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INTERVIEW ESSAY

On Sunday, October 10, I interviewed my grandmother named Sawako Saito, for my interview essay. There are three reasons why I chose my grandmother as an interviewee. The first reason is that she is the person I trust the most and can have discussions by sharing our honest thoughts about her experiences. The second reason is that I thought she could express her ideas and how she felt about being judged based on gender without being afraid to share the struggles and pain that she experienced since she encountered countless discrimination against living as a woman in Japan. The third reason is that I wanted to share what I have learned in this course, Women's Studies 1116 with her, and exchange our opinions by discussing the similarities and differences of sexism in Japan and Canada. In this interview essay, I would like to focus on the impacts of mythological norms of gender roles in an institutionalized patriarchal household on Sawako, which made her suffered from internalized oppression.

POWER RELATIONS WITHIN THE HOUSEHOLD

On June 17, 1944, Sawako Saito was born in a middle-class family raised in Osaka, Japan. She grew up in “the traditional family” (Kimmel and Holler 154), representing the last outpost of traditional gender relationships. Her family consists of four members, her father, her mother, Sawako, and her brother. Her father named Takeshi Saito was the breadwinner in her family who was working as a businessman. He had the most power over his family members, and he was the one who made all of the decisions for his family based on structural sexism. Her mother, named Mako Saito, was the homemaker who stayed at home and cared for her husband and children. Her brother is named Akira; he is two years younger than her.

Sawako was born in a patriarchal nuclear family, where her father had the power over other family members. Her father used mythologized beliefs of natural difference to justify the mistreatment towards her and her mother since he believed that men are intrinsically superior to women and women are less valuable. Those constructed ideologies created a significant power gap between men and women in her family. Sawako described her family's power relationships using the terms of the dominant and subordinate groups, and explained that there were two groups within her family, which were established by gender differences. The dominant group consisted of the father and the son, and the subordinate group included Sawako and the mother.

The power relationship within her family based on the conceptualized gender role, resulted in her suffering from unequal gender roles and expectations. Sawako's father did not allow her and her mother to speak up or disagree with him by taking away their power and made them live in subservience to him and his son, Akira.

EXPECTATIONS FOR A DAUGHTER

Sawako had been suffered from the ingrained ideologies within her patriarchal family, however, she remained silence as if she had never experienced mistreatment since it was viewed as natural or normal for Japanese women to live in patriarchal families, which often supported prejudice against women because of their sex. From an early age, Sawako always knew that her father treated her differently than her younger brother, but, at that time, she had no idea that those differences were based on the mythological norm of gender ideologies. Sawako and her brother were very close, so they always spent time together; however, things have changed when she turned 13. After Sawako entered junior high school her father started disciplining her based on the constructed ideologies of gender roles.

In the 1960s, there was the ideology that marriage was the most important and life goal for Japanese women, and they were expected to dedicate themselves to their husbands by sacrificing themselves and raising their children in an environment where they could get their husbands' protection. Sawako was forcibly guided by her father to acquire "womanly virtues" (Kishida 101), and was expected to act weak, dependent, quiet, and submissive based on her gender to become an ideal woman for Japanese women. Therefore, Sawako's father imposed on her to live up to the expectations of a gender role as a daughter by made her believed that marriage to a man who has wealth and fame is her life's primary purpose. Since Sawako's father had the mythical norm that "learning is an obstacle to a woman's successful marriage" (Kishida 102), she was restricted from studying in local high school; instead, her father decided to enroll her in a girls' high school which students could learn about tea ceremony, and flower arrangements, which represented the femininity of Japanese women. The girl's school was for women who needs to study and train her selves in order to acquire women's aesthetics and to be an ideal wife. Japanese women had the right to study at university; however, they were not free enough to exercise their right since socially constructed ideology influenced them to believe that

education was a right for men. Therefore, Sawako had to give up her learning in order to be a wife.

During the period, women who did not follow the ideology (unmarried women) were arbitrarily categorized and criticized for having problems with their personality and functioning as a woman. Therefore, Japanese women, including Sawako, had no choice but to get married in order to fit into the norm of a Japanese woman and live in obedience to her dominant husband under an established power relationship with no escape and excessive expectations of the roles of married women within the society. In fact, marriage was used as "the primary ways that men benefit from, and take advantage of, the work of women" (Coontz 42), so men structured it to control women and use women's power for their private uses instead of providing protection and stable life for women. Shortly after graduating from high school, her father requested her to marry a guy he chose for her. However, she refused his request and instead, she asked for permission to work at a sewing factory, which was her long-time dream. Although Sawako's father was furious with her when she talked back to him, he eventually allowed her to work at the sewing factory on the condition that she postpone the marriage for one year. About half a year after she started working at the sewing factory, she fell in love with a man who also worked at the same workplace and wanted to marry him. Her father did not allow her to choose her marriage partner, and forced her to accept the marriage arranged by her father. She felt anger and sadness towards him; however, she agreed to marry the man her father had arranged at the age of 20, since she believed that it was her responsibility to follow her father as a daughter, and she didn't want to disappoint his father anymore.

In March 1964, Sawako married a man named, Masaki who was 30, and successful business man who had his own company. Since her father arranged her marriage, it was not what she dreamed of, but she had hope that it could finally release her from the deeply ingrained patriarchal system within her house. However, her hope was beaten less than a year after she got married due to the socially constructed belief of a wife. Also Sawako mentioned about the ten-year age gap between her and her husband since it created visible differences in the power relations within her and her husband. The year after getting married, Sawako gave birth to a baby girl named Lana, which expanded the gender roles of Sawako as a mother based on a socially constructed unequal gender expectations, besides the roles of daughter and wife. She was assigned to fulfil the roles as a daughter, a wife and a mother formed by Japanese culture and

society. Therefore, she had to quit her paid job to do unpaid domestic labor, which included house chores such as cleaning, cooking, laundry, washing the dishes, raising children, and caring for her husband and her parents-in-law. All unpaid labor was considered a “God-given mission” (Kimmel and Holler 145). In other words, women’s unpaid labor was believed to be their responsibility. Many Japanese women, including Sawako, believed that “the ways of organizing gender roles and dividing work in human history of the male breadwinner/ female homemaker family was the natural and traditional family norm” (Coontz 36). She could not resist the inequality within her marriage life since her mindset was shaped by the ideas of gender roles based on the constructed sexism in Japanese society, which her father used to control for many years in the traditional patriarchal family.

It was the first interview I had ever done, so I was nervous and had no clue what to do to make this interview worthwhile for both of us since I had a shallow and limited understanding of her life. Despite such concerns, this interview allowed us to have meaningful discussions by sharing each other's ideas, which deepened our knowledge of the structural inequalities in gender roles and the historically and culturally constructed patriarchal household. At the beginning of the interview, my grandmother unconsciously acted as if she had overcome the abuse she had suffered from her father and husband. She is aware that what she experienced was based on the traditional family system. However, she did not recognize the consequences of the mythological norm of men's superiority and women's inferiority based on structural sexism, which is still deeply rooted in Japanese society and impacted her thinking and behaviour.

Works Cited

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