

Multiethnic identity of “haafu/daburu” girls in Japan

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Shared stories of six Japanese-Caucasian adolescent girlfriends in Japan, and how they discursively construct their multiethnic “embodied” identities, amidst dramatic mental and physical maturity, is examined within a poststructuralist discourse analysis approach. “Embodiment” signifies how individuals constitute identities through discursively positioning themselves and others based on their “lived-body/self.” Always in the public gaze, these girls discursively work to contest being racialized as *haafu* or *gaijin*, while they also appropriate positive constructions of their “ethnic exoticness” and rejection of “the marked outsider” as they come to draw on a wider range of more empowering available ethnic discourses.

日本に生まれ育った10代の日本人・白人「ハーフ」の友人同士6名(女子)の話の中から、後期構造主義ディスコース分析法を基に、急激に精神的・身体的な成長する時期に、どのように彼女達が多民族のembodied(身体的)アイデンティティーを構成するかについて検討した。Embodiment(身体化)とは、自分のアイデンティティーが身体表現にどのように表れるかである。いつも日本の中で目立っている彼女達は、一所懸命に「ハーフ」や「外人」としてよそ者扱いされないようにディスカシブ的にふるまうと共に、「民族的エキゾチックなイメージ」を伴ったより広範で有効な民族的ディスコースを利用し、「よそ者としてのイメージ」を拒絶するようにふるまっている。

This study is a continuing examination of the discursive construction of the multiethnic identities of a network of six Japanese-Caucasian adolescent girlfriends of the same age, born and raised in Japan, over the span of their early adolescence (ages 12-15). While other sections of this larger research have been reported on elsewhere (Kamada, 2005a; 2005b), this is the first time to report on the notion of how these girls, who are referred to in Japanese as *haafu* (half) or *daburu* (double), constitute themselves on the basis of their physical “embodied” identities.

While this larger study has examined how the six girls negotiate their identities in terms of constituting, contesting, and celebrating their ethnicity, this paper specifically focuses on how their multiethnic embodied

identities are constituted, at the site of the body. These girls discursively *work* to contest being racialized as *haafu* or *gaijin*, while, at the same time, they also appropriate positive constructions of their ethnicity.

These girls have one Japanese parent, and one Caucasian parent who was born and raised in the English-speaking environment of Britain, Australia, or the USA. Even though the girls reside in a community where international schools are available, they all attend different Japanese schools throughout a geographically expansive community. The girls consider each other to be best friends whom they have known since pre-school through their foreign parents' networks and associations.

One of the main objectives for undertaking this study is to examine how racialized and ethnicized practices are taken up and represented or rejected discursively by members of this relatively new, but growing, community of Japanese-Caucasian children in Japan. Another objective of this study is to examine the subject positions that these girls take up in constructing and contesting their multiethnic identities and to clarify the intersecting social discourses that they draw on. It is hoped that this examination will lead to a conceptualization of how these girls come to grips with the dilemma of their ethnicized embodiment and self-categorization. I hope to show that while social "othering" may serve to isolate and marginalize a certain group of multiethnic minorities, multiethnicity may also lead to an identity of privilege and heightened self-esteem in the same individual, according to the accessibility of certain alternative discourses.

In this paper, I draw upon the theoretical and methodological framework of Judith Baxter's (2002a;

2002b; 2003) feminist poststructuralist discourse analysis by adding the notion of "ethnicity" to Baxter's model. I examine how multiethnic girls are "simultaneously positioned as relatively powerless within a range of dominant discourses . . . [of ethnicity], but [also] as relatively powerful within alternative and competing social discourses" (Baxter, 2003, p. 30, with my inclusion of "ethnicity" in place of Baxter's "gender").

Embodiment

The word "embodiment," as employed here, signifies how individuals make sense of themselves discursively through their positioning and performativity at the site of the body—their "lived body selves" (Thapan, 1997). Embodiment is generally dictionary-defined as the act of giving concrete physical form to an abstract idea or the act of representing something abstract as a physical object. Poststructuralist discourse analysts have appropriated the use of the word "embodiment" to represent how identity is lived and performed at the physical site of the body.

Thapan (1997) designates the body as an important aspect of human identity which is not simply a given, but something over which one can exert one's own agency. Budgeon (2003, p. 52) conceptualizes the body as an "event" in an act of "becoming" through continuous and multiple practices and interactions with others, rather than as an object in which the body is described.

Many studies of adolescent girls have looked at identity construction through this notion of embodiment. Bloustien (2001) examined how adolescent girls come

to view themselves through their talk about their bodies by examining how girls talked about themselves in the enactment and representation of their subjectivity. Bloustien takes up such themes as body watching and bodily praxis as a mode of knowledge; other themes include touch, clothing, skin, body shape, and food to demonstrate how and why girls do "bodywork" through their "serious play" in which they come to deal with enigmas and gaps between the ideal "Other" and themselves.

Gottfried (2003) examined gender and embodiment of temporary female workers in Japan and the practices associated with body management in their work. Such practices as requiring work uniforms (generally a white blouse with a dark colored jacket and knee length skirt, sometimes also a hat and white gloves), use of feminine language and gestures, bowing and showing deference, age restrictions, and other controls on the body limit these women's position in society. This study helped to show how Japanese organizations contribute to producing "modes of embodiment" in Japan.

Discourses of ethnicity in Japan

This paper draws on the poststructuralist discourse analysis approach of examining how interconnected, competing social discourses combine in the positioning of self in the construction of one's multiplicity of identities. Through an ethnographic examination of this site of Japan, I have examined several dominant, as well as peripheral social discourses of ethnicity that others or I have identified and named. While for reasons of space I will not detail in this paper *how* these discourses have been identified, I will briefly explain them.

Dominant discourses of ethnicity in Japan

A discourse of homogeneity has been identified as one of the most dominant discourses of ethnicity in Japan (for example, see Denoon, Hudson, McCormack, & Morris-Suzuki, 1996; Weiner, 1997; Lie, 2001; Befu, 2001; Kamada 2005a; 2005b; 2006). This discourse denies the existence of ethnic diversity in Japan, in place of a narrowly defined standard of *sameness* in terms of both enacting Japanese in a performative sense and looking Japanese in appearance.

Related to this is a discourse of *gaijin* (foreigner) "otherness." Intersecting with the discourse of homogeneity, this discourse of *gaijin* "otherness" denies that multiethnic Japanese citizens or citizens with non-Japanese ethnicity exist in Japan, creating several commonsensical repertoires heard in people's speech: "*Gaijin* are not Japanese (citizens, race, ethnicity);" "*Gaijin* cannot speak Japanese;" "*Gaijin* speak English;" "*Gaijin* cannot use chopsticks;" "*Gaijin* cannot eat sushi." Along with this discourse, linguistic traces of an intersecting deficit discourse of multiethnic halfness 「ハーフ」 can be heard, which constitutes multiethnicity in a subtractive manner.

As well, a dominant discourse of conformity in Japan is expressed in the proverb *deru kui wa utareru* (The nail that sticks up gets hammered down), which illustrates the disagreeableness of standing out or being non-conformist in Japanese society. One has to work very hard to avoid allowing oneself to stand out.

Peripheral discourses of ethnicity in Japan

Competing with a discourse of homogeneity—which constitutes difference as bad—a peripheral discourse of diversity has been identified which allows for the positive constitution of difference as enhancing and valuable (for example, see Denoon, Hudson, McCormack, & Morris-Suzuki, 1996; Weiner, 1997; Lie, 2001; Befu, 2001; Kamada 2005a; 2005b; 2006). The foreign-raised parents of multiethnic children in Japan, in order to offer their children a more empowering alternate discourse, have spontaneously deconstructed the above-mentioned marginalizing, dominant, and subtractive discourse of multiethnic halfness (*haafu*) and constructed in its place an empowering and additive discourse of doubleness (*daburu*).

Emerging from an earlier discourse of openness to the outside world (emerging at the end of the Edo Period in the 1860's) and a discourse of internationality (*kokusaika*) (emerging within the economic boom of the 1980's), a newer discourse of interculturality has emerged in recent years in which a high value has come to be placed on cross-cultural communicative proficiency, intercultural savvy, and outside-of-Japan connections and ties.

Finally, linguistic traces of a discourse of foreign attractiveness can be heard and seen that constitute an "embodied" ideal of the foreign Caucasian in terms of face, hair, and body characteristics. Darling-Wolf (2003) has referred to this discourse in her study on Japanese women's conceptions of attractiveness, although she did not specifically identify it as a discourse, nor did she name it. In Japanese, the words *hori ga fukai*, and *hana ga takai* (in English, "deeply sculptured face" and "high nose,"

both implying "deep-set eyes") have a positive nuance of attractiveness and foreign-exoticness. This discourse also includes the notion of "good body style" which refers to a female with well-developed breasts and hips, and long legs—features associated with foreign Caucasian attractiveness. For men "good body style" refers to broad shoulders, full chest, and tall stature—features associated with foreign attractiveness. (Also competing with this discourse is a discourse of foreign grotesqueness [Kamada, 2006] in which foreigners are stereotypically portrayed with *uglified* phenotypic features such as large noses and hairy bodies. However, for reasons of space I do not include further discussion of this discourse here.)

The dilemma of ethnic embodiment

Early adolescence is already a sensitive phase of maturational development for youths in terms of both mental as well as physical maturity (Finders, 1997; Orenstein, 1994). Ethnic embodiment holds many dilemmas for these girls as shown in the discursive positioning that they assume within "competing discourses" (Baxter, 2003) of conformity on the one hand and ethnic diversity on the other. The following data demonstrates dilemmas of ethnicity that these girls maneuvered within. In this continuous excerpt, which I have broken up into three sections, while the girls maneuver themselves within these dilemmas, they also reveal how they have learned over time to resolve ethnic marginalization by drawing on a greater number of alternative discourses that they were earlier unable to access within a more limited range of dominant ethnic discourses available to them in their worlds at school. In this first section that follows, the

girls and I are talking about feelings of being constituted as "half" in their past, and how they feel about it now. (See Appendix for Transcription Conventions.)

Data Section A: Ages 14 & 15

- 1 H: **iya yatta haafu yattan na** (*I hated being half*)
- 2 G: **chiisai toki wa iya yatta**
(*I hated it when I was little*)
- 3 G: (?) **mukashi wa**
(*[?] a long time ago*)
- 4 G: **chiisai toki wa yatta kedo**
(*I did when I was little*)
- 5 L: **ima wa?**
(*and now?*)
- 6 G: **ima wa zenzen ureshii**
(*now I am totally happy*)
- 7 G: **mmmm**
(*yeah*)
- 8 G: **mmmm**
(*yeah*)
- 9 L: **Sara wa?**
(*how about you, Sara?*)
- 10 S: **shougakkou no toki toka mecha iya, yakedo**
- 11 (*I really hated it when I was in elementary school, though*)

- 12 H: **watashi mo meccha iyayatta**
(*I also really hated it*)
- 13 G: **unnn**
(*yeah*)
- 14 S: **kedo, ima wa, nanka, minna ii na, toka ippai iitte kurerushi jibun demo ii to omoi hajimeta**
- 15 (*but now, somehow, everyone thinks it's good, and a lot of people tell me that it's good, and now even*
- 16 *I am beginning to think that*)
- 17 L: **nnnhonto**
(*mmm, really*)
- 18 S: **sou mitai**
(*it does seem like that*)
- 19 L: **yokatta ne, minna**
(*it has been good for all of you*)
- 20 G: **yokatta**
(*it has been good*)

The girls express their "hatred" of being constituted as half (*haafu*) when they were little (#1-4). However, they agree that they are happy "now" to be half (#5-8), showing traces of a discourse of diversity, or difference as *good*. Sara again reflects on how she hated being constituted as "othered" as an elementary school pupil (#9-11), and Hanna offers agreement (#12-13).

But then (#14-20) Sara positions herself in terms of how others have constituted her positively as she comes to place

value on the cultural capital of her halfness/doubleness which is recognized and esteemed highly by others (#14-16). Over time Sara can be seen as being able to access more enhancing alternative discourses of diversity, enabling her to emerge from earlier, less empowering positions within limiting dominant discourses of homogeneity. She now identifies her ethnicity as "good" and positive.

The talk continues:

Data Section B: Ages 14 & 15

- 21 L: **hai** (*yes*), how about you Anna?
- 22 A: **yapa, chiichai toki iya yatta nanka shuugou shashin toka ne, jibun dake nanka**
- 23 **kao ga chigau, kara, nanka iya na to omotteta kedo, ima wa**
- 24 (*yeah, I hated it when I was little, somehow the school trip photo and stuff, only MY face was*
- 25 *somehow different, so I somehow felt like I hated that, and now*)
- 26 L: **yokatta?**
(*do you like it?*)
- 27 G: **ii kana mitaina** (laugh)
(*it's like it's good, I guess*)
- 28 L: **hai, Hanna wa?**
(*yes, and you Hanna?*)
- 29 H: **mmm, issho, shougakkou gurai no toki wa mecha tsurakatta**
- 30 (*mmm, the same with me, it was really hard just during elementary school*)
- 31 L: **mmm**
(*yeah*)
- 32 G: **nanka, nihonjin ni naritai to omotteta shi**
(*I felt like I wanted to be Japanese and stuff*)
- 33 G: **wakaru**
(*I know what you mean*)
- 34 G: **meccha omou**
(*I totally know [what you mean]*)
- 35 G: **minna (?) narou, narou to**
(*everyone becomes [?], tries to become*)
- 36 G: **kaminoke kurokushitai to omoteittamon**
(*I felt like I wanted to darken my hair*)
- 37 L: **asso nano?**
(*oh really?*)
- 38 G: **kaminoke dake ureshikatta, kao wa iya yatta**
(laugh)
- 39 (*the only thing I was happy about was my hair, it was my face that I hated*) (laugh)
- 40 N: **watashi no kaminoke motto kurokatta kara na**
(*because my hair, too, was darker than now*)
- 41 G: **itsumo (?)**
(*always [?]*)
- 42 L: **mmm**
(*uh-huh*)

- 43 R: **kinpatsu yatte shuugou shashin mitai (?) hitori dake na kin, kinpatsu ni kagayai ten na**
- 44 *(I was blonde, in my school trip photo I was the only one with blond, sparkling blonde hair)*
- 45 G: **kakkoii**
(that's cool)
- 46 L: **a hountou? Naomi wa so iu no nakatta?**
(oh really? didn't that kind of thing happen to you Naomi?)
- 47 N: **ah, meccha iya yatta**
(ah, I totally hated it)
- 48 L: **un**
(uh-huh)
- 49 N: **nanka, meccha chicchai gakkou yakara, sugu nareta kedo, sai-, nanka, meccha, mukatsuku**
- 50 **hito to ka ga, sore wo riyuu ni shite "anata haafu yakara" dou no kouno haafu (?)**
- 51 *(somehow, because my school was extremely small, I got used to it soon but, somehow,*
- 52 *there were totally disgusting people, using the reason, "because you're half", you're like*
- 53 *this or that because you're half)*

In this segment of the extract, in their telling of their elementary school experiences, the girls can be seen co-constructing the notion of Japanese conformity by

performatively enacting Japaneseness by positioning themselves as wanting to be something that they are not: dark haired and Japanese looking. Anna expresses her hatred of having ONLY her face appear as "different" in the school-trip photo (#22-25). An unidentified girl states, "I felt like I wanted to be Japanese and stuff" (#32). Another unidentified girl says, "I felt like I wanted to darken my hair" (#36), followed by another (unidentified) girl, "the only thing I was happy about was my hair, it was my face that I hated" (#38-39). Repeatedly, the girls resist and contest having been constituted in such a powerless manner and for having taken up these positions within dominant discourses. While revealing traces of a discourse of homogeneity by expressing their feelings of shame based on their multiethnic features, they also work to deconstruct this discourse. Rina, in describing herself as conspicuously standing out in her school photo with her "blond, sparkling blonde hair" (#43-44), positions herself not only as different, but also as attractive, within a "Western female beauty" discourse (Sunderland, 2004). This positioning is further supported by one of the girls who states, "that's cool" (#45). Now having other alternative discourses available to her, Naomi expresses a contesting voice, "I totally hated it" (#47) and takes the empowering role of positioning those who constituted her as "totally disgusting people" (#49-50, 52). Naomi discursively positions herself as being in control over the situation, "I got used to it soon" (#51). She contests being constituted in a discriminatory manner by others solely on the basis of ethnicity (or halfness). The topic of discussion shifts in the next segment, which follows directly after this, to the introduction of being constituted as foreigner (*gaijin*).

Data Section C: Ages 14 & 15

- 54 G: “**haafu, haafu**” to iwaretara ii kedo betsu ni,
“**gaijin**” toka iwaretara
- 55 *(it was alright when they said “half, half”, but being called “gaijin” [foreigner] or something)*
- 56 G: “**gaijin**” to ka iwaretara mou owari da yo ne
(it was like all over if they said “gaijin” [foreigner])
- 57 G: **owari**
(all over)
- 58 G: **zenzen chigau mirarekata**
(completely different way of seeing things)
- 59 G: **kenka no toki toka ni na, kishoi nen toka ittara**
“**gaijin no kuse ni**” to ka itte kite
- 60 *(like in a fight or something, if I say to someone “you’re gross”, they would say “that’s just like a*
- 61 *foreigner”)*
- 62 G: **ah, wakarū, meccha mukatsuku**
(oh, I know what you mean, that’s totally disgusting)
- 63 G: **meccha muka tsuiten**
(that’s totally disgusting)
- 64 G: **gaijin**
(foreigner)
- 65 G: **kuyashi namida yashi na**
(it’s enough to make you weep)
- 66 N: **nani mo iehen na, sore wo iwaretara**
(I can’t say anything, if someone says that to me)

- 67 H: **demo na, tomodachi ga soko de “gaijin chau de”**
toka iutte kuretara kandou shita
- 68 *(but, when my friend said at that time [in my defense] “she’s not a gaijin” [foreigner,*
- 69 *outsider] I was moved)*
- 70 G: **kandou**
(that’s moving)
- 71 H: “**gaijin’ chau de, ‘haafu’ yade**”
(“she’s not ‘foreigner’, she’s ‘half’”)
- 72 G: (laugh)
- 73 N: **dochi mo issho yanke mitai na, nanka dojji**
bouru shiteru no ni sa,
- 74 **mukou ga mukatsukareta “gaijin ya” to itte, a**
kankei nai yo, mitai na (laughs)
- 75 *(they’re both, like, the same, like when I was playing*
- 76 *dodgeball, they disgustingly*
- 77 *said “foreigner”, it was like not related [to anything]*
at all) (laughs)
- 77 N: “**gaijin nigeyou**” to
(they said “gaijin [foreigner] dodge the ball”)
- 78 G: (laughs)

Up to this point (Sections A and B), the girls had been co-constructing their disgust and dislike of being constituted as “half” when they were younger and re-aligning their present subjectivities by positioning themselves within a

discourse of diversity in which "halfness" is self-enhancing and positive. Halfness is a category that they take up in their self-identification by deconstructing the pejorative negative, outsider aspect of halfness into a positive category. However, these girls do not take up the category of foreigner (*gaijin*) at all, even in a deconstructed manner. Discursively, their contestation of being positioned as *gaijin* takes on a much stronger tone. In lines #57-66, the girls use various adjectives to describe their contestation and rejection of being positioned in the category of *gaijin*, "it was like all over if they said *gaijin*" (#56), "that's totally disgusting" (#62-63), "it's enough to make you weep" (#65) (*kuyashi namida* is a Japanese idiom indicating the shedding of tears with anger, regret or shame).

Hanna takes up a position of enacting Japanese conformity by aligning herself as Japanese in a rejection of the categorization of *gaijin* in her statement "when my friend said at that time 'she's not a *gaijin*,' I was moved" (#67-69). Hanna felt moved that her (Japanese) friend (on behalf of her), in effect contested (in the presence of other peers) the positioning and categorization of her as *gaijin*. Hanna elaborates further in the voice of her friend, "she's not foreigner, she's half" (#71). In Hanna's celebration of her friend's defense of her, she takes up the self-categorization of *haafu* and at the same time rejects the categorization of *gaijin*.

But, in line #75 (#73 in the Japanese), Naomi subtly contests Hanna's separation of *haafu* and *gaijin* into two separate categories with the words, "they're both, like, the same". The use of the hedge "*mitai na*" ("like") softens Naomi's rebuttal somewhat; however, discursively, Naomi can be seen as contesting the constitution of herself as either

gaijin or *haafu*, as both to her signify forms of "othering." Hanna felt moved by her friend's support (#67-69) because to deny Hanna's *gaijin*-ness is to *Japanize* her, a positioning and categorization which Hanna chooses to assume in the context of her Japanese school peers.

In contrast, Naomi rejects the categorization of Japaneseness for herself, while also rejecting both foreigner and half "othering." Naomi prefers to position herself as an *unmarked* multiethnic (*haafu/daburu*), which doesn't need to be pointed out, within a discourse of diversity. (In an earlier excerpt, in reference to people that Naomi meets for the first time in Japan, she states, "here, if they're people I meet for the first time, they're like, 'oh my gosh, she's not Japanese,' it's like, 'just shut up about it'.") Naomi is implying that she wants people to refrain from pointing her out as marked and different and just accept her as she is without reaction. Finally, in the excerpt above, Naomi offers her own example of being "disgustingly" positioned as *gaijin* at school during a game of dodgeball. A classmate positioned Naomi in terms of her ethnicity which, "was like not related [to anything] at all" (#73-77), when someone yelled to her, "*gaijin*, dodge the ball." Naomi is upset that she had allowed herself to be positioned in this hailing when she recognizes it as such; now she is able to assert her agency to resist being positioned as a *gaijin* and instead calls upon an alternative discourse of diversity to subjectively position herself in a more empowering manner.

Conclusion

This paper addressed the research question of how these multiethnic girls discursively position themselves and each

other within intersecting ethnic discourses in the constructions of their embodied identities. As adolescent girls constantly confronting issues of how they look, the issue of their ethnic embodiment is a foregrounded aspect of their identity. It was shown how these girls moved from their earlier dilemmas within less empowering, limited discourses of homogeneity and conformity to more self-enhancing, alternative discourses of diversity and interculturality in the constitution of their ethnic and gendered embodied selves. As they move, over time, out of childhood and into adolescent girlhood and undergo rapid physical and maturational development, they come to draw on a wider range of available ethnic discourses. Constantly attracting the stare of others, they at times discursively enact their Japaneseness within a discourse of conformity, drawing on the Japanese proverb: "The nail that sticks up gets hammered down." At other times they celebrate their diversity and discursively construct for themselves the privileged "embodied" positioning of ethnic exoticness while simultaneously rejecting constitutions of themselves as the marked "outsider." The girls had to discursively work hard over time in order to overcome controlling social discourses. They show that they were at times able to break through and resist being positioned as subjects within limiting discourses by repositioning themselves in other more empowering discourses of ethnicity.

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Transcription Conventions

- (?) undecipherable speech
- ? rising intonation, question
- (laugh) laugh
- CAPITALS loud enunciation ,
- , (comma) continuing intonation (utterance not completed)
- bold print** Japanese transcribed into Romanization (the actual speech) (Hepburn System of Romanization)
- italic print* the English translation of the previous Japanese, on a separate line
- (italics) English translation of the Japanese on the same line
- (to save space or to denote codeswitching within a turn)
- regular print the actual speech in English (not a translation)
- (.) pause less than one second
- (..) pause longer than one second
- [explanation] explanation or clarification in brackets (not the actual speech)
- “quotation marks” words enclosed in quotation marks indicate quoted speech, voice of another, title (book, etc.), or emphasis of speaker

Pseudonyms are used for names of the six girls:

R = Rina, N = Naomi, S = Sara, H = Hanna, A = Anna, M = Maya

L = Laurel (researcher)

G = unidentified girl (where it was not possible to identify with certainty which girl was speaking)

Gs = unidentified girls (when two or more unidentified girls simultaneously spoke, laughed, etc.)