

Women and Gender Issues

Creating a Social Space at a Tokyo Ramen Shop: An Analysis of Class and Gender in Eateries.
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This paper examines the popular perception of ramen (noodle soup) shops as being “low” class and male-dominated. Eateries are liminal spaces in which a host of players negotiates public and private boundaries. Some eateries provide an extension of the “home” while others attempt to differentiate themselves from the home; as a result, types of customers, their perceptions and acts vary from establishment to establishment. I argue that individual eateries create distinctive spaces on the basis of public-private boundaries that may appeal to a particular class and gender. Based on my ethnography of a Tokyo ramen (noodle soup) shop, I analyze the ambiguous delineation of the boundaries and the influence of creating social spaces on eateries.

Single(woman)hood and Social Agency: Ohitorisama in Contemporary Japan.
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“Ohitorisama is a woman with the established sense of individuality that is a given for any human being” (www.ohitorisama.net.jp)

Marriage and childrearing remain implicit markers of the ideal Japanese feminine life course, despite demographic shifts which suggest decreasing relevance. The appearance of the term konkatsu (marriage activities, or activities designed to prepare one for marriage) suggests the resilience of marriage as an ideal despite its decline in reality. However, emerging concurrently with this term is the discourse of ohitorisama, the single (woman), disseminated popularly through literature and the internet. These sites enjoin a challenge to marriage as a universal or inevitable goal for women, building on ideals of resilience, independence, freedom and fun. This paper looks to explore the discourse of the single woman (ohitorisama), drawing on recent literature, ethnographic fieldwork and interviews conducted as part of a current research project on women whose life-patterns diverge from the mainstream. I look to explore the ways that singlehood, both as an intentional and an incidental locus, shapes women as social and political agents.

“Grave” Problems? - The Legacy of Hidden Christians among Catholic Women in Tokyo.
Hisako Omori, McMaster University

It is common among female members of the Catholic Church in Tokyo to conceal their religious identity. As the only Catholics in their households, these women frequently decide not to tell other family members about their conversion. Some of these women even receive both Catholic and Buddhist funerals. Building on previous scholarship on the Japanese sense of self as primarily “relational,” this paper argues that concealing their Catholic identity is a strategy whereby these women maintain their socially assigned role as *yome* in the primarily Buddhist cultic context of Japan. This paper illustrates that the legacy of persecution of Japanese

Christians in previous centuries still haunts present-day Catholics through their historical consciousness as a minority group and through the strong ties that the government instituted between Buddhist temples, especially with their graves, and households.