

Femininity of Japanese culture in Kawakami's *Breasts and Eggs***Isnaeni Della Safitri¹✉, Sri Sumaryani²**¹English Department, Universitas Negeri Semarang, Semarang, Indonesia²English Department, Universitas Negeri Semarang, Semarang, Indonesia**Article Info***Article History:*

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In Japanese society, women are expected to exhibit femininity shaped by the ideology of "good wife, wise mother" prevalent in Japan. This societal norm often limits women's ability to pursue independent lives. However, the rise of the feminist movement has contributed to greater self-awareness among women, encouraging them to assert their rights and express their femininity in a non-traditional way. This study aims to explore how femininity is portrayed through female characters in Kawakami's *Breasts and Eggs*. A descriptive qualitative method is employed in this research, drawing on Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity. The results of this study suggest that femininity can be conveyed through the behavior, appearance, and language of several female characters, including Natsuko, Makiko, Midoriko, and Natsuko's friend. The femininity portrayed by these characters also demonstrates that they both maintain and challenge traditional Japanese femininity. This depiction illustrates that femininity is constructed by society, which aligns with what Judith Butler discussed about gender.

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INTRODUCTION

Japan is one of the countries that is often cited as an example of a patriarchal society, even though many countries in the world also have it. The existence of a patriarchal society in Japan has developed over a long time, influenced by the existing culture and religion. The factors that influenced it were the culture and religion of Shinto, Buddhism, and Confucianism, which shaped the mindset of Japanese society regarding the proper roles of men and women (Villa, 2019). Female deities in Shinto are often depicted as possessing intelligence, beauty, fertility, and purity (Villa, 2019). Because of that depiction, it can be said that women in this era are likely equal to men. On the contrary, Buddhism in Japan considers women's bodies as impure and full of sin, or the worst and most unpleasant condition in the world, which leads to severe discrimination against

women (Villa, 2019). Furthermore, in Confucianism, women are also assigned a lower social status than men (Villa, 2019).

This conception also makes Japanese women have stereotypes that many people, including English speakers, believe. The stereotypes noted that Japanese women are ideal women, gentle, and a "yes-person" due to the patriarchal society there. It is also noted that Japanese women are often perceived as meek and submissive, living primarily to serve their husbands (Linhart, 2005). There is also a gender stereotype that "men are better at science than women," which also leads to gender inequality because of the patriarchal society. This stereotype also suggests that math and computers are typically associated with boys and men rather than girls and women (Okanda, Meng, Kanakogi, Uragami, Yamamoto, & Moriguchi, 2022). This view of Japanese women cannot be separated from the

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concept of masculinity and femininity. Femininity and masculinity (one's gender identity) (Burke, Stets, & Pirog-Good, 1988; Spence, 1985 in Stets & Burke, 2000), refer to the degree to which an individual views themselves as either masculine or feminine, as well as what it means to be a man or woman in society. Masculinity emphasizes that men should be dominant, heterosexual, physically strong, and avoid feminine behaviors (Valsecchi, Lacoviello, Berent, Borinca, & Pichastor, 2023). It is also associated with aggression and violent behavior among men. On the contrary, the social construction of femininity encompasses qualities such as submissiveness, emotional sensitivity, nurturing behavior, and physical attractiveness. These traits are idealized in patriarchal societies to maintain women's subordination and reinforce traditional gender hierarchies (Bartky, 1990). Femininity also serves to reassure men that women need and care about them (Brownmiller, 2013).

In Japanese society, this concept can be interpreted as the traditional notion of the Japanese gender role: "husbands work, wives stay at home," or Japanese ideology: "good wife, wise mother," which honor Japanese women as mothers and wives whose roles included caring for husbands and families, as well as educating and raising children (Lukyantseva, 2023). Then, during the twentieth-century modernization, Japanese women could work to contribute to the country's economy, as well as girls who could attend school to learn how to manage the household. Nevertheless, if Japanese women want to be considered "good," they should be supportive and submissive in a romantic relationship (Belarmino & Roberts, 2019). In short, being a Japanese woman meant being born to get married, have children, and take care of the family. The development of culture, experience, and the influence of the feminist movement led women in Japan to become more aware of themselves. Thus, women began to voice their voices and oppose the ideology of "good wife, wise mother" (Bullock, Kano, & Welker, 2017). Some female activists also began to fight for women's equal rights, voting rights, and the protection of women. Later, the influence of the second wave of feminism in America and Europe, coupled with disappointment over the condition of women in Japan, led to the emergence of the *uman ribu* (women's liberation) movement. Because of this, Japanese women have the right to higher education, pursue careers for themselves, have reproductive rights, and show their sexuality in society (Lukyanteva, 2023).

The above phenomenon, regarding Japanese women in Japanese patriarchal society, is often depicted in novels. Female authors often write stories with themes centered on Japanese womanhood that challenge stereotypes in

Japanese society, such as Murata's *Convenience Store Woman*, which tells the story of a character who cannot meet society's expectations of being a Japanese woman (Herlina & Hafizh, 2022; McNeill, 2020). Furthermore, the portrayal of Japanese women's perceptions of femininity is also explored in Mieko Kawakami's novel *Breasts and Eggs*. This novel tells the story of three main characters, Natsuko, Makiko, and Midoriko, who represent women in Japanese society, divided into two distinct parts. The first part mainly tells about Makiko, who comes to Tokyo for breast surgery, and Midoriko's story of facing puberty. Then, in the second part, the novel focuses on the life of Natsuko, who aspires to be a mother but is uninterested in romantic or sexual relationships.

Several studies have examined *Breasts and Eggs* as the object, for instance, the analysis of the bodily alienation experienced by women in contemporary Japan and their struggle for survival and reclamation of their authentic selves (Munawar & Chaudary, 2022), the exploration women's body dissatisfaction depicted in the novel, as well as how patriarchal culture influences the beauty standards (Fitri & Wahyuni, 2024), and an analysis of body stigma through female characters, highlighting issues like single motherhood, lung cancer, childbirth, and lesbianism (Shalini & Aruna, 2022). Research highlights how the novel invites readers into an emotionally immersive engagement with the lives of female characters through the lens of affect theory (Auestad, 2016).

Apart from those, there is also some research related to women and femininity. The *Insurgent* novel by Roth demonstrates that the female character defies the femininity stereotype by exhibiting more masculine traits (Fatimah, Sili, & Asantai, 2019). The female character rebels against the traditional ideal of femininity, especially those associated with self-sacrificing motherhood and passive femininity, as seen in Elena Ferrante's *I giorni dell'abbandono* (Hodson, 2024). Then, in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, the two female characters often clash with the social expectations of femininity and masculinity imposed by their families and broader society (Traesar & Sujiwa, 2025).

Therefore, a research analysis of the novel *Breasts and Eggs* by Mieko Kawakami can be conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the lives of Japanese women, which people, including Westerners, often overlook. This study aims to explore how femininity is portrayed through female characters in Kawakami's *Breasts and Eggs*. This study focuses on female characters, examining what is meant by femininity through their behavior, appearance, and manner of speaking, as they maintain or challenge femininity rooted in Japanese culture. While still focused on

a topic related to women, the researcher wants to fill the gap by examining femininity as a performed identity in the novel, which differs from previous studies on *Breasts and Eggs*. In examining femininity as a performed identity, Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity is a suitable framework. Butler's gender performativity theory explores her perspectives on gender. Butler argues that gender is not a stable identity but rather something that individuals continually perform through a "stylized repetition of acts" (Butler, 1999). It also means that gender, including femininity and masculinity, is not the result of sex or something that appears to be fixed like sex, but gender is culturally constructed. In another meaning, femininity and masculinity are social constructs rather than biological constructs, so that a female can be masculine, and a male can be feminine (Stets & Burke, 2000). Gender performativity is also inseparable from the heterosexual matrix discussed by Judith Butler, which requires that sex, gender, and desire must follow what society expects (Butler, 1999). By applying Judith Butler's gender performativity theory, this research will bring a new perspective to the reading of *Breasts and Eggs*.

METHODS

The descriptive qualitative method is used in this study to understand the texts in Kawakami's *Breasts and Eggs*. Creswell (2018) stated that the qualitative method is a method that relies on data in the form of texts and images. In this method, researchers collect and interpret data through documents, interviews, or observation. Researchers typically collect data from multiple sources rather than a single source (Creswell, 2018). By using this method, the researcher can make informed interpretations of the data obtained, thereby developing a deeper understanding of aspects related to their study. The researcher applies Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity. Through the theory, the researcher examines the dialogue, the author's narrative, and the characters' behavior that show femininity.

In this study, the researcher uses Mieko Kawakami's novel *Breasts and Eggs* as the primary data source, in the form of words, phrases, or sentences relevant to the study's topic. The researcher also collects data from various sources, including journal articles, books, and other relevant materials that align with the topic. In this research, the researcher took several steps. First,

reading in-depth to gain a deeper understanding of the novel and obtain relevant information, such as the behavior of female characters that demonstrates femininity. In addition to reading novels, the researcher also consults other sources, such as articles and books related to the study's topic, found in various literary works, to gain further knowledge. Second, collecting data from the novel by underlining and highlighting specific words, phrases, or sentences could serve as the basis for the study. Third, classifying based on how the female characters perform femininity through language, physical appearance, and behavior. In this research, femininity that is performed through language focuses on how female characters express their opinions through writing and talk, which can be observed in the tone or speaking style of these characters. Fourth, by employing gender performativity theory, the researcher analyzes how they perform femininity and interprets their performance. In this case, the researcher explains the reasons, such as economic pressure and beauty standards. At the final stage, all the results of the analysis presented will be drawn to conclusions that reveal femininity in the novel *Breasts and Eggs*.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Japanese Culture Reflected in the *Breasts and Eggs* Novel

Breasts and Eggs, a novel by Mieko Kawakami, is set in Japan, specifically in Tokyo and Osaka. By revolving around the story in Japanese society, this novel also presents Japanese culture in the experiences of its characters, both in general and those related to femininity. One of the Japanese cultural elements in the novel is the Bathhouse, which is a public bath, also known as a Sento in Japanese (Nomura, 2025). This Bathhouse culture is exemplified when two characters in the novel, Makiko and Natsuko, spend the summer in Tokyo. They decide to take a bath in the Bathhouse before dinner. Additionally, the novel also mentions mugicha, a traditional Japanese tea. Like the Japanese tradition of drinking mugicha during summer (Betz, 2024), in the novel, Natsuko also serves mugicha in a cold state during summer for her, Makiko, and Midoriko when they visit her place.

Subsequently related to femininity, this novel highlights how women in contemporary Japanese society continue to face societal expectations that emphasize motherhood, marriage, beauty standards, and traditional gender roles. One of the Japanese ideologies that views women as mothers and wives, whose primary role is to take care of household chores, is also reflected in the story, where several characters, such as Natsuko's friends, choose to stop working after getting married and having children. They also choose to join their husbands or even their husbands' families to take care of their in-laws. In terms of motherhood, the novel presents how Midoriko's school friends are pleased when they find out that they have menstruated and can become mothers. In this case, Midoriko's friends believe that if they are born female, they will eventually have children. This is also evident in Midoriko's story, where she finds a book that recounts the experience of a mother celebrating the day her child experiences her first period. It can be said that becoming a mother is a natural thing, and all women will become mothers.

The Depiction of Femininity

In this section, three points are discussed related to how female characters perform their femininity according to gender performativity theory, which is evident through their behavior, appearance, and language or the way they speak. The analysis will uncover femininity from the three main characters, namely Natsuko, Makiko, and Midoriko, as well as several supporting characters who appear in the story, such as Natsuko's friends. Characters of various ages, including writers, hostesses, and homemakers, living in Osaka and Tokyo during the late 2000s to mid-2010s, provide a glimpse into how they strive to build their lives. This analysis provides an opportunity for the researcher to understand and present several ways in which femininity is performed, uncovering why it is performed and the interpretation of their performance.

Femininity through Behavior

The novel shows that the two characters grew up without a father figure. Although they had a father, he never provided proper support for his family. He just stayed at home, never worked, until he finally left their house when they were still

young. This situation caused Makiko and Natsuko to have negative experiences with men, which affected how they lived their lives.

We ran off and started a new life, living with Komi, but it didn't last long. My mom died when I was thirteen. Komi died two years later. Once it was just the two of us, Makiko and I worked like crazy. (Kawakami 2020, 10)

In a Japanese family, the father typically works outside the home, while the mother is responsible for household chores, including childcare (Sakamoto & Kohara, 2025). However, Makiko and Natsuko's family has a situation that is the opposite of that concept. Makiko and Natsuko have lived differently since childhood from the typical traditional Japanese family model, where, in their family, the mother is the one who works outside the home. This difference in their family's circumstances marks the start of their independent lives without any male figure or support. Living alone from a young age in a situation that can be described as inadequate, the two main characters, Natsuko and Makiko, take jobs to survive. In that quote, their hard work and willingness to do anything can be interpreted as a form of femininity that sets them apart from other women, indicating they can support their own lives without relying on anyone else.

Butler argues that gender as an identity is constructed (Butler, 1999). In this case, Makiko and Natsuko's family circumstances play a role in shaping the femininity they perform. By demonstrating active and independent femininity rather than perpetuating a passive and dependent image through their hard work, Makiko and Natsuko attempt to challenge the traditional concept of femininity in Japanese society. In addition, they also demonstrate that women have a brave side, as shown by their mother's decision to leave their old house and by Natsuko and Makiko eventually living alone without any relatives at a young age.

Then she got pregnant with Midoriko, and went from one job to the next, but after all these years, at thirty-nine, she still works at a bar five times a week, living pretty much the same as our mom. Another single mother, working herself to death. (Kawakami 2020, 11)

As Makiko gets older, she gets married and becomes pregnant with her daughter. However, her relationship with her husband did not last long. They separated while she was still pregnant.

Because Makiko already has a child, her child becomes her main priority. After Midoriko was born, Makiko continued working at the bar as a hostess. Japanese society promotes the idea of "good wife, wise mother" (Ichimasa, 2019). Nonetheless, Makiko's situation as a single mother means she lives a different life from what is typical in Japan. Her circumstances force her to leave her child to work in order to give her a better life.

Although Makiko does not live her life according to what is expected by Japanese society, her responsibility towards her child, by raising and working alone, can be a form of performing femininity in a non-traditional way. This action aligns with Butler's discussion, which posits that gender is a set of repeated acts within a rigid cultural framework (Butler, 1999). In addition, her behavior represents a woman who lives independently, continuing to work even though she already has a child, which can also be interpreted as Makiko challenging the traditional Japanese femininity prevalent in society.

"When I get home from work, there's one thing I always do," she said, with noticeable pride. "What do you think it is? The first thing that I do."

"Take your shoes off?"

"Nope." Makiko shook her head, as if we'd never guess it. Her voice went giddy. "I watch this cutie pie sleep." (Kawakami 2020, 65)

Due to her circumstances, Makiko works as a hostess, which requires her to work at a bar from the afternoon until late at night. Therefore, when Makiko gets home, her daughter, Midoriko, will likely already be in bed. In the quote above, even though Makiko must work and leave her child, she still shows her motherhood through her behavior. There is a traditional Japanese view of the maternal role where mothers are expected to be emotionally dedicated and self-sacrificing (Katou, Okamura, & Ohira, 2022). In this case, Makiko demonstrates her attitude in line with what Japanese society expects. Makiko and Midoriko have a strained relationship because Midoriko has refused to talk to Makiko for about half a year. Despite their strained relationship, she still loves her and occasionally kisses her while she is sleeping.

Makiko's behavior of prioritizing her child even after working represents a performance shaped by societal expectations about how to be a

mother. Through her behavior, Makiko still maintains traditional Japanese femininity. Butler (1999) argues that gender is not something one has; it is something one does. However, her behavior is something she does, not only because she is a woman. Makiko's behavior itself does not come naturally but is learned and maintained through time after she has a child.

After her mother and grandmother left her, Natsuko continued to live with Makiko, even after she had her child. However, when she felt she was old enough, Natsuko decided to live alone by going to Tokyo.

I moved to Tokyo to become a writer when I was twenty. Thirteen years later, when I was thirty-three, I won first prize in a contest run by a minor publisher. (Kawakami 2020, 148)

In Tokyo, Natsuko lives alone in an apartment, works at a bookstore, and is a writer, writing both her novels and essays for a magazine. Japanese society believes that women have only the opportunity to learn how to manage the household, thereby achieving the "good wives and wise mothers" ideology (Correa, 2022). Therefore, it will be very challenging for them to pursue their careers (Belarmino & Roberts, 2019). Even in Confucianism, it is said that the house is an honorable place for women to carry out their roles (Villa, 2019). However, Natsuko does not live the same life as what is taught in Japanese society. This has also been influenced by her childhood experiences, where her mother also worked for her family. Natsuko's attitude that women can live independently to achieve their dream careers can be a form of performing femininity that differs from that of other women.

Butler (1999) discussed that gender is something one does, whether through a person's way of speaking, physical appearance, or behavior. By choosing to live and work for herself, Makiko's behavior can be described as non-traditional femininity. This demonstrates how independent a woman can be in achieving her career without relying on men in her life, which can be a form of challenging traditional Japanese femininity.

She reminded me of Mom. I couldn't tell if it was just in the way that daughters start to look like their mothers over time, or if the things that happened to Mom's body were happening to her now, too. I can't tell how many times I almost asked her, "Hey, how are you feeling? Are you doing okay?" but I always held off, not wanting

to make her any more self-conscious. (Kawakami 2020, 15)

One summer, Makiko and Midoriko visit Natsuko in Tokyo. Their visit is partly due to Makiko's scheduled appointment for a breast augmentation consultation. After meeting Makiko, who has just arrived in Tokyo with her daughter, Natsuko realizes that her sister's face looks older than her age. Realizing this, Natsuko worries about her sister's condition if she ends up like her mother did and has breast cancer. Women in Japanese society are expected to be tactful, gentle, affectionate, and sensitive to others' feelings (Laukmane, 2019). Accordingly, Natsuko's behavior represents femininity. Natsuko's reluctance to ask more about her sister's condition illustrates her caring and gentle side towards other people's feelings, particularly Makiko's.

Natsuko's behavior that worries others is a behavior that is done repeatedly, not because she is a woman. This can be influenced by society and repeated, thereby helping to shape femininity in women. In addition, Natsuko's behavior aligns with Butler's statement, which posits that gender is something that individuals continually perform through the repetition of acts (Butler, 1999). Natsuko can also be said to embody traditional Japanese femininity through her gentle behavior towards others, both those she knows and those she does not.

Femininity through Appearance

The characters in the novel are primarily women of various ages. In the story, female characters are depicted with various appearances that can be seen as their way of performing femininity.

The one, still wearing makeup, whose slender neck and curves and blonde hair reaching down her back were unmistakably feminine, looped her arm around the bicep of the other- who had a guy's haircut and a thick chest that was basically flat, and a towel pressed over her crotch. (Kawakami 2020, 50)

The quote above illustrates how Natsuko describes two people she saw in the women's bathhouse who had very different appearances. In Japanese society, women are expected to wear makeup and have long hair (Andini, Sosrohadi, Fairuz, Dalyan, Rahman, & Hasnia, 2022). Here, one person is described according to what Japanese

society expects women to look like. Meanwhile, the other person, who turns out to be Natsuko's old friend, Yamagu, looks like a man with a short haircut and a flat chest. The woman with makeup and long hair demonstrates that she performs femininity through her appearance, which aligns with societal expectations. On the contrary, Yamagu did not follow what was expected by Japanese society at all. The quote above illustrates that Yamagu challenges traditional Japanese femininity, whereas the other woman upholds it.

Butler (1999) argues that gender does not depend on a person's sex; masculinity and femininity can easily signify both female and male. Accordingly, both females and males can have both because it can be expressed freely. In the quote above, Yamagu and her girlfriend demonstrate how women can embody both femininity and masculinity through their appearances. Yamagu, with a male appearance, shows more masculinity and vice versa. Then, Butler (1999) also discusses the heterosexual matrix, which mentions that someone should be attracted to the opposite sex according to society's expectations. In this case, although the other woman appears to maintain traditional Japanese femininity through her appearance, she also challenges it by having a relationship with a woman who presents herself as male.

She had a round face and a cornflower blue dress, a yellow sweater draped over her shoulders. Her hair was neatly curled. She looked like probably my age, but I could've been convinced that she was ten years older. Her wrists clacked with an assortment of power stone bracelets. (Kawakami 2020, 222)

Apart from facial appearance, femininity can be perceived from a woman's clothing choices. In the quote above, it describes how women dress to show their femininity by wearing brightly colored floral dresses that are often associated with women. Because Japanese society's expectations assume that women must appear fashionable (Belarmino & Roberts, 2019), the description of the woman that Natsuko saw at the seminar aligns with that expectation. In this case, the woman exhibits her femininity in response to societal expectations. Here, Japanese culture shapes society's expectations about how women and men should present themselves. Butler (1999) discussed that gender, including femininity and masculinity,

is culturally constructed. The appearance of the woman in the quote above, who chooses to wear a dress in a soft color, suggests that existing culture can shape femininity. Additionally, the fact that Natsuko believes the woman is older than her but looks her age can also be a form of performing femininity by taking care of her body. This can be interpreted as meaning she wants to stay attractive because in Japanese society, older women tend to lose value as they age (Belarmino & Roberts, 2019).

Femininity through Language

In the first part of the novel, it is told that Midoriko, Makiko's daughter, does not talk to anyone except her friends at school. Every day, she only communicates with paper and pencil or writes in her journal.

Once you get your period, that means your body can fertilize sperm. And that means you can get pregnant. And then we get more people, thinking and eating and filling up the world. It's overwhelming. I get a little depressed just thinking about it. I'll never do it. I'll never have children. Ever. (Kawakami 2020, 36)

The quote above is from Midoriko's journal regarding what she has just learned about puberty. In Japanese society, women were expected to contribute to the creation of better Japanese citizens by raising and educating their children, as well as managing household tasks (Sharma, 2023). This statement also perpetuates the notion that women's identity is primarily defined by their roles as wives and mothers (Nae & Ikeda, 2023). Midoriko's friends at school were also excited when they got their first period and discussed how to be a woman who is expected to have children. However, seeing how her mother was after having her made Midoriko have a different opinion from her friends. Midoriko dislikes the notion that every woman is destined to be a mother, regardless of the circumstances.

Butler (1999) talks about the heterosexual matrix, which requires that sex, gender, and desire must be in accordance with what society expects. Midoriko here acts as if she is not in line with society's expectations. Midoriko's writing can be represented as a woman having the right to her body and her reproductive rights so she can choose her future, in this case related to children. The firm tone in her writing also suggests that women do not

always have a weak and gentle nature. Midoriko's awareness of her reproductive rights demonstrates a form of femininity that differs from that of her school friends.

In addition to Midoriko's journal, femininity through language is also performed by Natsuko's friends. Natsuko and her friends from her old workplace have a regular gathering. They are almost the same age, maybe only a year older or younger.

"Well, yeah. Giving up a kidney would be rough, but how rough would it be if your husband died? Doing everything on your own? I guess I could get by with one kidney, if I had to...(Kawakami 2020, 144)

The quote above occurs when Natsuko and her friends are talking about whether they will give their kidney to their dying husband. One of her friends, Aya, answered that she would rather have one kidney than have her husband die. In Japanese society, women often face expectations of submissiveness in romantic relationships, as well as being expected to support their husbands' careers and their husbands' endeavors (Belarmino & Roberts, 2019; Sharma, 2023). This is also what makes most of Natsuko's friends agree to give their kidneys to their husbands rather than having to live and take care of their children alone. The depiction of Natsuko's friends is a form of performing femininity that conforms to societal expectations of femininity.

Butler (1999) discussed that gender can be performed through a person's way of speaking. The way Aya answers questions by using several interrogative sentences and not directly answering with a yes or no shows hesitation, but also a form of sacrifice for others. This can be interpreted as suggesting that femininity can be demonstrated through sacrifice and prioritizing the needs of others, such as husbands and children. Accordingly, Aya can be seen maintaining traditional Japanese femininity.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the depiction of femininity in the novel *Breasts and Eggs* examines three ways of performing femininity: through behavior, appearance, and language. Through behavior, femininity is performed by Makiko and Natsuko. Makiko and Natsuko, who live and work alone,

exhibit a femininity that is distinct from that of other women. Makiko herself, by having a child, shows femininity in a non-traditional way by being responsible for raising her child and working alone. However, Makiko also still performs traditional Japanese femininity by prioritizing her child even after she works. Lastly, through behavior, femininity is also performed by Natsuko as evident in her tendency to worry about others, as well as her caring and gentle side towards Makiko's feelings.

Additionally, through appearance, femininity is performed by two characters. Yamagu's girlfriend and the woman at the seminar with Natsuko both exhibit femininity that conforms to societal expectations, as evidenced by their use of makeup, long hair, dresses, and even the choice of clothing colors. Finally, through language, femininity is performed by Midoriko and Aya. Midoriko, through her writing in her journal, reveals a femininity that is distinct from that of other women. Her writing that says she does not want to have children shows that she does not perform the traditional Japanese femininity. Aya, Natsuko's friend, demonstrates femininity through her response to a question about whether she would be willing to give her kidney to her husband. Her answer, which demonstrates her willingness to sacrifice for her husband, and Aya's speaking style reveal how women are expected by society, indicating that Aya embodies traditional Japanese femininity.

Through the depiction of femininity, female characters in the novel *Breasts and Eggs* can be said to both maintain and challenge the traditional Japanese femininity expected by society in Japan. Even one female character can demonstrate how she both maintains and challenges traditional Japanese femininity. In this case, modern Japanese women in the 2010s continue to be constrained by societal expectations that have long shaped their lives as women. However, although some female characters still maintain traditional Japanese femininity, several other female characters also present a new femininity through their construction as women. This means that femininity is constructed by society and undergoes changes even though it does not entirely abandon its traditional version. This aligns with Judith Butler's discussion, which posits that gender is

something constructed by society through the repetition of a person's acts, making it not a natural aspect of a person.

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