

The Full-time Wife Escapist

The Full-time Wife Escapist was a dramatic Japanese television show that was a big hit in 2016. (It is known as “Nigeru wa haji da ga yaku ni tatsu” in Japanese.) The English title expresses some of the show’s main themes. It has been said that dramatic shows reflect the societies in which they are made, and the title of this show may provide some insight into modern Japanese society. Mafumi Fujita is a professor at Hosei University whose research includes sociological analysis of TV dramas.

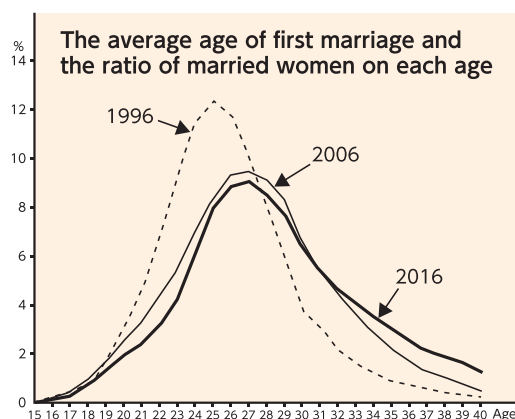
The television show was adapted from a comic book of the same name by Tsunami Umino. The theme song was composed by Gen Hoshino, and the dance performed to the theme was popular among viewers of all ages. The drama takes place in Yokohama and the main characters were played by Yui Aragaki and Gen Hoshino. Mikuri (Yui Aragaki) is an unemployed woman with a Master of Art degree, and Tsuzaki (Gen Hoshino) is a system engineer in his mid-thirties. The two agree to enter into a marriage “contract” in which Mikuri essentially works for Tsuzaki as his house-keeper, but in the end, the pair fall in love. The relationship causes Mikuri to question many aspects of the institution of marriage itself. In one episode, Tsuzaki pays Mikuri for her house-keeping services, suggesting that the salary he is paying is the equivalent to the value of the work she did.

If we compare this show to another drama on television 35 years ago, we find a very different image of the idea of marriage. The show “Dear Friday Wives” (or Kinyobi no tsumatachi e) was on the air for three years. The main characters were housewives living in a new residential area in the Tokyo suburbs. In the first episode, a wife is praised by her mother-in-law for doing a job in keeping the house clean and managing the family budget. Her “job” is not considered worthy of receiving money. She is simply the wife of a man in a well-established company, and her value is derived from that. However, again, “housework” is not really considered to be “work.”

Comparing the two dramas shows how people’s views of working women has changed over time in Japan.

The two dramas can be analyzed from other perspectives as well, including career development for women, lifestyle diversity, and public acceptance of LGBT issues.

The chart on the right shows the average age of the first marriage in Japan. When Dear Friday Wives was popular, the average age was under 25, as shown by the leftmost peak in the graph, marking the year 1996. That suggests that women at that time may have had fewer choices in terms of life planning. Looking at the two dramas in this way, we see how people’s opinions of marriage have changed.



Average age of first marriage and the percentage of women getting married at each age



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