

Investigating the sexuality of disabled Japanese women: Six autobiographical accounts

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Abstract

Social attitudes perpetuate the idea that disabled people's sexuality is privileged or disregarded based on the degree of social belongingness accorded to them. When social circumstances valorise the sexual needs of (non-disabled) men over the needs of (non-disabled) women, the right of disabled women to experience their sexuality can be harder to establish than the rights of disabled men. In Japan disabled women's freedom to express their sexuality is severely constrained. The struggle some have in experiencing their sexuality in a life-enhancing way is revealed through an examination of two themes emerging from six autobiographical accounts written by disabled women themselves. These show how the authors are able to successfully integrate their 'disabled' and 'sexual' identities. Yet integration comes after many experiences of humiliation and violence. Disabled Japanese women should be able to cultivate their capabilities in this area with joy and delight. However, overcoming discriminatory attitudes and practices through education and attitudinal change is necessary.

Key words

disability, sexuality, women, Japan, attitudes, rights, autobiographies

Introduction

Although now recognised as a basic human right, disabled people's sexuality is an issue that continues to be surrounded by significant degrees of discomfort and controversy (Begum, 1993, Shakespeare, 1997, Wilkerson 2002). Environmental barriers, including the minimal expectation of disabled people as capable and desirable sexual beings, prevent many disabled men and women from being supported to express their sexual feelings (Shakespeare, 1997: Jeffreys, 2008: Hamilton, 2009). Wider social attitudes perpetuating the notion that disabled people's right to be 'seen as sexual' is ultimately privileged or disregarded based on the degree of belongingness accorded to them by society, further reinforce the barriers surrounding individual disabled people's access to this desirable life area. (Chance, 2002; Jeffreys, 2008; Shakespeare, 1997; Wilkerson, 2002: Wolfe, 1997). When disabled people's sexual needs are acknowledged, that 'need' could also include the notion of sexual pleasure is relegated to the bottom of the list of service agencies' support priorities (Tepper, 2000). When surrounding circumstances prioritise the sexual needs of (non-disabled) men over the needs of (non-disabled) women, the notion of supporting disabled women's 'right to be sexual' is even harder to establish (Fidduccia, 1999; Jeffrey, 2008), resulting in the loss of significant opportunities for disabled women to build and sustain meaningful long-term intimate relationships (Dotson, Stinson & Christian, 2003). Disabled women's right to full citizenship is now guaranteed by a number of international accords, including the United Nations Convention on the Elimination All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1981) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006). Yet, is the spirit and intention of these important documents enough to successfully counter more traditional views that maintain the subordinate status of women's sexuality? For example, while the concept of full citizenship continues to reflect culturally traditional expressions of (non-disabled) male and female sexual engage-

ment, enacting disabled women's rights in this area can result in a strengthened recognition of the right to participate in the process of childbearing, to the detriment of fostering the right to engage in sexually intimate behaviour purely for sexual pleasure (Helmius, 1999).

In Japan disabled women's freedom to express their sexual lives is severely limited (Osanai, 1989; Osanai 2002). Taking gender into account reveals that traditional understandings of both disability and femininity not only limit disabled Japanese women's life choices in this area, but could also be said to constitute an insult to their sexuality. In this regard a recent survey conducted by an all women sub-group of the Japanese chapter of Disabled Peoples' International (DPI-Japan) highlights the disturbing reality surrounding women with disabilities in this country. These include the sexual and verbal abuse they encounter in their homes, workplaces, communities and care facilities (Disabled women speak out on discrimination 2012). The DPI-Japan report - 'Shogaino Arujosei no Seikatsu no Konnan: Fukugo Sabetsu Jittai Chosa Hokokusho' (Otane, 2012) notes that due to privacy concerns and the sensitive nature of the complaints, it is very difficult to quantify or categorize the kinds of discrimination and human rights abuses experienced by disabled women. It also indicates that in order to improve the sexual lives of disabled Japanese women, not only must the individual difficulties posed by physiological limitations be addressed and overcome, but the cultural and traditional aspects of femininity and sexuality must be also recognised, understood, challenged and transformed. In this regard the role of support systems as agents of change is significant (Tepper, 2000). However, the question of how to improve the situation presents a huge dilemma for disabled Japanese advocates and those working in support services, as individualism is identified in Japanese culture as selfishness, especially when sought and exercised by minority groups such as women and disabled people (Shougaiha no sei to sei no kenkyukai, 1994).

The first part of this article outlines the development of the interest of the first author, a young non-disabled Japanese woman, in how disabled Japanese women currently negotiate expression of their sexuality in contemporary Japanese society. Brief details of her initial exploration for information are recorded. A partial 'insider' (Blyth, Wukes, Jackson & Halcomb, 2013) perspective is captured in this aspect of the paper, in recognition of the first author's awareness of how matters of femininity and cultural convention in Japanese society drive perceptions of what constitutes an 'acceptable woman' for marriage (1). This part of the account is also included as commentary on the barriers facing Japanese or English researchers who wish to collect verifiable data in this very sensitive area. The second part includes an analysis of material found in six published autobiographies written by disabled Japanese women. The method used to analyse the information found in these accounts is briefly outlined. Two significant emerging themes are then summarised (Ryan & Bernard, 2000). Finally the rights of all disabled Japanese women to be supported to safely express their sexuality in ways that are meaningful to them and that are of their own choosing is asserted as an outcome of this process.

Methodology

The study outlined in this article was undertaken within an overarching Feminist Disability Studies (FDS) framework – a set of theoretical approaches that promote the advancement of research and scholarship about women with disabilities (Garland-Thomas, 2005). FDS underpins the assertion that women with disabilities experience appreciably higher levels of marginalisation, social injustice and health inequality than their non-disabled counterparts. In particular, many endure levels of 'violence, sexual assault, abuse, adverse health outcomes' (Alvares, Case, Kronenberger, Ortolova, S & Tosti-Vasey 2011, p. 1) that significantly contribute to their overall lower quality of life. Use of this framework provides an opportunity to undertake research with a 'sharp political edge' (Garland-Thomas, 2005, p. 1557) through which action about factors that

have created the sexual oppression of disabled Japanese women as a recognisable minority group can be taken. FDS also provides a starting point from which it becomes possible to ‘challenge our dominant assumptions about living with a disability’ (Ibid.). As such, the aspect of FDS that incorporates what is now known as a ‘social model view’ of disability – the economic and social discrimination experienced by individuals with a variety of different kinds of physical, cognitive and emotional impairments (Oliver 1984, Brisenden, 1986) – is also drawn on. However FDS enables comment on more than just ‘research and scholarship about women with disabilities, just as feminist scholarship extends beyond women to critically analyse the entire gender system’ (Garland-Thomas, 2005, p. 1558). Prioritising the circumstances of disabled Japanese women is not to deny or downplay the difficulties facing disabled Japanese men in the sensitive area of socio/sexual development, but enables the problems encountered by women to justify the call for a greater breadth of gendered research work in this area to be undertaken.

Part 1: Developing the topic

In 2011 as part of my Master’s degree programme in New Zealand, I began exploring how disabled Japanese women viewed their sexuality and countered the barriers imposed by traditional cultural understandings of disability, femininity and sexuality in my country. In choosing this topic I was inspired by a story told by my mother. She completed an internship as a kindergarten teacher three decades ago in Japan in a care home for children with cognitive disabilities. The care home had strict rules about any girls wearing brassieres. This was considered an inappropriate practice and one that could provoke male residents’ sexual desire. My mother did not agree with this rule but as a young internship student she could do nothing about it. She realised that one 13-year-old girl in particular combed her hair and changed her clothes many times before a certain boy came back from school. She wanted to be attractive to him. To support staff, this young girl’s actions could not be seen in the context of a natural process of achieving adulthood that needed support and encouragement. Instead her behaviour was labelled ‘a problem to be solved’ in order to maintain the discipline of the institution. For me this had been a shocking story. The behaviour of these teenagers, and thus also their sexuality, was clearly being shaped by staff and institutional rules rather than by the people themselves. I, too, was a teenager and in my mind I was no different to them.

While studying, an online news article renewed my interest in this topic. This article focussed on the life of a British disabled woman, Catarina, who was supported to use an escort service for sexual satisfaction (Barnes, 2009). I was intrigued by how determined this disabled woman was to gain what she wanted. Could Catarina’s story happen in my country?

I began investigating the question of how disabled Japanese women currently negotiated their sexuality. I used Google Scholar to undertake an initial search on the topic of disabled sexuality, support and Japanese women – a search tool known for the high proportion of relevant and unique documents able to be retrieved and its accessibility as a research starting point (Brophy & Bawden, 2005, p. 510). This search elicited virtually nothing on this topic in the English language.

I then turned to Google Japan, entering key Japanese words – 障害者 (disabled people), 性 (sex), 介護 (nursing care), サポート (support), and NPOs (non-profit organisations) – the latter in order to find any Japanese organisation that supported disabled people. I chose to include NPOs in my search because of the story my mother had told me and because of Catarina’s successful experience. Information about two significant Not for Profit Organisations (NPOs) – White Hands (2011) and Noir (2011) – came up. Both had been trying multiple approaches to improve the quality of sexual lives of disabled men in Japan (Noir, 2011; White Hands, 2011). It was clear that these initiatives had raised controversy among Japanese with and without

disabilities. Yet, although opinions regarding these initiatives were largely negative, at least disabled men's sexuality had gained some recognition.

I then turned to finding out how Japanese women with disabilities regarded their sexuality, and the social support offered to them. I used Google Japan as my initial starting point, this time to search for NPOs that might support disabled women in Japan. I entered the Japanese words – 障害者 (disabled people), 女性 (women), 性 (sexuality), 介護 (care), サポート (support). I found no NPOs that advertised a support system for the sexuality of disabled women in Japan. Not only were there no NPOs, no information about disabled Japanese women's sexuality came up in any search results (although I did locate a few negative, indecent comments about disabled Japanese women's sexuality posted by non-disabled people). One organisation, *Syougaisha Seiseikatsu Support Net* (2011) (Support Network of Sex Life for Disabled People), did offer support services for the sexual lives of disabled couples. In this case services were orientated towards disabled men. Disabled women were only mentioned in a support system capacity, if they were part of a couple, or married to their (disabled) male partner. This organisation also had a support program for disabled men's masturbation, but they did not seem to have any kinds of support for disabled women's masturbation (*Syougaisha Seiseikatsu Support Net*, 2011). Women's sexuality and/or support for disabled women were not mentioned at all, implying that women with disabilities could only be supported if their disabled partners wanted to use this service.

I was not surprised I could find no website discussing issues related to the sexuality of disabled women. In Japan, traditionally women have been seen as inferior to men and encouraged to see themselves as innocent and pure (Minamoto, 1995). In the recent past, talking about sexual matters within Japanese culture has been regarded as indecent and immodest for women (English Discussion Society, 1996). Sexuality and sexual issues were labelled dirty, humble and shameful – possibly in order to maintain the subordination of Japanese women and children to Japanese men (*Group: Fighting Women*, 1995). I assumed that these beliefs still influenced modern Japanese women. Might any disabled Japanese women have written about their lives? Might analysing contemporary autobiographies written by disabled Japanese women specifically relating to issues of sexuality and sexual support provide the information I sought? I began a third search. I entered key Japanese words – 障害者 (disabled people), 女性 (women), 自伝 (autobiographies), and セクシュアリティ (sexuality) – on Google Japan's search engine. This search produced a reference to one autobiography found on the website of White Hands (2011). Subsequently I located further titles on the Amazon Japan website, the biggest online bookstore in Japan. This site provided a significant source of material, housing a list of 150 book titles of books written in Japanese about disabled people's independence, rehabilitation, marriage and sexuality. I read the summaries and tables of content of each book in Japanese, ascertaining suitability for my project from the words used in the tables of contents, such as ファーストラブ (first love), 私のセクシュアリティ (my sexuality), マスターベーション (masturbating), and 「障害」をもつ女の性 (sexuality of a woman with 'disabilities') (Asaka, 1993; Moriyama, K; Ohata, 2010; Osanai, 1995; Sakaiya, 1992; Takeda, 1999).

Method

For my dissertation, I examined ten autobiographies written by disabled Japanese women. These were chosen from books that focussed mainly on issues of sexuality, femininity, marriage and romantic relationships. Four were unavailable for online purchase and thus were eliminated at that time. I purchased the remaining six to provide material for close analysis. A brief biographical note about the six authors follows below.

Michiko Osanai (小山内美智子) was born in 1953 in Japan and has cerebral paralysis. Her first book was published when she was 36 years old. She has had the experience of living in an institution, marriage, divorce, child-rearing, and of founding a social welfare organisation to promote independence in the lives of people with disabilities in Hokkaido, Japan.

Yuhō (Junko) Asaka (安積遊歩 (純子)) was born with osteogenesis imperfecta in 1956 in Japan and lived in a residential home for children with disabilities. Her autobiography was published when she was 36 years old. She became involved in the disability movement and went to the United States to learn about disability issues. She introduced peer counselling to Japanese disabled people and now works for an organisation that promotes the independence of disabled people in Tokyo.

Junko Sakaiya (境屋純子) was born in 1952 in Japan and experienced cerebral paralysis as a baby. After spending her childhood and teenage years in an institution, Sakaiya started living with her boyfriend. She participated in the disability movement and studied at university. She has three children, marrying her partner after giving birth to their first child, and is now divorced. She published her autobiography when she was 40.

Kazaho Moriyama (森山風歩) was born in 1981 and began to feel the effects of muscular dystrophy when she was eight years old. As a child she was abused by her family and teachers ignored her disability. She spent some years in an institution in her late teenage years. Later on, working with a world famous photographer, Moriyama released her photograph book. She wrote her autobiography when she was 27 years old.

Mayumi Takeda (武田真弓) was born in 1970 in Japan and became hearing impaired at three years of age. She moved to New York and after working in an elite company, Takeda, started working in the sex industry. She met and married an African American and started working in a strip club. She published her first book when she was 29 and has written a further three books about her life.

Rabu Ohata (大畑楽歩) was born in 1978 in Japan with cerebral paralysis. She participated in the Achievement of Human Potential programme – a re-training programme designed to ‘cure’ her physical condition. She is married to a non-disabled Japanese man and has one son.

Analysis

The six autobiographies were read three times. During the first reading positive and negative Japanese words used by the authors to describe sexuality topics were noted. During the second reading key sexuality-related themes cohering around the positive and negative words were pinpointed and recorded. Significant categories relating primarily to descriptions by the authors of their thoughts and experiences related to sexuality and sexual expression were isolated in the third reading (Ryan & Bernard, 2000).

In general, all autobiographies recounted how under severely constraining conditions the authors finally identified, experienced and ultimately celebrated their sexuality in ways that made sense to them. Positive words related to sexuality used in the texts include joy (喜び), beauty (美しさ), enjoyment (楽しむ), self-trust (自己信頼), and love (愛), and describe the authors’ achievement of ‘true’ sexuality. However negative terms, including fear (恐怖), rape (強姦), shame (恥), humiliation (屈辱), and ugly (醜い) appeared far more often. Expanding on the context in which these words were located revealed how all the women struggled as both disabled women and women to come to terms with the complicated social and emotional pressures they faced in relation to sexual expression. The second part of this paper details two significant themes that emerged from all six accounts relating to this struggle. At times the author’s words as written appear in the text in order to maintain the integrity of these sensitive accounts as much as is possible. A translation by the first author appears underneath the Japanese text.

Part 2: Two themes – humiliation and liberation

The most common theme emerging from all autobiographies were the episodes of humiliation and violence recounted by the authors. In Japan it is necessary for adults to maintain harmony among people, family and community. Behaving the same way as other people is very important. In relation to social expectation towards ‘ordinary’ (non-disabled) adults, no-one should bother other people with one’s ego or selfishness (Osanai, 1988). Accordingly, disabled Japanese women are under severe pressure not to cause ‘extra trouble’. These ideas were clearly visible in the texts. As Sakaiya (1992) explains:

身体的な「障害」を持つ女たちは、その外見や物理的なハンディにより、性的にもほとんど何も期待されない。ただ、人に迷惑をかけず、人の重荷にならず生きていくことが要求される。セクシュアリティーを持っていることさえもわすれられてしまう。(Sakaiya, 1992)

Women with physical ‘disabilities’ are not expected to engage with anything in society because of their appearance and physical handicap. They are only expected to live without causing any trouble to anyone and not to be someone’s ‘burden’. People forget that women with disabilities have sexuality.

With regard to appearance, Osanai (1988) recounts experiencing the humiliation of having been (sexually) refused by men because of her disability. It taught her that she was not attractive to them. Takeda (1999) and Asaka (1993) experienced violence from men in their childhood because of their disabilities. Violence was experienced in a number of different forms. Asaka felt that she had been raped by her doctors’ gaze. Yet paradoxically even though she felt she was treated in humiliating ways, she also recorded that being noticed was somehow proof of her existence. Significantly, men were not the only sources of negative experiences. Non-disabled women also contributed to the embarrassment and degradation experienced by all disabled authors. Moriyama (2008) was told that she should not have interests in fashion despite the fact that wearing extremely feminine and highly fashionable dresses was an important part of her identity. Further, female helpers told her that, as a ‘disabled’ person, she should not consider how she looked. One helper tried to ‘educate’ her so that she could be an ‘ordinary’ Japanese woman with disabilities, telling Moriyama patronisingly that ‘before dressing up yourself, you should take care of yourself at least’. Responses from non-disabled women in particular become more extreme when sexual behaviour resulted in pregnancy. Sakaiya (1992) recounts that, when pregnant, she heard comments such as ‘it is pitiful for her child to have a disabled mother’ from women who knew of her pregnancy.

Sexualised images of (non-disabled) women presented by a non-disabled culture presented further sources of humiliation and anxiety for the authors, because these were so different to their own body shapes (Asaka, 1993; Sakaiya, 1992; Osanai, 1998). As an outcome Asaka, Osanai and Sakaiya experienced difficulty in celebrating any of the physical indications of womanhood. Sakaiya in particular hated menstruation because she believed that she would never have a sexual relationship and become pregnant. These three women recorded having tried to commit suicide at some point of their lives. Asaka records trying different ways but could not complete because of her disability. As she states:

私は自分の障害ゆえに自殺を考えるまでに追い込まれ、そのあともかなり長いこと自殺願望にとらわれてきたけど、逆に、障害をもっていたから自殺もさけられたんじゃないかなと、おかしいような悲しいような。(Asaka, 1992)

I was pressured to commit suicide because of my disability and always fettered by desire to kill myself so long, but I avoided committing suicide because of my disability.

A second significant theme detailed how the authors attempted to integrate their ‘disabled’ and ‘sexual’ identities. Three, Moriyama (2008), Ohata (2010), and Takeda (1999), were able to

develop supportive networks in the Japanese non-disabled community. From this they gained a sense of 'normality' that allowed them to express aspects of their sexuality. These primarily centered around emphasising aspects of femininity and the feminine role as a way of taking control and expressing their sexual lives. Takeda had plastic surgery on her breasts. She became very happy with her new body image and the responses of others to it. It gave her confidence to socialise with other people. For Ohata, celebrating her motherhood and her ability to take care of her son and husband was a way of refuting the stigmatised identity of a non-sexual 'disabled' woman. Takeda and Moriyama both worked in the sex industry and wrote that even though they had a 'disability', taking on this occupation showed that they could still be attractive to (non-disabled) men. Not only was attractiveness as a woman important to them, this work also provided a significant counter-point to their disabled status.

In contrast Asaka, Osanai and Sakaiya refused to accept what they saw as the stereotyped and oppressively constructed (lack of) sexuality offered to them as disabled women. Significantly, these three women joined disability movements and within this support system began developing more positive attitudes towards their sexuality. Living independently from their parents was recorded as important for these authors, as it gave them a certain amount of sexual freedom. For example, Asaka (1993) encouraged men to have sex with her. Yet she struggled with the very narrow, male orientated values and behaviours related to sexual intercourse she experienced in these encounters. As she explains:

私たちの関係は、一般にはレイプとはみなされないだろう。相手の男にしてみれば、要求されてやったんだと思っているだろうし、こっちも自分からはっきり誘ったわけじゃないとはいえ、拒否はしなかったのだから、それでも、私にとっては、あれはたしかにレイプだった。もっと言えば、私は拒否ができないくらいに追いつめられていた、ああい状況に自分で自分をおいつめていた。そうさせられた社会のありよう自体がレイプなのだと思う。(Asaka, 1993)

Our relationships are not considered as rape in general. The men could think that they had sex with me because they were demanded by me, and I did not refuse to have sex with them. However, it was certainly rape for me. Moreover, I was hounded down so that I could not refuse to have sex with them and I forced myself to be in that situation. The social system, which hounds me down and creates that situation, is rape.

Even though her relationships with the men involved were forced, Asaka also felt the need to exert 'control', i.e. to continue these encounters. Finally, after a serious relationship with a boyfriend she was able to overcome her negative feelings about her body. However, she noted the difficulties involved for herself as disabled women in trying to conform to the expectations of sexual expression available to non-disabled people. Osanai (1988) believed that 'having sex' should not be limited to intercourse only, viewing this aspect of sexual expression as an activity which excludes many women and men with disabilities. Coming to this recognition allowed her to consider how disabled people's sexual lifestyles could become more flexible and free from the non-disabled notions which contributed to the discrimination she had experienced. For Osanai, accepting her own identity and sexuality as a disabled woman came to mean being able to celebrate her 'different' ability to express herself sexually, thus to come to love the man with whom she had a relationship. Sakaiya (1992), however, writes about her disagreement with fixed gender roles in more forceful way, saying:

女である自分を意識し、社会から要求される女としての役割、たとえば、男の世話をしたり、家事をしたり、また女はかわいくなければならないというようなことに対しては、はっきりと反対の意思をもった。(Sakaiya, 1992)

I recognised myself as a woman and have strong disagreement with socially expected women's role, such as taking care of and being attractive to men.

Rejecting societal discrimination and reconstructing their own identity and sexuality was achieved for these three women through the creation of their own sexual pathways. Unlike Moriyama (2008), Ohata (2010) and Takeda (1999), Asaka, Osanai and Sakaiya decided to step beyond the traditional (Japanese) women's role and this became a positive part of their disabled/sexual identity.

Discussion

Each autobiography detailed numerous, sometimes very shocking, examples of the negative attitudes held towards the sexuality of disabled women in Japan by non-disabled Japanese women and men. The struggle all authors went through to transcend these attitudes and to try and live authentic sexual lives suggests that it is time to raise the awareness of people with and without disabilities of these issues in public and private spheres in Japan. As all the autobiographies reveal, negative attitudes contribute to the lack of control disabled Japanese women experience in relation to their own bodies and impede development of a sense of autonomy and freedom in relation to their sexual lives. These accounts suggest that to improve the social position of disabled women in contemporary Japanese society, information, opportunities and experiences need to be made available to them so that they can create and maintain their own autonomy and power in this sensitive yet desirable life area. In particular, non-disabled women who work for disabled women or who are involved in caring for disabled women should recognise the unequal power relations that exist between themselves and the women they are associated with. In the non-disabled/disabled binary through which issues of sexuality are negotiated and enacted, non-disabled is recognised as 'standard' and 'normal' rather than a site of privilege and social favour. Non-disabled women in Japan need the opportunity to learn about how relationships of power in the area of femininity and sexuality operate generally (Stibbe, 2002), as well as learning how to support disabled women to fully express their sexual freedom in Japanese society. As a human rights issue it is necessary that individual disabled women are assisted to fully integrate their sexuality into their identity. To ensure that this happens, discrimination against them as sexually incapable people must be challenged and overcome.

These accounts, and the survey recently conducted by DPI-Japan, provide a starting point for the in-depth study now needed to reveal the full extent of the barriers facing disabled Japanese women in the area of sexuality and intimate relationships. Many questions remain. Do the barriers to sexual freedom experienced by physically disabled women differ to those experienced by women with sensory, neurological, mental health or cognitive disabilities? What needs to change in order to enable all disabled women's sexual requirements to be taken as seriously by NPOs in Japan as the requirements of their disabled male counterparts? Labelling and stigmatising disabled Japanese women's sexuality disconnects them from their humanity and denies them access to the dignity and fulfilment possible to achieve in this very desirable area of life. Disabled Japanese women should be able to recognise, cultivate and to love their capability and possibility in this area with joy and delight. They should not be forced to identify themselves only by the extent to which they can 'overcome their incapacity and perform normal' in this area. It is not about individual physical, cognitive and psychological impairments; it is all about how we respect and celebrate disabled women's diverse abilities in my country. Disabled women in Japan can enjoy the autonomy and independence of their own bodies only if society decides to end discriminatory attitudes and practices towards them.

HIROKO YASUDA undertook postgraduate study at the University of Waikato between 2009 and 2011. Her interest in both women's and disability issues prompted the choice of topic for her Master's dissertation. In 2012 she returned to her family in Fukushima Prefecture in Honshu, Japan, where she began working at a local radio station gathering stories from tsunami victims. She remains interested in issues facing women in her country.

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