derogatory term used for a so-called effeminate man. In popular discourses of gender and sexuality, there is a collapsing of various non-normative behaviours such as a man who “fails” to present a suitably masculine demeanour, a man who cross-dresses, and a man who is attracted to other men. This term has become controversial, with some refusing its use as derogatory and confusing because of its collapsing of the categories of sex, gender and sexual orientation, and some trying to claim new meanings for the term (Ino, 2005, pp. 56–60; Lunsing, 2005, pp. 81–95; Fushimi et al., 2002).

Nomachi bravely refers to herself as “*o-kama*” because of an intense dislike for the Japanese language term for “gender dysphoria” [*sei dōitsusei shōgai*, literally “gender identity handicap”], a term that not only medicalises the condition, but renders it as a disability. Nomachi apologises to those who dislike the term “*o-kama*”, but explains why this is a less problematic term for her, at least in self-reference. She does not like others to call her *o-kama*, perhaps because of their likely negative tone (Nomachi, 2006, p. 7; pp. 128–29).

In this aspect, Nomachi’s book provides a strong contrast with the television drama *Watashi ga watashi de aru tame ni*. In the drama the discourse of medicalisation whereby transgendered individuals are rendered “disabled” comes through strong and clear. There are scenes of the main character consulting a medical practitioner for advice. The doctor explains, in very colloquial and informal language, as if talking to a child, that Hikaru should have been born female, but was born male “by mistake” [. . . *machigaete otoko ni umareta*]. Thus, the only answer is to “fix” Hikaru’s body [*karada o naosu shika nai*]. The medical practitioner advises

Hikaru to talk the issue over with her family, and Hikaru is compliant with the medical practitioner's advice.

Hikaru's mother and sister also embark on research on the issue – the sister through the internet, and the mother through books.<sup>11</sup> The mother even blames herself for some hormonal imbalance which she thinks might have happened during pregnancy and thereby affected the gender identity of her child. In her attempts to persuade the father to approve of Hikaru's desire to undergo surgical modification, she explains that he has a "medically recognised illness". The characters learn the phrase *sei dōitsusei shōgai* [gender dysphoria], and this is where the drama takes on a pedagogical function, schooling the television audience in the relevant medical terminology. A mild challenge is posed by the character Rin, who describes herself as "*otoko-onna*" [man-woman]. The term "*okama*" only appears in the drama in its derogatory sense (Kamikawa, 2006).

### **Family and Society**

The family is an important site for mediating between state and individual. State policies for the management of biopower depend on individuals being placed in heteronormative family units, where they acquire normative gender identities and are socialised to become productive and reproductive adults. Hikaru's story is overshadowed by a series of subplots that portray various kinds of societal and familial pressure. Hikaru is close to her final year of college, when students start to look for their future careers. For Hikaru, this is stalled by the realisation that there will be a gap between any identity documents and her feminine persona. Her father comes to realise that he will no longer have a son to take over the family gardening business.<sup>12</sup> Hikaru's sister's engagement is stalled when her fiancé's family learns of Hikaru's situation, although the fiancé himself had shown no concern. Hikaru befriends a male childcare worker who is highly progressive in challenging gender norms, but affirms the importance of family when he laments the situation of the children under his care, orphans who have been deprived of a happy family life. Hikaru's (ultimately) happy family unit is contrasted with the situation of Rin, a transgendered singer who had to leave home, sleep on the streets, and work in the "water trade" [*mizu shōbai*] to earn money for her operation.<sup>13</sup>

The drama affirms family values. When Hikaru returns to the family home, she joins her mother and sister in the kitchen to prepare a family meal. Her facility in the kitchen is evidence of her adjustment to a feminine gender identity. The family dining table, however, is the site of the most intense family conflict.<sup>14</sup> It is at the dinner table that the father refuses to recognise Hikaru's new identity, and where Hikaru screams that she would rather die if she could not become a woman. Nevertheless, the family is reconciled in the end, and decides to support Hikaru's decision. When Hikaru asserts her right to be included as a family member in the discussion of her sister's broken engagement, this is a powerful statement, for so many transgendered people suffer alienation from their families. The site of the final reconciliation is not the family dining table, but the outdoor bar where the father has hitherto retired to escape the pressures of the family. Perhaps the family can never quite be restored to a state of imaginary harmony around the dinner table. A new family imaginary needs to be constructed.

### Assimilation and Recuperation

Strangely enough, in Nomachi's book there is little discussion of the term "OL" [Office Lady], perhaps reflecting Nomachi's implicit aim to live as a woman with a conventional feminine gender identity. She pursues one of the most stereotypical and least glamorous of feminised occupations, with little reflection on the gendered discourses that channel some women into such an occupation. Perhaps these contradictions are inseparable from the transgendered condition, which provides some challenge to the heteronormative sex-gender system, but at the same time can often be reclaimed and recuperated into conventional gender norms.

Bringing transgendered narratives into the relatively mainstream spheres of mass market book publication and television has an important function in contributing to the recognition of the belonging and citizenship of such individuals. However, these narratives are subject to the generic constraints of the various media. In mainstream media there is often an assimilative and recuperative impulse, with a focus on those individuals who successfully "pass" and who thus uphold the conventions of the binary sex-gender system and heteronormativity. The framing of narratives of transgendered experiences according to medicalised discourses provides further generic constraints, pushing the narratives into a pattern of overcoming "barriers" (Nomachi, 2006, pp. 128–29). These narratives of transgendered experiences also provide new understandings of the creation of gendered identities. They reveal that gendered identity is not only a matter of performance, but also a matter of narrative and of shared memories. Thus, they can also shed light on the acquisition of more conventional gendered identities, and the imbrication of discourses of sex, gender and embodiment with discourses of citizenship.

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### Notes

1. In addition to the official terminology, there are also various slang or "in-group" terms. In one of the texts to be analysed in this essay, the colloquial term used is "*chinko-tori shujutsu*" [dick-removing operation] (Nomachi, 2006, p. 6).
2. This change was a consequence of changes to the former Eugenic Protection Law [*Yusei hogo hō*] (1947), amended as the Law for the Protection of the Maternal Body [*Botai hogo hō*] (1996). See Mackie (2001, pp. 185–92; 2002, pp. 200–29); Taniguchi (2006, unpaginated); Ishida and Murakami (2006, unpaginated).
3. See the succinct diagram of the implications of this in Nomachi (2006, p. 25). It has been possible to apply to change the sex of the entry in the family register since 2004, when the Exceptional

Treatment Act for People with Gender Identity Disorder came into effect. However, until recently, this was only possible if the individual was unmarried with no offspring. See Taniguchi (2006). At the time of writing, an amendment was prefigured which would allow an individual with children to change their own sex on their own family register once their children had reached adulthood (*Japan Times*, 2008).

4. For a succinct definition of biopower, see Schirato and Webb (2003, p. 135).
5. It is just over a decade since the first sex reassignment operations were carried out in Japan. There are now many dozens of volumes of narratives of the transgendered experience available in the Japanese language – too many to list here. There has also been at least one other mainstream drama that dealt with transgender issues, an episode of the TBS high-school drama, *3nen Bgumi Kinpachi-sensei* (Mr Kinpachi, 3<sup>rd</sup> year, B Group), in 2001. For the genealogy of such representations in the media, see Ishida and Murakami (2006, unpaginated). For the purposes of this essay, I will mainly focus on two texts that appeared in relatively mainstream and accessible media outlets in 2006. For this special issue on the ‘Girl, Body, and Nation’ I will focus on narratives of male to female transformation, and how these particular narratives shed light on the sexed, gendered and embodied dimensions of citizenship in contemporary Japan.
6. The title could be translated as ‘I’m Queer but I’m an Office Lady’. The significance of the term “*o-kama*” will be discussed below.
7. The actor who plays the transgendered singer, Hasumi Rin, in the drama is herself a transgendered singer-songwriter and actor, Nakamura Ataru. Nakamura was the focus of attention recently when she appeared in the national broadcaster NHK’s New Year’s Eve singing contest in the female team. The NHK New Year’s Eve singing contest is one media venue where entertainers of ambiguous gender presentation, such as Takarazuka performers, *Onnagata* from the Kabuki theatre, or other cross-dressing performers, do appear. However, Nakamura’s case has been treated as rather different due to her “coming out” as a transgendered person, usually described in the media as a sufferer of “gender dysphoria”. In Wikipedia she is described with some attention to detail as “the first person with a male family register entry” to appear in the female team in the NHK singing contest. See <<http://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/NHK紅白歌合戦>>, accessed 31 January 2008. I am indebted to Suganuma Katsuhiko for alerting me to this connection and for an extended discussion on the gender politics of the NHK program.
8. I will generally use pronouns that refer to an individual’s chosen gender identity, except in such situations as this, where I wish to emphasise the gap between sexed bodies and gendered identities, or below, where the narrative refers to different gendered identities at different times of an individual’s life.
9. Finally, the napkins come to serve a useful purpose. She can use them to hide her genitals in a situation where she must undress down to her underwear in front of other women.
10. The national broadcaster, NHK, devotes a significant amount of time to documentary programs on “living with disability”; includes lessons on sign language alongside other language programs; and provides news bulletins with signing. A documentary program on transgendered individuals was broadcast in 1996 in the series *Hāto o tsunagō* (Heart TV), alongside documentaries on development disabilities, child abuse and “*hikikomori*” [emotional withdrawal] (NHK On-Line, 2006). On the medicalisation of the transgendered condition in Japan, see McLelland (pp. 1–20). For an example of resistance to such medicalisation, see Mitsuhashi (2007, pp. 295–311).
11. The mother buys a book on the transgendered condition (Nomiya et al., 2003), and it reappears in several scenes in the drama, when, for example, she tries to explain Hikaru’s desire to undergo surgery to Hikaru’s father, who is initially hostile to the thought of surgical modification.
12. There is little challenge to conventional gender norms here, for there is never any suggestion that a woman could take over the family gardening business.
13. “*Mizu shōbai*” is a vague and euphemistic term for occupations connected with bars, entertainment, hostessing and sex work. I have chosen the direct translation of “water trade” rather than attempting to narrow this down to a more specific term such as “sex work”.
14. Intertextual links may be made with a large number of family melodramas where action is focused on the kitchen, the dining table or other familial spaces. More subversive deployment of such domestic spaces appears in such texts as Yoshimoto Banana’s (1988) novel, *Kitchen*, where

an orphaned young woman finds solace in the kitchen of her friend and his transgendered mother. In Sono Shion's (2005) horror film *Noriko no shokutaku* (Noriko's Table), the kitchen table is the site of a dystopic horror movie where the family is the root of violence. See other dystopic family dramas such as Morita Yoshimitsu's (1983) film *Kazoku gēmu* (Family Game). Aoyama Tomoko has alerted me to a further incidental intertextual link whereby the actor who plays the father in the television drama *Watashi ga watashi de aru tame ni* also played the transgendered mother in Morita Yoshimitsu's 1989 film of *Kitchin*. On Yoshimoto Banana's novel, *Kitchin*, see, inter alia, Buckley (2000, pp. 215–44); Treat (1996, pp. 275–308); Saitō (2006) and Kawasaki (1990).

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