



Title	日本社会における産児調節の文化とジェンダー : ピルに関する新聞記事を手がかりに
Author(s)	ヴィタレ, アナリア
Citation	年報人間科学. 2001, 22, p. 33-57
Version Type	VoR
URL	<a href="https://doi.org/10.18910/11238">https://doi.org/10.18910/11238</a>
rights	
Note	

*The University of Osaka Institutional Knowledge Archive : OUKA*

<https://ir.library.osaka-u.ac.jp/>

The University of Osaka

## 日本社会における産児調節の文化とジェンダー

——ピルに関する新聞記事を手がかりに——

### 〈要旨〉

最近になって、日本の市場に新しい医療避妊薬が登場してきた。この新しい避妊薬は、おそらく女性および人間の考え方に、そして生殖問題に関する役割に影響を及ぼすと思われる。同様に、医学的組織や行政官僚、女性グループといった、世論と政策を形成している中心的なプレーヤーもまた、おそらく変化していくと思われる。ならば、これまでの日本の産児調節をめぐる文化は、いかなる特徴を有していたのか？本稿では、この問いに答えるために、主な日刊紙のひとつである朝日新聞のなかに登場したピルに関する報道を分析する。対象とする時期は、それが最初に登場する1965年から、ピルが認可される直前の1969年までである。

新聞に登場する報道から明らかにするのは、とりわけ1960年代までは、ピルに関する報道のあらゆる視点のなかに医学的な言説枠組が浸透していることである。情報源として圧倒的に多いのは男性であり、主としてエリート医者と官僚である。医学的な言説枠組は、新聞にとって扱いにくい報道に関しても強調されている。避妊具を用いる日本の女性の数がピルを使

### ヴィタレ・アナリア

用していることも、国際的にはピルの使用が一般的であることも、新聞のなかでは解説されていない。女性によるピルの使用について報道することは、新聞自身の議論と矛盾をきたし、産児調節法に関する別の判断基準があることを示すがゆえに可能でなかった。しかし60年代になって、医学的な言説枠組は「市場的な言説枠組」に取って代わられた。

新聞は、種々の商品の大規模な生産と普及を後押しする、ある種の広告産業に変わったように思われる。情報源は男性と女性に等しく割り振られ、一般の人々の意見もまた報道されるようになる。ピルは日用品であると報道された。女性の性的な自由、性教育、そして二代の性行為といった、道徳の問題や政治的な含み、あるいは文化的な神話などに関するそれまでの制限は、あたかも消えてしまったようである。代わって、あらゆる消費者の需要が平等に扱われる。市場的な言説枠組は、リプロダクティブ・ライツの概念に関する脱政治化を引き起こし、医療に関する資本主義的な考え方を産み出すという点において、ジェンダーと再生産問題に影響を及ぼす。

こうした産児調節法に関する肯定的な報道のために、性教育や公共医療

といったリプロダクティブ・ライツの基本的条件をめぐる議論は、脇に追いやられた。新聞は、この医学的な避妊具が現行の医療システムに対してもたらす影響を討議しえなかったのだが、それは様々な利害集団関のあいだの現在のな力の配分に関するある種の現状を表している。こうしたピルに関する脱政治化された報道は、ジェンダーをめぐる極度に保守的な定義を帰結したのである。新聞報道における最初の10年間において女性性は、産児調節に関する彼女らの意見と需要を無視されると同時に、ピルに関する情報を消費していたように思われる。80年代においては、市民としての資格や年齢、あるいは経済状況などにかかわりなく、女性はおそらくこのピルという方法に満足し、生殖をめぐる決定する者という自らの社会的役割を遂行している。

#### キーワード

日本、産児調節、ジェンダー、新聞、経口避妊薬（ピル）

## Introduction:

From the postwar period to the present there have been few effective contraceptives on the Japanese market. Two methods which are called medicalized because they require a specialized service provider were introduced in 1999 and in 2000 respectively. These are the low-dose contraceptive pill and a second type of IUD<sup>1</sup>. Both of these are used by women. It could be said that these changes might have an effect on the beliefs and values of women's and men's roles with respect to reproductive issues. It is certainly possible that opinions among interest groups might change, especially those key players shaping public opinion and policies on contraception. These key players include ministerial bureaucrats, medical associations and women's groups.

What, in the past, have been the main characteristics of the Japanese birth control culture? In order to answer this question, this paper proposes to examine the press coverage of the pill in one of the main daily newspapers. The pill, banned for nearly forty years, offers an example of the complexities and conflicts of social interests involved. In 1960, a medium and high dose formulation of the pill gained approval for gynecological treatment. During this time the environment

was highly sensitive due to a number of drug-related scandals<sup>2</sup> and the government was severely criticized and repeatedly sued for compensation. The safety of the pill as a hormonal contraceptive was judged and its approval was postponed in the mid-sixties and again in the nineties. The reasons given for the prohibition of the pill as a contraceptive included such possible negative social impacts as "dangerous side effects", "public morals", "Japan's economy", "AIDS", and, more recently, "pollution of the environment and ecosystem."<sup>3</sup>

One of the most important social groups in the provision of birth control methods was the Japanese medical community, who, unlike in other developed countries, was not particularly supportive of the promotion of any method of contraception until the mid-eighties when they demanded the liberation of the pill. Women's groups had not considered oral contraceptives as an important matter.<sup>4</sup> However, in the late nineties, women's groups and those in medical circles lobbied hard to have the pill approved after the impotence drug, Viagra, had been approved in an unusually short time for a foreign drug. Six months later, in June of 1999, the low dosage pill was officially permitted for hormonal contraception by prescription.<sup>5</sup>

Two main studies have examined Japanese reproductive health culture, explaining the popular rejection of the pill as a

birth control method. One, by anthropologist Samuel Coleman,<sup>6</sup> is an ethnographic examination of the relationship among Japanese law, the medical profession, the government, the Japanese Family Planning Association, specialists in the field and Japanese couples. Coleman's study questions how Japanese couples limit their fertility and why they use some birth control methods - such as induced abortion, condoms and the calculation of the female reproductive cycle - and do not use others - such as oral contraception and contraceptive sterilization. Through questionnaires and interviews in the seventies about sexuality, birth control methods and abortion, he concludes that the particular set of fertility control methods, "is an adaptation to the political economics of health care and contraceptive marketing that meshes with the dominant themes in Japanese marital life-styles and sexuality."<sup>7</sup>

The other main, and very recent, study is Tiana Norgren's<sup>8</sup> questioning of the relationship between Japan's liberal abortion policy and its conservative contraception policy. She concludes that the two contradictory policies were generated by widely divergent historical circumstances and interest group configurations. Norgren also argues that the pill "...first appeared at an inopportune moment in history, when economic recovery and drug-related scandals dominated the

public consciousness and when most of the relevant groups opposed it either because they saw it as a threat to their livelihood or because they saw it as a threat to abortion rights."<sup>9</sup> She also points out that government policy regarding the pill was a good illustration of how a robust civil society negotiated with the governing coalition. Moreover, among the social groups, well-organized groups with focused agendas and financial and political resources, such as drug companies and pharmacists, were able to influence policy more than others.

These studies explained Japanese policies related to abortion and contraception, particularly the political position of interest groups and how their activities created and perpetuated their own interests. However, the question of how the particular way of judging oral contraceptives in relation to gender roles and reproductive issues was shaped remains unanswered. The following (among other points) remains to be explored: reproductive health and rights; legitimate speakers in society and what criteria they use when they pass judgement; authorized control and distribution of contraceptives. Understanding who the influential groups are in today's Japan, along with their positions or ideologies, provides a basis for devising strategies for the future improvement of women's reproductive health and rights. By exploring the course of the debate as it appeared in the media,

I hope to convey the power of mass media in shaping gender and reproductive choices.

In order to examine the public debate about the pill, I have chosen press coverage because the press is one of the sites where different social groups communicate with society and influence public opinion. I will use some concepts and tools used in the Critical Discourse Analysis approach. This approach consists of the belief that news production is not value free. Media production always contains bias because of choices made in the reporting of only certain news, the use of only particular sources and the highlighting or avoidance of certain parts of the news stories that are covered. Van Dijk calls this, "a manipulation of the mental model of social events through the use of specific discourse structures, headlines, style, rhetorical figures, [and] semantic strategies."<sup>10</sup> The way in which news is presented relates to the inherent values of news production, which are not neutral but reflect economical, social and ideological values.<sup>11</sup> Finally, "unless the readers have access to alternative information...the result of such manipulation...may turn to be generalized to more general, preferred knowledge, attitudes or ideologies."<sup>12</sup>

I will analyze news coverage of the pill since it first appeared in 1955 until its near approval in 1999 in one of the major daily newspapers, the Asahi Shinbun. During my

research, I used quantitative and qualitative methodology. The aim of the quantitative methodology is to provide a general impression of the representation of the pill in the press, with the analysis of 140 press releases.<sup>13</sup> I took into account the following categories of news releases: headlines (the most conspicuous elements of the news, in order to attract the reader's attention); topics (which are like the gist of the news, representing what is most important about a news event); news sources (the supplies of information and news actors, they reflect the power of sources and access to press discourse); and column or section (indicating the type of reader targeted by the newspaper). The frequency of each category appears between brackets.

Qualitative methodology is applied in three series of articles covering the topic of hormonal contraceptives published in 1975, 1991 and 1998. The series receive particularly close attention to their leads, argumentation, background, sources, and illustrations because they developed in detail the dominant argumentations of the time.

The presentation of the analysis and results is divided into three periods. The first one covers from the first piece of news in 1955 to 1974 (quantitative analysis). This is followed by the series in 1975. The second period, from 1975 to 1990, is followed by the analysis of the 1991 series. The last period

covers 1991 to 1998 and the 1998 series.

### I. The pill as a drug, 1955 – 1974

Since the sixties there has been an increasingly positive attitude towards contraception among Japanese people.<sup>14</sup> A pattern of condoms and abortion was established and has continued until today.<sup>15</sup> Since in the mid-fifties and sixties there was approximately one article per year about the pill it would appear that the pill was not a valuable or newsworthy topic for the newspaper. However, in the early seventies the number of articles about the pill increased slightly when discussion on the restriction of legal abortion (the Eugenic Protection Law) arose. (See Figure 1) Only a small group, Chirupen, demanded the liberalization of the pill and reached notoriety through their publicity, generating divisions among Japanese women.<sup>16</sup> In 18 news releases about the pill between 1971 and the six-part series in 1975, Chirupen was quoted only three times and very concisely.

Quantitative analysis of the headlines about the pill (See Figure 2) shows that the most frequently used words were the ones related to the object of the news, such as *piru* (9) followed by *keikou hinin yaku* (oral birth control or contraceptive drug) (12). The intensive use of these nouns in the headlines

demonstrates what needed to be emphasized at that time and what was novel for Japanese readers. Interestingly, if the frequency of headline words is considered chronologically, it can be seen that the English loan word '*piru*' (for pill) instead of the use of Chinese characters,<sup>17</sup> has appeared overwhelmingly since 1971. The next most frequent category of words relates to health and includes the phrase 'side effects' (5), which appeared for the first time in 1963.<sup>18</sup> Some of the most prominently occurring side effects are supposed to be: chronic virulence; fetuses with abnormal chromosomes; cerebral thrombosis, and ocular problems. The disadvantages associated with the use of the pill belonged primarily to the medical field. In addition, the common use of terms related to science, such as 'learned society' (5), 'conference' or 'announcement', shows that scientific reports formed the main sources of judgement about the pill. In conclusion, the Japanese press demonstrated alacrity in reproducing reports on health risks and effects on women who took the pill, focusing exclusively on reiterating the connection between '*piru*' and 'side effects'. This was displayed as the topic expressed in the headlines and in the descriptions of the oral contraceptive.

When the content of the news reports is studied it can be seen that overwhelmingly the most frequent topic in the news

reports was health (See Figure 3). Firstly, this category covered side effects (13) and related topics such as contraindications and negative reports of health risks. While introducing this new birth control method to Japanese society, the press emphasized its harmful effects on a woman's body. Secondly, it included the physiology and biochemistry of reproduction (7) with themes like the female reproductive system, hormonal system, chemicals produced by the body, and gynecological treatments. In third place were scientific reports that covered specialists' conferences and publications (6), mostly from the medical field. News regarding the birth control pill was presented through scientists' opinions. Finally, occupying fourth place was the political topic of kaikin (removal or lifting of the ban) (5). This dealt with questionable drugs which the Ministry was still considering for approval, as well as the external fact of official approval in other countries.

The distribution of news about the pill in columns and sections shows the relationship between the theme and the orientation of the news (See Figure 4). In the fifties the articles were placed in "home" related columns and in the seventies in recreation, health and medical care columns. Since the seventies, most of the coverage of the pill in the Asahi Shinbun has been published in sections related to

medical and health information, such as 'Ampule' and 'Everyone's health'.<sup>19</sup> All of these articles are found in the last pages of the newspaper, which are supposed to be light, easy to read, and mostly oriented toward female readers.<sup>20</sup> Undoubtedly, from the newspaper's point of view birth control themes belong overwhelmingly to female readers, revealing that women were considered responsible for family planning and birth control practices.

The sources of information in the news texts were male physician's statements (10) and the Ministry's information (5) from the time news of the pill first appeared in 1955 until the mid-seventies (See Figure 5). Therefore, it could be surmised that the use of medical sources by the press corresponds with the above analysis of topics and headlines, indicating a strong medical approach to reporting on the oral contraceptive.

## 2. The series ALL ABOUT THE BIRTH CONTROL PILL (『すべての子育て』 1975<sup>21</sup>)

The topics developed in the 1975 six-installment series entitled ALL ABOUT THE BIRTH CONTROL PILL relate to the medical field, continuing along the same ideological line as the accounts I have mentioned above in what I have labelled the first period of coverage. The main ideas promoted by the series were an understanding of the hormonal composition of



the pill, its main side effects and other health risks. The intent was to relate the pill to extensive diatribes about the harmful effects on a woman's body, as shown by installment headlines such as "There are some cases where life is involved" (命にかかわる場合) ; "Fear of thromboembolism" (血栓症の恐れ) and "Diabetes and Severe Liver Disorders" (糖尿病と重度肝臓病)

The whole series was based predominantly on foreign and national medical sources with statistics, quotes from medical publications, etc. Japanese sources are held in high esteem in relation to the modes of representation in public discourse. The press has presented the medical professionals positively, reproducing their social power by the use of different discursive strategies.<sup>22</sup>

As was referred to in the earlier analysis, the coverage routinely excluded any examination of the birth control pill by the users. This feature is repeated in the lead of the series. In general, the lead describes the main reason for the publication, which in this case was Japanese women demanding the pill from their physicians and being unsatisfactorily informed about this birth control method. The news sources of this social phenomenon are not revealed.

Although the newspaper continues to not quote women's opinions directly, women as users were quoted through the

use of different discursive strategies. Firstly, the press used the "conversationalization strategy",<sup>23</sup> where women's realities are encapsulated and controlled in the words of the journalist who supposedly represents their needs and worries. Secondly, women are represented in the illustrations, sending very strong messages of distrust of the pill. The illustrations are basically of women in isolated situations or in alliance with other women. They are in total ignorance of or with insufficient knowledge of contraceptive measures. Women are portrayed as worried about the control of their fertility, a portrayal which reinforces the fact that this is a "woman only" problem. The illustrations who exactly who has the power to decide, which terms will be used to judge the pill, and what the expected "natural" reaction of potential consumers will be. For instance, particularly interesting is the illustration in the third installment where a woman is trying to take a pill and is surprised because the pill is being taken away by someone else. This "someone else" appears to be a man, who the illustration portrays as bigger and more powerful than the smaller and distant woman. This man could be someone in a position to stop her from taking the pill as the caption reads, "You must not take them." (おそれないでください) This representation implies a female wish for a birth control method but in a passive position with a male exercising power

over her.

The effectiveness of the whole argument of this series, which labelled oral contraceptives as harmful, was not based on males in powerful positions discrediting but on possible effects of the drug itself, according to prestigious scientific sources. The illustration of the fifth installment is an expression of this logic. It draws attention to a possible social demand for the pill. In this illustration, angry women are demanding the pill—clearly referring to the group *Chupiren*—illustrated in the public space, grotesquely and imperatively. They are complaining to a man who is presumably able to decide about these things. He is scratching his head in worry or fright because of the pressure of the demonstrators. This scene expresses the Ministerial image of knowing what is best for its citizens. By supporting the messages developed in the content of the news the drawings are indirectly reinforcing the institutionalized power of doctors and public servants over women as patients, reducing the circle of people authorized to judge the pill.

Finally, the content of the series is summarized in the main headlines as: ALL ABOUT THE BIRTH CONTROL PILL. This is a speech act, which means a promise to the readership that everything about the pill will be answered. Along with the lead these headlines suggest the existence of a

need for information about the oral contraceptive. The fact that the demand for information about the pill is published in the “Home” column suggests that it is also produced for female readers. As a result, the promise in the headline is fulfilled by an over-medicalized approach, with a constant reminder that the pill is a dangerous drug. This reinforces the current division of social power in which prestigious physicians and elite bureaucrats reach the public.

## II. A transitional passage, 1975 - 1990

Since the mid-seventies there have been many signs revealing a state of transition with respect to opinions about the pill. Internationally, the first versions of the hormonal contraceptive had severe side effects. This prompted the development of new formulations, resulting in the low-dosage pill used in many countries since the early seventies. In Japan meanwhile, the Asahi Shinbun covered the topic of the pill in an extremely alarmist way during the seventies and early eighties.<sup>24</sup> However, in 1985 the Japanese medical profession changed their position on the pill when two highly respectable associations demanded that the Health and Welfare Ministry approve the low-dosage pill. As a result, clinical studies began in the following years. The discussion of birth control methods

among women's groups was covered by the press. In 1987, a group based in Osaka published a book called "*Piru, watashitachi erabanai*". This news was reported in the Asahi Shinbun twice.<sup>25</sup>

From the mid-seventies to the mid-eighties the Asahi Shinbun published scarcely one article a year about the pill and after that the number increased to nearly one article per month (in total, 40 news reports). (See Figure 1) During 1986, the newspaper reported on the official *kaikin* of the birth control pill. The quantitative examination of the Asahi Shinbun's coverage reveals that the biggest change was primarily in the domain of health hazards and the political stance towards its liberalization.

The quantitative analysis of the most frequently used words in the headlines are categorized below. Firstly, the category called "the name of the contraceptive drug" was used the most often (See Figure 2). In this category the loan word "*piru*" (27) was the most frequently used word. The second most common terms come under the category of "health". They not only included the term "side effects" (6) but also other reactions such as: heart attack (1); liver tumour (1); gallstone (1); carcinogen (1); cerebral apoplexy (1); thromboembolism (1) and venereal diseases (1). Diseases such as cancer (1), arthritis (1) and breast cancer (1), which also appeared in the

headlines, are quoted as decreasing due to the use of the pill. The third most frequent category was politics. The work "*kaikin*" demonstrates that the liberalization of the pill was also an important feature of the news of this contraceptive. The above feature, that is the consideration of the pill's approval, was related to the fourth most frequent idea in the headlines: scientific research. Terms such as: research teams (3); clinical tests (1) and research tests (1) were picked up by the press in order to highlight the official criteria of producing scientific data from Japanese clinical studies.

Given the main ideas developed in the headlines, it is interesting to look also at the main topics in the content of these news items (See Figure 3). Scientific research was the topic most reported on (18). There were reports about studies performed abroad, mainly in the United States.<sup>26</sup> The second most important topic was discussion of the merits and demerits of the contraceptive pill. There was significant coverage of the negative side effects (10) and other aspects related to the use of the pill, for instance, a possible decrease in the use of condoms and as a result, the spread of venereal diseases. On the contrary, effectiveness and other positive points (7) reached the readers because of the official reconsideration of the use of the hormonal drug as a contraceptive in the mid-eighties. Health matters were the

third most reported topic (14). Reports on negative features of the pill such as side effects and other health hazards reveal that the emphasis on the connection between the hormonal composition of the pill and its side effects continued throughout these years. Finally, the political debate about the pill was prominent, due to the official reconsideration of the low-dosage pill (10).

To sum up, by looking at the frequency of each of the categories it can be argued that in the Japanese press there are two kinds of arguments for and against the liberalization of the birth control pill. One is related to the most prominent group of topics, the “medical argument”. This medical and academic debate about the evaluation of the pill was extensively developed from the mid-seventies to the mid-eighties in the column “*Ampuru*”, as I will show below. As described earlier, topics related to drug scandals and unknown side effects were used by the press in order to attract the readers’ attention. The Japanese press only picked up stories related to serious and life-endangering side effects, excluding, for instance, the United States’ health movement which demanded official controls over clinical trials as well as marketing and distribution of contraceptives.<sup>27</sup> The second kind of argument for and against the oral contraceptive was the “political” one. This mainly developed from the mid-

eighties and is related to the pill’s possible official approval.

The change in the debate about the pill from a medical one to a political one can also be shown in the sections and columns where news of the pill was published (See Figure 4). Up to 1980, almost all the news pieces were concentrated in the health and medical-related columns (19). *Ampuru*, *Purisma* and *Capuseru* reported on the health hazards of the contraceptive pill. This section, as well as the ‘home’ section, is directed at female readers (6). ‘Hard news’ sections published in the first pages of the newspaper and directed at male readers were also reporting on the oral contraceptive (10). Beginning in the mid-eighties, they covered official announcements from the two most newsworthy interest groups, the government and the medical associations. This news was covered in sections dedicated to reporting political, international and economic news.

The news release sources were from international agencies (8) in the first years and published in the health-related columns such as *Ampuru* and *Minna no kenko*. From the mid-eighties, most of the data gathering was based on newspaper sources, mostly male doctors who were professors and chiefs of departments of gynecology and obstetrics in prestigious Japanese universities (8) (See Figure 5).

The series THE AGE OF THE PILL (2006年) 1991<sup>28</sup>

The topics developed in this series recount the official Japanese decision-making process, the clinical trials, contraceptive research, side effects and women's responses to the pill. This series emphasized a number of points: firstly, the image of the pill as something recently invented, still under research and associated with past side effects and unreliability. The anti-pill orientation of the news is evident in the reporting of the clinical trials. For example, when the clinical trials among Japanese women was reported, it was emphasized the fact that a quarter of the women quit the trials because of mild side effects.

Secondly, this series reinforced the argument that the pill does not fit a particular Japanese background. There is a comparison between Japan and the rest of the world, which is, although not clearly defined, the rich Western world. The west is shown as opening up more easily to new contraceptive technologies. The series shows an oversimplification of the complicated reality in different countries. Western women are portrayed as women who are actively involved in contraception and who are very conscious of their reproductive freedom and social participation in policy making. On the other hand, according to the series, Japan places a high value on the maternal role, a fixed reproductive pattern based on

condoms and the Ogino Method, and a low level of trust regarding the pill because of side effects and negative social impacts. The series presents a polarized attitude towards the pill – Japan vs. the rest of the world – suggesting a unique social and cultural situation in Japan. To sum up, it could be argued that the press explains the prohibition of the pill, stating that Japanese women did not follow the stereotype of the western women with respect to the pill.

The news sources for the this series are still predominantly male physicians, but instead of including statements about their expertise the newspaper uses them as sources for information on descriptions of contraceptive practices, couple's roles in birth control and women's desires. The information on western women is provided via some statistics but mainly via quotations from pro-pill Japanese physicians who appeared as representatives of the western view of the pill's prohibition. On the other hand, Japanese women's rejection of the pill derives from the daily newspaper Mainichi Shinbun's opinion poll on family planning. This quantitative source based on statistics serves to emphasize the objective stance in news production which still requires male physicians to talk about women to portray an accurate and credible picture of Japanese birth control culture.

Finally, from the above analysis of the series' content as

summarized in the main headlines it could be argued that the news is implying that the pill is something new to be integrated into society's mainstream in the nineties. This ignores the fact that the pill had been widely adopted worldwide thirty years before. The lead of this series suggests the existence of a need for information about the oral contraceptive. The series was published in the "Commentaries – Planning" column, close to political, international and economic news – a different approach from that used for the series in 1975. The highly political value placed on the pill by the Ministry regarding permission for its use brought male readers' attention to the topic.

In summary, the coverage still had a very narrow definition of legitimate sources which, as before, were predominantly males who represented the institutionalized and organized social power of the medical profession. However, one discursive transformation was based on the movement from considering the pill as a drug with side effects to the pill as possessing value, with social and cultural implications. Although the discussion moved to the cultural and social impact of this birth control method, women's concerns about their health and personal needs were not yet deemed newsworthy by the press, unless introduced by male speakers.

### III. The Feminization of the Pill, 1991 – 1998

In the nineties, women's and health-related groups approached the prohibition of the pill differently. The new argument was that current birth control policies deprived women of an effective, "female" contraceptive, e.g. the pill, seen as indispensable for their reproductive rights.<sup>29</sup> In contrast, the prevalent argument from the Ministry was that the pill was prohibited in order to prevent the spread of AIDS. In other words, public health considerations are above civilians' needs.<sup>30</sup> In the last years, press coverage changed from a paternalistic position to a defence of individual choice, involving the concept of individual risk and user responsibility, and against surveillance or suppression of choice by the state.<sup>31</sup> This stance put government policy inside Japan into question as internally the pill was prohibited while externally foreign assistance with family planning had taken place since 1969<sup>32</sup> and Japan had participated in international meetings where reproductive rights had been affirmed. In 1997, the Ministry's Central Pharmaceutical Affairs Council decided that oral contraceptives were safe and effective. At the end of 1997, a new barrier to its use appeared – the warning that the pill could be an endocrine-disrupting

chemical that caused reproductive disorders.

The number of articles about the pill published in the Asahi Shinbun during these last ten years increased greatly, from eight in 1991 to 14 in 1998, when the series analyzed at the end of this section was published.

The most frequently used word in the headlines was "*piru*" (22) (See Figure 2). Used as a noun in the headlines "*piru*" was the best way to emphasize the message. A radical difference from previous coverage was the frequent use of the word "woman" (12) and words related to the political stance of the pill, such as "*kaikin*" (12). Terms related to describe the user of this birth control method were almost entirely absent in the first decades of press coverage. Between 1991 and 1998 these terms appeared as frequently as words related to the pill's official approval. This political dimension is also related to the next most commonly used word, "AIDS" (8). In this case, the pill is associated with a disease which can be transmitted by sexual intercourse without the use of condoms, not with negative side effects of its use.

One radical change in the content of the news releases is the way in which the pill as a theme was connected to politics in a broader sense (24) (See Figure 3). Firstly, oral contraceptives appeared as a debatable theme in international meetings (8). Secondly, as in former years, the *kaikin* (7) of

the hormonal contraceptive was still a topic in the news. As a result of those international meetings, topics related to government policies (5) and population policies (4) were also covered. Another modification in the coverage was the appearance of topics on women's rights (11) and women's groups (10). In the nineties, women as social agents became obvious in the media discourse. While in previous decades the main interest groups were made up of scientists, in the nineties it became common to think that because women are directly affected by the current set of birth control choices they should be discussing the pill's impact on their lives. A new social trend towards seeing the pill as a tool for women's rights reached the public arena via debates on women's birth control choices. As it was the third most frequently reported topic, the nineties appear to have been the time to broach sex education or sex information (13). Reports about the pill described sexual and contraceptive practices in a perspective broad enough to include the daily life of Japanese people. Sexual education as a topic was also related to the use of condoms and the spread of AIDS.

The above features in the news sources can also be found through the examination of the columns and sections in which news releases about the pill appeared (See Figure 4). The contraceptive pill was introduced by the newspaper in

columns dedicated to controversial topics for Japanese society (8) between and 1991 and 1998.<sup>33</sup> News about the pill was published in the first pages (7), also demonstrating the highly political value of the debate about the liberalization of the pill. To the same degree, letters from readers in the sections called “Voice” and “Koe” constitute another change in newspaper coverage. Thirdly, health and medical-related columns (5) maintained a prominent place as in decades before.

An examination of the news sources in the last years will help to understand the above changes (See Figure 5). This simple account of news sources, by direct or indirect quotations and authors of articles, plus letters to editors, showed the change in newspaper coverage from the previous decades that were analyzed earlier. When sources by gender are considered it is found that women and men were quoted in nearly the same numbers. Although obstetrician-gynecologists and other specialists were consulted (16), the academic elite from famous universities was no longer consulted. Without a doubt, this was because the main topic of “side effects” was no longer a barrier to the pill’s approval and science was no longer the exclusive criterion for judging the pill. Instead, in the nineties criteria related to social factors such as sex education, women’s roles and teenage sexuality became prevalent. Representatives of pro-pill members of the

Japanese family planning organizations (8) and women’s groups (8) were quoted a considerable number of times. Finally, common people, with their letters to the editors, were also participating in the media discourse about the pill (7). Up until this decade no letters discussing the pill had been published.<sup>34</sup>

The series, WHO DOES MY BODY BELONG TO? (わたしの体は誰のものか) 1998<sup>35</sup>

In contrast to former news pieces, the topics in this series were scarcely related to side effects, suspicions about possible harm to the ecosystem or worry over the spread of venereal disease. The series put specialists’ roles into question, not only at the Health and Welfare Ministry but also in medical associations (for their role in developing guidelines for the prescription of the pill). This series points out the gender bias in policy-making procedures and undermined the specialists’ credibility.

While rejection of the male-dominated world of science was a major breakthrough, the main changes resulted from reporting on the world of the common people. A variety of news sources used by the press provided stimulating new angles to the discussion. People working in social institutions and ordinary women were cited discussing sexuality and



contraceptive practices. In the cases of counselling centres, schools and public lectures reports focused on the extremely complicated issue of sex education – not only for young people but also for adults. Thus, it can be affirmed that there was a cultural democratization in access to print media, resulting in a plural construction of discourse about the pill. Not subordinated to any kind of authority or judgement, the press portrayed ordinary people giving opinions as well as recounting experiences. Women of differing ages and lifestyles described their worries: for example, communication problems with their partners and a lack of sexual information. There were also stories of women taking high and medium dosage pills, taboo in the coverage of earlier decades. Teenagers were also shown to be suffering from a lack of proper sexual education. Single adult and married women also appeared trapped by a limited set of available contraceptives, as well as communication problems with partners. Both women and men were portrayed as victims of a sex culture which forbid discussion about contraception.

The series, WHO DOES MY BODY BELONG TO? is a debate about the way in which contraceptive practices permeate people's lives. In other words, the press was transformed into a forum for discussing the actual system of gender roles and sexuality, with the discussion of the pros and

cons of the pill as secondary. The news content is summarized in the headlines with greater informality and a colloquial, accessible style: I CANNOT SAY 'USE A CONTRACEPTIVE, A CONDOM (「避妊しろ」の口実をいふ) , THE CONDOM, HE ONLY USED IT THE FIRST TIME" (口実をいふばかりで避妊を一回だけした) and (HE) SAYS HE UNDERSTANDS BUT DOES NOT CHANGE AFTER THE ABORTION (「理解はしている」中絶後態度は変わらない) .

The lead of this series argued that Japanese women had insufficient knowledge about how to use contraceptives, as was also reported in the 1975 and 1991 series. Japanese women showed no sign of increasing their knowledge of sexual matters by the end of the nineties. The lead summarizes the political situation regarding official steps to authorize the pill, but highlights that the real issue at stake was the situation of Japanese women in relation to sexuality and reproductive issues. The politics of the pill was emphasized in the headlines for the first time: WHO DOES MY BODY BELONG TO? (私の体は誰のものか) , to which the sub-headline added a political context with THE KAIKIN OF THE PILL IS WAVERING (避妊の口実が揺らぐ) . The body in question is the body of a woman and she is questioning who has been making decisions for her on sexual and reproductive matters. The title, WHO DOES MY BODY BELONG TO? leads directly to

the general orientation of the whole series: a criticism of the policy on contraceptive pills which directly affects women's reproductive lives and birth control choices. This was the first appearance ever in the Japanese of a critique from this perspective, showing a complete change in news coverage of the pill.

Women's stories had been upgraded to the most noticeable level of news texts. The displays of visual elements with the above news features show changing discursive definitions of Japanese birth control culture and gender relations. This includes a revision of past stereotypes or images where, for instance, birth control was practised satisfactorily using current contraceptive choices and involved the male's active co-operation. In this sense, the media in the nineties appears to have been shaped by a wider society or by making 'ordinary' social and discursive strategies more prestigious than they were before. The inescapable conclusion which emerges is that the press was leading a transformation in its media production through a process of feminization and democratization of sources. This resulted in a revision of the state's policy prohibiting the pill and deconstructed old taboos and traditional values.

On the one hand, WHO DOES MY BODY BELONG TO? can be considered a phenomenon of cultural democratization,

showing the common world of women's needs and opinions of other social groups about this contraceptive. On the other hand, the effects of the prohibition of the pill on common people are reduced to an individual, experiential level. This excludes the fact that a woman's decisions on reproductive matters are actually dependent upon collective social experiences, including not only her own, but also her partner's, family's or community's needs. The critique of limited birth control choices fails to address the social relations and sexual divisions around which responsibility for contraception, pregnancy and children are assigned. As a result of the above media tendencies and the coverage of women's issues, oral contraceptives are equated to a tool or something valuable for pragmatic purposes. Therefore, the message promoting the liberalization of this contraceptive is based not on a feminist or a human rights platform but on the idea of consumer rights.

## Conclusions

This paper has explored birth control culture as portrayed in the reports on oral contraceptives published in the Asahi Shinbun. Two different discursive frames in two different time periods have been identified. The first, a medical discursive

frame, is found in the press from the mid-1950s to the 1990s. The second, a market discursive frame, is found in the 1990s.

The medical discursive frame permeates every angle of the reports. The Japanese press established the criteria on which coverage of the pill was developed. The medical discursive frame is also highlighted by what the press was reluctant to report. Neither the use of the pill by 3% of Japanese women who used contraceptives nor the popular use of the pill internationally was explained by the press.<sup>36</sup> Reporting on women's use of oral contraceptives was not possible because it would contradict the newspaper's own arguments and would reveal that there were other criteria by which to judge a birth control method.

What can be called a "market discursive frame" replaced the medical discursive frame in the 1990s. The press seems to have been transformed into a kind of advertising industry, pushing the large-scale production and dissemination of goods. The pill was reported on as a commodity. Old restrictions related to moral questions, political implications or cultural myths, such as women's sexual freedom, sex education or teenage sexuality, seem to have disappeared. Instead, all consumers' needs are equalized.

The market discursive frame affects gender and reproductive issues in that it causes a depoliticization of the

concept of reproductive rights and produces a capitalist conception of medicine. Because of the positive coverage of this birth control method, a debate over such basic conditions of reproductive rights as sex education and health services was avoided. The press has failed to debate the impact of this medical contraceptive on the present health system, thus expressing a certain maintenance of the status quo in the current division of power amongst the various interest groups. This is particularly important in the case of the pill because, as Helen Rees pointed out, the safe use of oral contraceptives is also dependent on quality health care<sup>37</sup>. This depoliticized coverage of the pill has resulted in an extremely conservative definition of gender. Women, regardless of civil status, age or economic circumstances, are supposedly satisfied with the new birth control method and are fulfilling their social role as the one making reproductive decisions.

Finally, it is important to highlight other implications of the press coverage of oral contraceptives, ones linked to how women's reproductive health and rights are socially shaped. Firstly, the distinction between lay knowledge and scientific knowledge, followed by the idea that medicine is knowledge and practice without gender bias, are features which were particularly reinforced by the press during the first decades. Secondly, the relationship to the definition of reproductive

health is important.<sup>38</sup> The medical discourse defined reproductive health, or female health, as measured in terms of physical symptoms in women's bodies. On the contrary, a woman's reproductive health requires that not only her physical condition, but also her psychological and social environmental factors be taken into account. The World Health Organization's definition of reproductive health, reiterated in the programmes of action of the International Conference of Population and Development in Cairo, 1994, makes explicit the multi-dimensionality of the concept:

Reproductive health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, in all matters relating to the reproductive system and its functions and processes. Reproductive health therefore implies that people are able to have a satisfying and safe sex life and that they have the capability to reproduce and the freedom to decide if, when and how often to do so.<sup>39</sup>

Therefore, a detailed study of press coverage of the birth control pill suggests that a new "view" of medical contraceptives might be replacing the traditional approach to reproductive issues.

- 1 The first IUD approved in Japan was available in the mid-thirties, invented by a Japanese doctor Ota Tenrei. In 1974 the Ministry of Health and Welfare permitted the usage of two kinds of IUD, the "*Ota rings*" and "*Yusei rings*". The second type approved in 2000 are the copper IUD Multi load-250.
- 2 These scandals (none related to the pill) included the thalidomide tragedy (deformed babies born to women who had taken thalomid during early pregnancy) and the Quinoid case which caused severe neurological disturbances.
- 3 The pill may be polluting the environment through the urine of its users, which may cause reproductive disorders, including a reported fall in the sperm count of men.
- 4 Ogino Miho, "Abortion and Women's Reproductive Rights: The State of Japanese Women, 1945-1991", in Joyce Gelb and Mariam Lief Palled, eds. *Women of Japan and Korea: Continuity and Change* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994). Ashino Yuriko, *Piru no koto wo shiritai, Sei to hinin wo kangaeru* (Tokyo: Iwanami Booklet. No. 484, 1999); Ashida Midori, *The Piiru, Jinseimarugoto tanoshimita ijosei ni okuru*, (Tokyo:Houken 1999); Kinjyou Kiyoko, *Seisyoku kakumei to jinkei* (Tokyo: Chuukou shinsho 1996); Onna no tame no kurinikku shuunbi kaihen, *Piru: watashitachi erabanai*, (Osaka: Onna no tame no kurinikku 1987).
- 5 Until its official liberalization, it is estimated that approximately 3% of female Japanese birth control users were taking oral contraceptives in high and medium dosages. Mainichi

- Shinbunsha, Zenkoku seron chousa, 1-22. 1950-1996, Hookoku-sho.
- 6 *Family Planning in Japanese Society, Traditional Birth Control to a Modern Urban Culture* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983).
  - 7 P. 291.
  - 8 "Abortion Before Birth Control: The Interest Group. Politics Behind Postwar Japanese Reproduction Policy" in *Journal of Japanese Studies*, 24:1, 1998.
  - 9 P. 91.
  - 10 Dijk Teun van, "Discourse, Power and Access" in Caldas-Coulthard, Rosa and Malcom Coulthard, *Text and Practices, Readings in Critical Discourse Analysis* (London: Routledge, 1996) p. 85.
  - 11 Bell Allan, *The Language of News Media* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991) p. 156.
  - 12 Dijk Teun van, *Racism and the Press* (London: Routledge, 1996) p. 85.
  - 13 These number of studied articles are from the Asahi Shinbun's CD-Rom. The election of this newspaper as a corpus of analysis was because this was the only newspaper that had all articles since 1945 in CD-Rom format.
  - 14 Mainichi Shinbunsha, Dai 11 kai zenkoku kazoku keikaku seron chousa, Hookokusho (Tokyo: Mainichi Shinbunsha, 1972)
  - 15 Mainichi Shinbunsha, *Byoudo, kyosei no sinseiki he* (Tokyo: Mainichi Shinbunsha, 1996); Mainichi Shinbun 「薬種」 1998, May 14.
  - 16 Akiyama Yoko, "Enoki Misako to *Chupiren*" 'ribu shishi noto yori', Joseigaku nenpou, vol. 12, 1991; Buckley Sandra, "A short History of the Feminist Movement", in: Joyce Gelb and Mariam Lief Palled, eds, *Women of Japan and Korea* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press 1994)
  - 17 This term is a direct importation and nativization of the English term "pill" which, according to The Scribner-Batnam English Dictionary, means in English: (1) pellet containing medicine, to be swallowed whole; ... (5) the pill, women's oral contraceptive. The katakana version was integrated into Japanese popular culture by the press, referring to the popular English meaning of hormonal contraceptive pill. I hypothesize that the "*piru*" term originated in the mass media in the early seventies. Considering the logic of mass media production and the fact that there is a term in Japanese (*Keikou hinin yaku*) for this method, it could be argued that the loan word 'piru' is shorter and therefore easier to use in the news production of headlines eager to transmit fast and clearly what the news about.
  - 18 Feb. 6, p.4.
  - 19 Gotoo Fumiyasu, "Shinbun", Oka Mitsuo, et. al, *Mediagaku no genzai* (Kyoto: Sekai shizou, 1997) p. 52.
  - 20 Tanaka Kasuko and Taiki Morihashi (eds.) *Genda-Kara Mita Shinbun no Ura, Omote*, Shinbun Joseigakumon, Tokyo: Gendaisyoten 1996.
  - 21 The series were published on January 29 and 30, and February 1, 3, 4 and 5.
  - 22 Among different strategies, direct quotation, personalization, functionalization and identification were used. As a result, these "experts" are treated like elite persons, playing a highly active

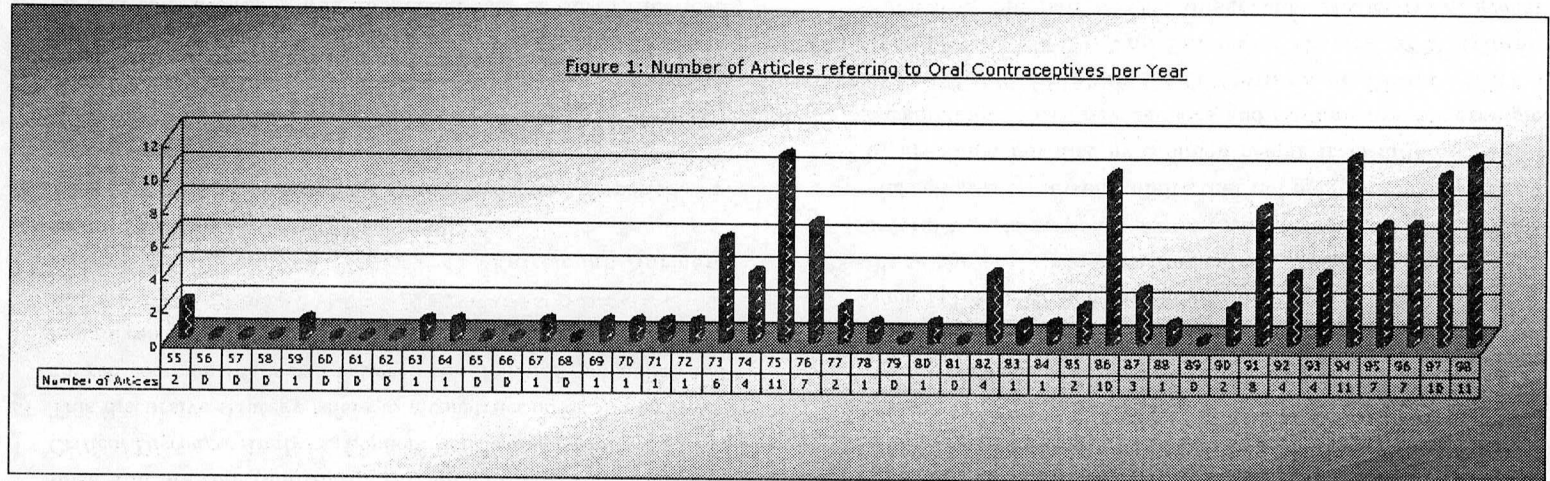
- role in relation to the debate of the pill, and indirectly, adding an important sense of consensus among experts (Leeuwen Theo van, "The representation of Social Actors", in Caldas-Coulthard, Rosa and Malcom Coulthard, *Text and Practices, Readings in Critical Discourse Analysis* (London: Routledge, 1996).
- 23 This discursive strategy refers to a construction of a supposedly shared common life world between the (female?) journalist and female readers, for example using the pronoun "we" (「われわれはみな女性として生きています」). Fairclough Norman, *Media Discourse* (London: Arnold, 1995).
- 24 These are some examples of the headlines during this period: 「母年長りの家庭で、この服は危険です」 1975/05/25; 「この服は危険」 1976/01/028; 「この服は危険」 1976/03/07.
- 25 Jan. 27, p. 16 and March 29, p. 23.
- 26 In this case, it is important to consider that Japanese research on oral contraceptives was far behind that of North American and Western European countries.
- 27 Watkins Elizabeth, *On The Pill, A Social History of Oral Contraceptives, 1950-1970* (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998)
- 28 The series were published on May 28, 29, 30 and 31.
- 29 Ashino Yuriko, *Piru nokoto wo shiritai, sei to hinin wo kangaeru* (Tokyo: Iwanami Booklet, No. 484, 1999); Ashino Yuriko, *Piru no koto wo shiritai, seito hinin wo kangaeru* (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1999) ; Ashida Midori, *The Piru: Jisei marugoto tanoshimitai josei ni okuru*, (Tokyo: Kouken: 1999).
- 30 The article 「ハヤク世で、この服は危険」 published in 1996, March 23, in the column "Discussion" (討論) represents the last example of that argumentation.
- 31 The debate between a chief of a center for information on infectious diseases published in 1998, September 21 「この服は危険」 and the Japanese birth control movement leader, Shizue Sato in October 7, 「この服は危険」 in the column "The sphere of critics" (批判) portrayed that discussion.
- 32 Kubo Hidefumi, *Nippon no kazoku keikaku shi, Meiji, Taisho, Showa* (Tokyo: Nippon kazoku keikaku kyokai, 1997)
- 33 Since the early nineties, Japanese newspapers underwent several transformations. One of them is the creation of sections and columns on current affairs that not only contained analysis by specialist but also by common people from different social backgrounds. These new sections and columns are, for example of the Asahi Shinbun One's Opinion or Claim (主張), A commentary (解説), The Sphere of Critics (批判). (Gotou Fumiyasu, "Shinbun" in: Oka Mitsuo, et.al. *Mediagaku no genzai* (Kyoto: Sekai shizou, 1997)
- 34 While there may have been many written and sent in, it is important to note that the present phenomenon of their sudden appearance reflects the newspaper's policy to reproduce readers' opinions.
- 35 These series were published on March 24, 25 and 26.
- 36 Especially interesting was the lack of reports on the North American situation at the end of the sixties, where women and health related groups demanded that the state and pharmaceutical companies provide safe contraceptives, package inserts and informed consent. Watkins Elizabeth, *On the Pill, A*

*Social History of Oral Contraceptives, 1950-1970* (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

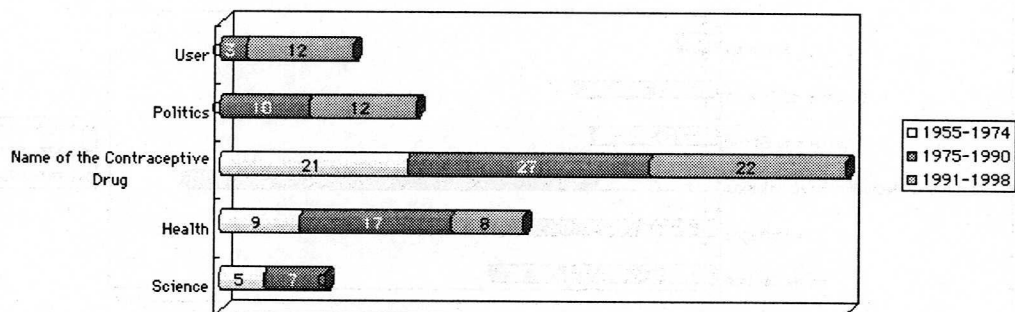
- 37 Rees Helen, "Acquiring the Pill: Safety Issues", in *Reproductive Health Matters*, No. 3, 1994.
- 38 Snow Rachel, "Each of Her Own: Investigating Women's Response to Contraception" in Sen Gita and Rachel Snow (eds.) *Power and Decision. The Social Control of Reproduction*

(Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1994).

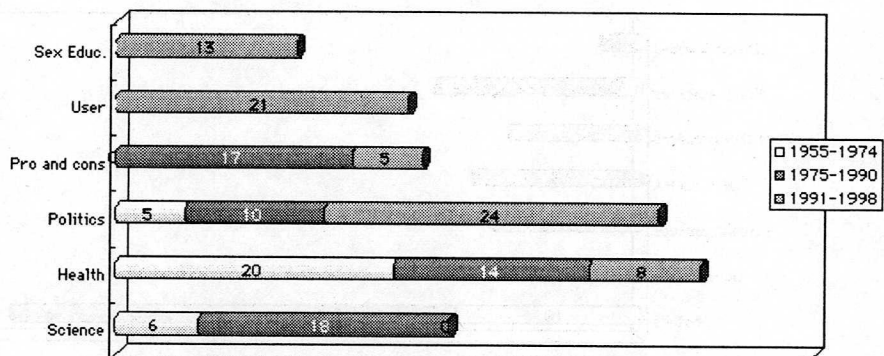
- 39 Extracted from Sonia Correa, "From Reproductive Health to Sexual Rights: Achievements and Future Challenges" in *Reproductive Health Matters*, No. 10, 1997, p. 111.



**Figure 2: Most Frequently Used Categories of Words in Headlines of News about the Pill**

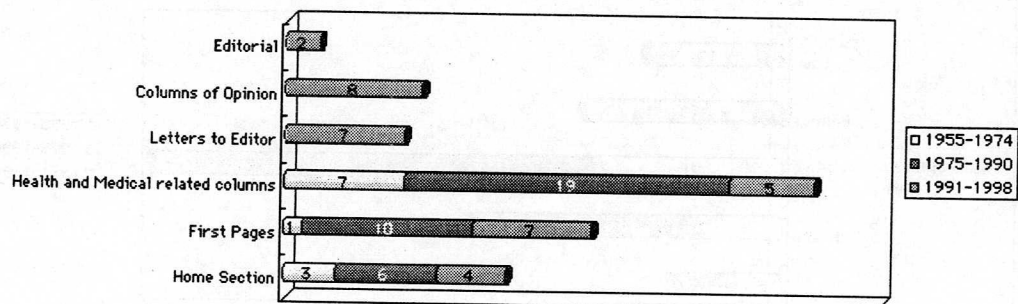


**Figure 3: Most Frequently Reported Topics in News about the Pill**

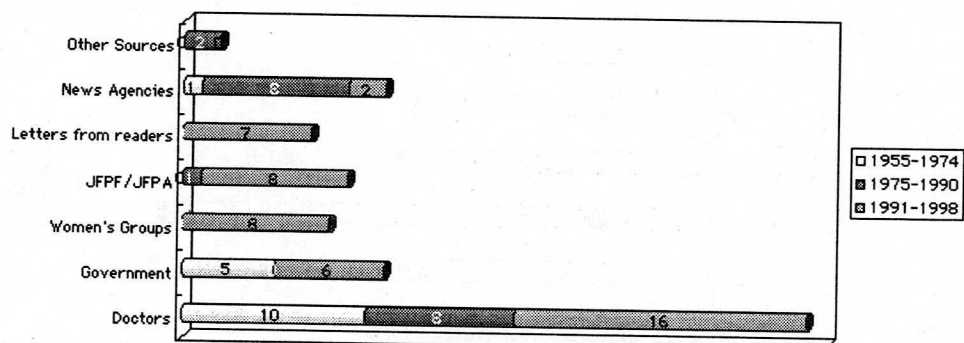




**Figure 4: Frequency of Columns and Sections with News about the Pill**



**Figure 5: Sources of News about the Pill**



# **Birth Control and Gender in Japanese Society: The Case of Press Coverage of the Pill**

Analia VITALE

New medical contraceptives recently appeared in the Japanese market. It could be said that these new contraceptives might affect women's and men's beliefs and roles related to reproductive issues. As well, the key players shaping public opinion and policies about contraception, such as medical associations, ministerial bureaucrats and women's groups might also experience a change. What, in the past, have been the main characteristics of the Japanese birth control culture? In order to answer this question, this paper proposes to examine the press coverage of the pill in one of the main daily newspapers, the Asahi Shinbun, from its first mention in 1955 up to its near approval in 1999.

The coverage in the press shows that a medical discursive frame permeates every angle of the reports about oral contraceptives, particularly up to the nineteen eighties. Male news sources, mainly elite physicians and bureaucrats, were overwhelmingly used by the press. The medical discursive frame is also highlighted by what the press was reluctant to report. Neither the use of the pill by 3% of Japanese women who used contraceptives, nor the popular use of the pill internationally, was explained by the press. Reporting on women's use of oral contraceptives was not possible because it would contradict the newspaper's own arguments and would reveal that there were other criteria by which to judge a birth control method. However, in the nineties the "market discursive frame" replaced the medical discursive frame.

The press seems to have been transformed into some kind of advertising industry, pushing the large-scale production and dissemination of goods. News sources are divided equally into males and females and common people's opinions are also reported. The pill was reported on as a commodity. Old restrictions related to moral questions, political implications or cultural myths, such as women's sexual freedom, sex education or teenage sexuality, seem to have disappeared. Instead, all consumers' needs are equalized. The market discursive frame affects gender and reproductive issues in that it causes a depoliticization of the concept of reproductive rights and produces a capitalist conception of medicine.

Because of the positive coverage of this birth control method, a debate over such basic conditions of reproductive rights as sex education and health services was avoided. The press has failed to debate the impact of this medical contraceptive on the present health system, thus expressing a certain maintenance of the status quo in the current division of power amongst the various interest groups. This depoliticized coverage of the pill has resulted in an extremely conservative definition of gender. In the first decades of press coverage women appear to consume news about the pill while their opinions and needs regarding birth control are ignored. In the nineties, women, regardless of civil status, age or economic circumstances, are supposedly satisfied with this oral contraceptive method and are fulfilling their social role as the one making reproductive decisions.

## **Key Words**

Japan - birth control - gender - newspaper - oral contraceptives