

Transformed Bodies and Gender

Experiences of Women Pro Wrestlers in Japan

Keiko Aiba

Union Press

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For girls and adult women
who are not confident in their bodies

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Foreword

Amy S. Wharton

Femininity in the West and elsewhere has long been associated with docility, weakness, and physical vulnerability. Women's cultural identification as "the weaker sex" has been used to justify their exclusion from positions of power and prestige and legitimate male dominance. The female body occupies a central role in this conception, as it is invoked as biological proof of female weakness and vulnerability. Women are presumed to need male assistance, and the social control of their bodies is thus rationalized as an act of benevolence and protection.

Sociologists and feminist scholars have vigorously challenged these cultural assumptions and the practices to which they give rise. And these scholars have increasingly placed the body at the center of their critiques. They reject the biological essentialism on which notions of women's weakness and vulnerability rest, focusing instead on the gendered meanings associated with the female body. These meanings are produced and reproduced within particular social contexts and thus are not fixed or immutable. Gender does not stand apart from the body but is constructed through it. Understanding the embodiment of gender and femininity thus takes center stage in these accounts. Dr. Aiba's book contributes to and expands this influential discourse on gender and body by taking up the question of women's physicality.

It is noteworthy that Dr. Aiba draws on her own embodied femininity as inspiration for her interest in women's bodies and Japanese pro wrestlers in particular. Recognizing the power of dominant cultural assumptions about women's bodies in her own life experience, Dr. Aiba sets out to understand

women who appear to embody the antithesis of beliefs regarding women's physical weaknesses and vulnerabilities. With bodies that exude physical strength and livelihoods that involve theatrical displays of power and dominance over others, women pro wrestlers might seem to represent an uncomplicated example of a counter-stereotype. As Dr. Aiba's meticulous research reveals, however, there is much more to this story. Her detailed description of the history, organization, and performance of Japanese women's pro-wrestling yields a fascinating portrait of a type of embodied labor. Her sensitive and nuanced exploration of pro wrestlers' motivations, experiences, and emotions challenges us to rethink simplistic notions of strength and vulnerability, of physicality and dominance. With the female body both literally and symbolically occupying center stage in this project, Dr. Aiba confronts and complicates our understanding of the "weaker sex."

Preface

Since its beginning women's pro wrestling in Japan has always been under an independent organization of which the members have only been women, and the women pro wrestlers have always been the center of their exhibitions. Women pro wrestlers with a variety of bodies dressed in flashy costumes keep interchanging blistering pro wrestling techniques in the ring. On the assumption that it may be possible to find some elements that transform normative femininity of Japanese society as we observe the wrestlers, I decided to make visits to exhibitions of women's pro wrestling.

Considering the bodies of women pro wrestlers, I explore how other women who are not free from the concept of the ideal female body and/or who are without physical strength can succeed in escaping from the concept of the ideal female body and obtain physical strength. Previous research in Japan concerning the female body has mainly examined the female body as an object for evaluation, desire, or attack by others. Therefore, this book intends to provide a new viewpoint on the study of the female body.

In particular, issues relating to the ideal female body have developed into global issues, because multinational fashion and beauty businesses have globally diffused the criteria for beauty (white skin, a thin body, etc.) of the West. Thus, the information and perceptions in this book are highly suggestive for those who have faced similar issues outside of Japan.

I began considering gender in terms of its relationship with the body ever since reading a book by McCaughey entitled *Real Knockouts: The physical feminism of women's self-defense* (1997). According to McCaughey, the female body is made vulnerable and its power is weakened by gendered physical socialization, by sports as an institution and by discourses

supporting the physical vulnerability of women. However, their weakened bodies can regain power. McCaughey argues that one of the ways to do so is through self-defense. This assertion hit me very hard. It did so because I had always believed somehow that women would be no match for men as far as physical strength is concerned. Therefore, I had always thought that women are physically vulnerable by nature, and thus, we have to live taking constant precautions about being subjected to violence by men. McCaughey, however, makes the point that the female body is a reality created by society and, since it is created by society, it can be changed by society.

I had been researching gender and work in Japanese society until I read McCaughey's book, however, since then my area of research has changed dramatically and I have begun examining how the female body is constructed and its consequences. The reason why I was influenced so extremely by McCaughey's assertion was that I had been suffering from back pains since 1990. Especially during the first three years, I could not manage to sit for more than one hour continuously. I was in a graduate school in the US at that time. Most of the classes I was taking in the school lasted as long as 90 minutes, and there was a 10-minute interval between classes. I could not keep sitting for such a long time because of the pain. For each class, and with permission from each professor, I used to move quietly to the back of the room with my notebook after one hour of each lecture, and there I used to listen to the lecture and take notes while standing against the wall. Other American students were looking at me questioningly at the beginning, however, some of them also began standing up saying that they were too tired of sitting continuously. I appreciated the company of students.

It was clearly brought home to me that it is impossible to carry out mental activities, such as studying, without having a healthy body. I also realized that the fact I could not study as much as I wished, because of a physical cause, lowered my motivation to complete my doctoral thesis. Thus, I began taking a walk everyday in order to overcome the pain in my back. I started doing this because one of the professors at school recommended walking. He was also suffering from back pains. After I started walking, the pain gradually subdued. Once the pain subsided, I began sitting at my desk for longer and longer every day. I started thinking that I might be able to finish writing my thesis.

This experience with physical pain made me understand the importance of the body as well as the fact that the body and mind are closely connected. In other words, if I had not suffered from back pain at that time, I would

never have paid much attention to the importance of the body. I began thinking that if we consider the issue of releasing women from a gendered society, then we should consider not only their mentality but also their bodies. I have decided to conduct an investigation into the bodies of Japanese women pro wrestlers from the perspective of gender, in order to explore issues related to the above and to find a solution. You may have wondered why women's pro wrestling was chosen for this study. The answers to that question will be found in Chapter 1.

CHAPTER ONE

The Female Body and Gender

In modern society, women are expected to exhibit “beauty” through their bodies. A diversified “beauty” is not approved, but rather an ideal female body is specified. Both girls and women are expected to evaluate and shape their bodies based on the image of the ideal female body. There may be some girls and women whose bodies are close to that ideal image and who are proud of their bodies, but many women are unsatisfied with, or lack confidence in, their own bodies. I was no exception. I could not be proud of my height, which was considered tall, and I also cried over my button nose when I was in the period between puberty and my 20’s.

Some women may be willing to transform their bodies so that it matches the ideal female body of society at any cost, even if they are better off without any changes. I was also one of this type. I became near-sighted at around 14 years old and could not read what was written on the blackboard at school. My eyesight continued to get worse and I really needed to wear glasses or contact lenses by my university days. I belonged to a tennis team as university’s club activities. I had difficulties of seeing even when playing tennis. I could not see the tennis balls on the court very well, stood too close to balls that were flying towards me, and thus used to hit the balls in a strange manner. At around the same time there was a trend for women not to wear glasses and nobody whom I idealized was wearing them. Thus, I resisted the idea of wearing glasses constantly. I had an image of women with glasses as bookworms and also believed that women with glasses were not *kawaii* (see Chapter 6 for definition of *kawaii*), and thus I could not live with such images. Many people in the club were playing tennis using contact lenses, but I was not happy about putting a foreign substance in my

eyes. I continued playing tennis without wearing either glasses or contact lenses, and I believe this was one of the reasons why I did not play tennis well. After years of twists and turns, it was only when I became 30 that I accepted and perceived my face with glasses as my own face, without feeling dissatisfied.

In this way, girls and women are encouraged strongly to shape their bodies into the ideal female body, though they are not encouraged to participate in playing sports (Itani, 2004a). This consequently suggests that women are not encouraged to develop their physical strength and athletic ability (Castelnuovo & Guthrie, 1998; Dowling, 2000). These points are interpreted in this book as gendered physical socialization of girls and women. What is gendered physical socialization? The meaning will become clear when we examine what is expected for the male body. Although the pressure on men to have an ideal male body is getting stronger in society (Ishida, 2009), it is still much weaker than what girls and women have been receiving socially. In contrast to women, boys and men have been encouraged strongly to develop their physical strength and athletic ability by playing sports (Raita, 2004a; Connell, 1987). Such a gender gap between men and women indicates that physical socialization—which is the process of people shaping their body into an ideal body held by a specific society—is connected by a certain gender-type.

Some may oppose my assertion that girls and women are not encouraged to develop their physical strength and athletic ability. They may argue that Japanese women are in fact doing well in wrestling, soccer, and other sports in Olympic and international competitions. Certainly, the players in the women's soccer team called Nadeshiko Japan won the championship at the 2011 women's soccer World Cup. Their achievement received a lot of media attention in Japan. However, no positive comment on the coverage was made about that those women soccer players develop their physical strength or gain a body type that is different from the ideal female body. Nahomi Kawasumi, one of the players of the Nadeshiko Japan, appeared on a cover of a Japanese fashion magazine for women called "*an•an*" (2011.11.16). She was the first female athlete to appear on the cover of the magazine. As the images of the ideal female body are generally diffused among women through such magazines, does this mean that her body image is perceived as a new ideal female body? Not at all. The magazine ran five photos of her; she was in her private clothes in four photos and in her uniform in one. The magazine also had an interview with her. In the interview, she talked about

how she was trying to cut down her living expenses. Her attitude to her life was admired as “a clean- and fun-loving skill at cutting things down in the Nadeshiko style that derives from a high sense of consciousness” (p.23). However, no comment was made about her body and the physical strength that she had developed by playing soccer ⁽¹⁾.

How were such issues as the gendered physical socialization of girls and women dealt with in the period of second-wave feminism of Japan? Nishikura claims that the issues of women having beautiful or ugly looks have not been “topicalized continuously and comprehensively” (2003, p.40) within the feminism, compared to the issues of reproduction and prostitution. In the same way, issues about the gendered physical socialization of girls and women have not been discussed continuously and comprehensively. The criticism of beauty contests (Nishikura (2003) made summary of the criticism) gained attention between the end of 1980 and the beginning of 1990 in relation to issues of the ideal female body and the gendered physical socialization of girls and women. Criticism of beauty contests developed further as a criticism of the ideal female body only when eating disorders (Asano, 1996; Kato, 2004), cosmetic surgery (Kawazoe, 2003), and other problems drew a lot of attention as types of strategies women chose to achieve their ideal body images.

The fact that girls and women are not encouraged to develop their physical strength and athletic ability was perceived as a gender-related problem only after Japan Study Group for Sport and Gender Studies was established in 2002, (of which “Study Group” was changed to “Society” later) and a book called *Invitation to the Study of Sport and Gender* was published in 2004. This delay is also symbolized by the fact that during the annual symposiums of “The Women’s Studies Association of Japan” ⁽²⁾, discussion has never been carried out on the issue of the lack of encouragement provided to girls and women for them to develop their physical strength and athletic ability. The symposiums have been held since 1980. In the period between 1980 and 2012, 47 symposiums were held, and during this period “reproduction” was chosen twice as a theme related to the female body. This indicates that women’s reproduction has had more attention than the physical socialization of women when we consider issues concerning the relation between a woman and her body. In other words, the issues of the gendered physical socialization of girls and women were ignored and considered less important during the second-wave feminism of Japan, even though such problems certainly existed all the time.

One of the reasons why this issue has always been ignored is that, as Asano described, women's bodies are, for women themselves, "an endlessly alienated body and an object for evaluation, desire, or attack conducted by others" (1996, p.219), and many women do not consider their bodies as a source of physical strength. It is believed that feminists also perceived women's bodies in the same way, and thus, they find it difficult to take up this problem. I also shared this perception. Before encountering McCaughey's book (1997), I had always thought that women are physically vulnerable by nature, and thus, we have to live taking constant precautions about being subjected to violence by males.

Why are the bodies of women pro wrestlers chosen for this study?

The body image of women pro wrestlers was chosen for this book for the purpose of examining the issue of the gendered physical socialization of girls and women, something that has not been considered important so far. This choice was made because the wrestlers transform their bodies, which constitute a different type of body from the image that people in Japanese society think ideal. Women pro wrestlers tend to have big muscles and a lot of fat to make them bigger (see Chapter 4 for more details). Another reason for choosing women pro wrestlers for this study is that women pro wrestlers achieve, in the process of becoming wrestlers, physical strength that includes combat skill—physical skills to counter violence against one's body (see Chapter 5 for more details). Such a body image for women pro wrestlers is different from the body image that is expected for women generally in Japanese society. This book examines how women wrestlers perceive the transformation of their bodies and what kind of benefits they have obtained by mastering combat skill. Moreover, the book examines what kinds of other benefits or challenges they receive by involving themselves with pro wrestling. These investigations hope to show how women, who are not free from the image of the ideal female body and who do not have physical strength, can be free from such an image and obtain such strength. Now, this chapter turns to examine how such body images of women pro wrestlers are understood within the study of body and gender in Anglophone countries, where studies like this have already been conducted for many years.

Female bodybuilders

The reason why the body image of female bodybuilders has received so much attention is because the image of their bodies has been perceived as a threat to both the definition of beauty, which is a vital portion of normative femininity, and the physical differences between men and women (Schulze, 1997; St. Martin & Gavey 1996). Bodybuilding originally meant to reshape the body through weight training (Weider & Weider, 1981). Bolin (1992b) explains that the ideal body for bodybuilders matches the body image that has been thought of as the image of the ideal male body in certain cultures. In other words, this type of body consists of a hard masculine look, a body with a wide back and slender waist (Bolin, 1992b). The upper half and the lower half of the body are expanded and a slender waist joins these two parts of the body. Muscle is developed in order to realize such a shape through bodybuilding. Besides training to develop their muscles, bodybuilders also conduct special dieting to realize their ideal body. When bodybuilders are preparing for bodybuilding contests, they need to reduce body fat while maintaining a certain level of density and size in their muscles. For this purpose, they usually take in a lot of protein to develop muscle, and they control carbohydrate ingestion severely in order to lower the body fat percentage in their system (Lowe, 1998).

Some studies indicate that it is full of conflict for women to do bodybuilding (Bolin, 1992a; Lowe, 1997). Bolin (1992a) points out, for example, that well-muscled women have not been considered beautiful because muscularity is not included among the notion of beauty, which is a vital portion of normative femininity. Meanwhile, muscles are usually considered the preserve of men rather than of women, and muscles suggest strength and power (Freedman, 1986). As female bodybuilders have training to develop their muscles, their bodies suggest strength and power and they are challenging the preserve of men. However, strength and power acquired by these women are undermined by the culture that tells them that a muscular body is not normatively considered as beautiful (Bolin, 1992a).

Do female bodybuilders succeed in transforming the normative female body image and the physical differences between men and women? Bolin (2003) pointed out the gap between the public domain and the private domain. Bolin (1992b) examined the process of dieting and the interactions between male and female bodybuilders, based on her own experiences as a bodybuilder. In this study, Bolin (1992b) found the transformation of the boundary between men's and women's bodies at gyms (that is, in the private

back-stage area). Before participating in bodybuilding contests, both male and female bodybuilders conduct the same dieting in order to “appear more dense and muscular” (Bolin, 1992b, p.395). Through this process, both men and women “lose fat, becoming striated and vascular” (Bolin, 1992b, p.393), and as a result, both men and female bodybuilders have the similar body with more muscle and almost no fat. Thus, female bodybuilders “subverted the dominant conception of muscle as a qualitative gender distinction to one of a quantitative distinction” (Bolin, 1992b, p.395) and as a result blurred the physical boundary between men and women.

This change in gender is, however, limited to inside the gym. According to Lowe (1997), the system of bodybuilding is controlled by male board members and judges, and they decide how female bodybuilders should be seen. The 1991 Ms. Olympia Contest was broadcasted on TV and the appearance of the muscular female bodybuilders was not well received by viewers. The incident led the board members of bodybuilding organizations to discourage female bodybuilders to develop their muscles and to encourage them to express their femininity through judging guidelines. As a result, “female bodybuilders...exudes physical strength and emphasizes impressive musculature,” however, “their strength and power are tempered significantly” (Lowe, 1997, p.159) by the bodybuilding organizations. This shows that female bodybuilders have transformed the normative female body and physical differences between men and women, but these transformations have not yet reached the public domain.

Self-defenders

Women self-defenders—women with combating skills—have gained much attention in studies in Anglophone countries. In this book, “self-defenders” means women who have obtained methods to defend themselves through skills gained from self-defense training. The term “self-defense training” appearing in this book is the same as the training called “feminist self-defense” by Matsuo (2010), which consists of four characteristics. One of the characteristics of self-defense training is that the training is focused on sexual violence. The participants in the training are basically limited to women, and the skills obtained in the training are different from any other defensive tactics that are already known in the martial arts. The differences from existing defensive tactics are: (a) existing defensive tactics do not focus on sexual violence; (b) existing defensive tactics require a certain period of time to obtain, and; (c) existing defensive tactics do not consider the psy-

chology, size of body or physical abilities of women well (Matsuo, 2010).

The second characteristic of self-defense training is that it deals with the issue of the relation between the traditional gender roles and violence. The third characteristic is that the self-defense training started from the idea of women resisting violence by using their potential capacity, not by developing their muscle or physical ability. The fourth characteristic of self-defense training includes the reduction, avoidance and prevention of violence, assuming various forms of violence and relationships with whom women are likely to become involved.

In the Japanese language, “self-protection” (*goshin*) is often used as a similar term to “self-defense,” but the term “self-defense” is used in this book. This is because the term “self-defense” has different characteristics from “self-protection” as mentioned above. The self-defense training places an importance on providing women with psychological training, so that they can obtain “fighting spirit” (McCaughey, 1997, p.89) before acquiring the physical skills to defend oneself. This “fighting spirit” means that women can and should resist violence.

McCaughey (1997) emphasizes the importance of self-defense in resisting violence by men. Women self-defenders come to reject the image of themselves as the sexual objects of men, once they abandon certain feminine behaviors and gestures that seal themselves in (McCaughey, 1997). McCaughey also argues that “to become a self-defender is to become a gender transgression” (1997, p.128). This is because self-defense training teaches women to stop behaving in a feminine way and to be tough with the people who attack them. The “femininity” suggested by McCaughey (1997) here can be interpreted as having consideration for the feelings of others and the passivity generated by such a consideration, and this point had already been suggested by Cline and Spender (1988).

The study by McCaughey (1997), however, indicates that some women find that normative femininity and learning self-defense conflict with each other. For example, a woman found that a man who discovered she was learning self-defense tried to have a fight with her as a kind of a joke. She felt then that she deviated from normative femininity. She wants to be feminine but had difficulties in how to combine femininity and self-defense (McCaughey, 1997). Another woman in McCaughey’s study who is learning boxing as one way of mastering self-defense is afraid of being misunderstood for a lesbian (McCaughey, 1997). This is because some people infer that learning self-defense is masculine, therefore women who are learning

self-defense must be masculine and thus, they must be lesbians. According to a study by De Welde (2003), women who participated in self-defense training integrated defending themselves and being a woman into the redefined femininity. Therefore, these women did not see self-defense and femininity as something in conflict. Thus, the argument by McCaughey that “to become a self-defender is to become a gender transgression” (1997, p.128) is theoretically correct, but this argument does not necessarily fit with all women who participate in self-defense training without any psychological conflicts. Since women self-defenders transcend normative femininity to a limited extent, more study in detail is required.

Women who have transformed their bodies and attained fighting skills

According to earlier studies, female bodybuilders develop their muscles, which transform their bodies and strengthen them. On one hand, the bodybuilders do not use the strength of their muscles to defend themselves against violence targeted at them. On the other hand, the self-defenders in the study carried out by McCaughey (1997) attained their skills to resist the violence targeted at them, but they did not transform their bodies. As a similarity, both female bodybuilders and women self-defenders transform the normative idea constructed by gender of how the bodies of men and women should be and how femininity should be.

Women pro wrestlers transform their bodies into a body that is different from the ideal female body, like female bodybuilders, and women pro wrestlers also attain their combat skill, like self-defenders. Women pro wrestlers, who thus have the characteristics of both female bodybuilders and women self-defenders, may be able to change the normative body images of men and women constructed by gender. Based on this idea, I decided to examine the bodies of women pro wrestlers from many points of view (details are in Chapter 6).

Outline of this book

This book consists of eight chapters. In the first half of Chapter 2, women’s pro wrestling, and the stages and performances of women’s pro wrestling in Japan, are explained for people who have never watched it. The chapter introduces the definition of pro wrestling and the basic styles

of Japanese women's pro wrestling. As examples of Japan's women's pro wrestling, the chapter introduces the main matches conducted during the Korakuen Hall match of NEO women's pro wrestling on September 18, 2005. Through some interviews with women pro wrestlers, I show the characteristics of women's pro wrestling that are difficult to understand from observing only matches. The latter half of Chapter 2 explains how Japan's women's pro wrestling was established and how it developed historically. It also examines the doldrums of women's pro wrestling in Japan today.

Chapter 3 examines some key factors behind teenage girls wanting to become pro wrestlers, since its characteristics and behaviors are things that usually men are encouraged to have. The chapter also introduces the kinds of effort the girls make in order to realize their dreams to be a pro wrestler and the difficulties they face in the process of making their dreams come true. After the girls decide to become pro wrestlers, they need to do well in a tryout, which is a kind of screening process conducted by pro wrestling organizations. The chapter focuses on the process of how these girls pass the tryout.

Chapter 4 analyzes the transformation of the bodies of women pro wrestlers in relation to two aspects. First, the chapter examines what kind of changes the women pro wrestlers think are happening to their bodies and how they perceive these changes. Second, the chapter examines whether women's recognition of the "ideal female body" is changed by attaining a body developed for pro wrestling. The bodies of many pro wrestlers deviate from the "thin" body that is considered the ideal female body among girls and women in their teens and twenties in Japan today. How do the women pro wrestlers perceive their own bodies, since their bodies deviate from the "ideal female body"? If women pro wrestlers are evaluating their bodies positively after all, it may be possible for women in their teens and twenties to free themselves from the "thin" body as the ideal female body that has the dominant value.

Chapter 5 examines whether women pro wrestlers can make a change to the "physical vulnerability" that is an attribute of normative femininity. As part of the study, analysis is conducted to find out if the wrestlers are applying their "combat skill—physical skills to counter physical violence" to violence encountered in their everyday lives. "Physical vulnerability" means here the sense that women feel during the process of the socialization of women. That is, the sense that their physical strength is weak and that they are weaker than men physically. I assume that many women, in gen-

eral, obtain physical vulnerability in the process of socialization. As a result many women feel powerless against men's violence because they lack the psychological and physical strength necessary to counter violence committed by men. The study of how women pro wrestlers with combat skill deal with violence committed against them may show how women in general can learn ways to resist violence by men.

Chapter 6 examines the relationship between the performances in women's pro wrestling and the normative bodies constructed by gender. Women's pro wrestling consists of two aspects: an aspect of fighting and an aspect of performance. Pro wrestling is a type of stage performance that is centered on expression derived from sporting games and acrobatics, while using expressions derived from dancing and theatrical plays. It contains values of entertainment and commerciality. The term "performance" used here includes not only the direct and visual expression of bodies, without using musical instruments or similar devices (Moriya, 1992), but also includes the methods of showing one's body and body movements.

Women pro wrestlers are, in fact, struggling at how to establish their own distinct persona and how to impress their viewers. As part of establishing distinct personas, they try to develop their own characters and wrestling styles. The chapter examines how the diversified performances of women pro wrestlers are transforming the normative female and male bodies in sports, the "gender order" argued by Ehara (2001), and the sex/gender system.

Chapter 7 examines the kinds of benefits and challenges women pro wrestlers experience in their daily lives. No study has been conducted in Japan about what benefits women athletes receive by playing sports and how playing sports affects their daily lives. I examine this issue by studying women pro wrestlers since they participate in physical activities even though wrestling is not considered a competitive sport. Women are less encouraged to participate in physical activities than men in general, and because of this tendency it is possible that women, who are not involved in physical activities, do not receive any of the benefits that could be gained if they were to be involved in such activities.

Chapter 8 overviews how the bodies of women pro wrestlers and their performances challenge norms constructed by gender and how they reproduce them. Women pro wrestlers have become empowered by being involved in a physical activity called pro wrestling. How can women who do not participate in physical activities now empower themselves by becoming

involved in physical activity? Conceptualizing this as “physical feminism,” this chapter also suggests possible directions for the future.

Methods of study

The methods used in this book include interviews with women pro wrestlers and observations of women’s pro wrestling. Pro wrestling is observed because understanding the movements and performances of women pro wrestlers in actual matches can help with understanding the contents of the interviews with the wrestlers. The observations were conducted mainly between 2002 and 2005. Observations were also continued once or twice a year even after that period until the manuscript for this book was completed. The details of the observations were recorded and reported as “field notes.” It should be noted that some records in the notes are marked without dates. This is done so intentionally in order to avoid revealing the identity of wrestlers.

In the period between the spring of 2001 and the autumn of 2005, 25 women pro wrestlers, including three retired wrestlers, underwent in-depth semi-structured interviews. “Semi-structured” interview means a kind of interview where, though the content of questions is decided in advance, the order of those questions may be changed in accordance with the development of the stories told by the interviewees. The number of interviewees increased through the method called snowball sampling, or chain sampling. This is a sampling method using human networks (Sakurai, 2002). This method is used because it was very difficult to have interviews with women pro wrestlers by using any other means, such as asking people in the public relations sections of organizations of women’s pro wrestling to help with the research.

Interviewees were collected until the number reached a satisfactory level for the theoretical categories, while conducting inductive analysis (Glazer & Strauss, 1967; Miles & Huberman, 1994). This study is applied by a “grounded-theory approach” (Glazer & Strauss, 1967), which is a method for creating theories based on qualitative data. Inductive analysis aims to clarify the themes in what women pro wrestlers talk about and to apply theoretical categories to the contents of the talks. Then, based on each category, narratives of women pro wrestlers were re-sorted and the contents analyzed.

Each interview lasted from two to three hours. Before, after and during each interview, behaviors, attitudes and other findings concerning each inter-

viewee were recorded as an “interview journal.” The purpose of this is, like the field notes, to help interpret the contents of talks by women pro wrestlers multi-directionally. Especially in Chapter 6, analysis and interpretations are made by combining the data collected in the interview journal, field notes, and document data yielded from interviews.

The contents of interviews included questions about the kinds of physical activities each interviewee participated in during their lives, changes in their bodies, and their experiences of pro wrestling. Questions are listed in the data at the end of this book. The contents of the questions also reflect the contents of autobiographies published by some women pro wrestlers, including retired wrestlers such as Kandori (1997) and Nagayo (1989). I constructed some questions by referring to questions toward female body-builders by Lowe (1998). The contents of each interview were recorded and audio-typed by professional audio-typists, and I checked each document datum made by the audio-typists to see if it matched each recording. All processes in collecting data were conducted by me, except for the audio-typing.

The characteristics of women pro wrestlers who provided help with interviews are described at the end of this chapter (Table 1). The length of their careers as active pro wrestlers varies among the interviewees: more than 10 years for 6 people, 6-9 years for 10 people, and 1-5 years for 6 people. Among the interviewees, 17 people were in their 20's and 5 people were in their 30's. Information gathered in the interviews that could provide a clue to identifying the name of an interviewee was either omitted or altered so long as it had no influence on the analysis. Women pro wrestlers in Table 1 and the wrestlers whom the interviewees commented on are listed under pseudonyms and only first names are used. Their ring-names are also under pseudonyms⁽³⁾. Some real-life wrestlers who are listed with their full names or with only last names are shown by their ring-names. Kazuko in Chapter 3, 4, and 6, Akira in Chapter 6, and X organization and the name Mr. Otoyama in Chapter 7 are pseudonyms. In this book, “women wrestler” and “wrestler” mean “women pro wrestler” unless a special explanation otherwise is given.

The next chapter will describe the commercial performance called women's pro wrestling in Japan.

Notes

⁽¹⁾ The magazine, *Nanbā dū* (*Number Do: Winter 2012*), is an exception.

Table 1 The characteristics of women pro wrestlers who were interviewed (as of January 1, 2004)

Pseudonym	History as a wrestler (in years)	Current situation	Membership of organization	Age
Sawako Kitayama	10 and more	Active	Free	Early 30's
Yoshie Yamamoto			Member	Early 30's
Rei Nishimura				Late 20's
Sachi Mihara				Early 30's
Midori Kurata				Late 20's
Nana Fujitani				Late 20's
Maki Kuwana	6-9		Free	Late 20's
Aoi Azuma			Member	Late 20's
Yumiko Sakamoto				Early 30's
Kiriko Yukishita				Early 20's
Yuka Tsurusaki				Late 20's
Akiko Ichikawa				Early 30's
Tomiko Kamikawa				Early 20's
Mika Matsubara				Early 20's
Ryoko Natori			Free	Early 20's
Sayaka Tobiishi			Member	Late 20's
Mami Kousaka				Early 20's
Rie Hayama				Late 20's
Maho Odagiri				Early 20's
Masumi Sakurai				Early 20's
Sanae Izumi	1-5	Free	Early 20's	
Aki Satonaka		Member	Late 20's	
Yuko Minami	6-9	Retired	/	Late 30's
Junko Kanazawa	1-5		/	Late 30's
Aya Kuroda			/	Late 30's

Note: * The period during which wrestlers are not active (retired) is exempted from the period counted in the career of a pro wrestler. A wrestler's career is counted as from January 1 of the year the wrestler made a debut to January 1 in 2004. The age of each wrestler is shown as of January 1, 2004.

This magazine featured how Nahomi Kawasumi is training her body (Ikushima, 2012). However, the readers of this magazine are usually people who are participating in physical activities, and in this sense, the range of the readers is more limited than the magazine “*an·an*.”

- (2) An academic association that was established in 1979. Feminists and researchers of gender are involved in this association. Studies are conducted mainly on gender in Japan.
- (3) The wrestler’s name as a wrestler, i.e., not the wrestler’s real name.

CHAPTER TWO

The Characteristics and Trajectory of Women's Pro Wrestling Business

The first half of this chapter describes how women's pro wrestling is exhibited. It will first of all introduce the definition of women's pro wrestling and also basic styles of women's pro wrestling in Japan today. Then, examples of actual women's pro wrestling matches will be introduced using the final match held at Korakuen Hall by a women's pro wrestling organization, NEO, on September 18, 2005. The characteristics of pro wrestling matches will also be described by referring to interviews with women pro wrestlers. The history of how women's pro wrestling started and developed in Japan will be described in the latter half of this chapter, and it will also explain why women's pro wrestling in Japan today is in the doldrums. At the end of this chapter, the characteristics of women's pro wrestling in Japan will be discussed by making comparisons between Japanese and Mexican women pro wrestlers.

Women's pro wrestling business

Definition of pro wrestling

It is difficult to define pro wrestling. Muramatsu (2003) points out that pro wrestling is the “*onikko* of the genre.” *Onikko* is a Japanese term used for describing a child who does not resemble his/her parents. Pro wrestling is a mix of the elements of competitive sports and theatrical aspects, and thus, it is difficult to decide to which genre pro wrestling belongs specifically. Kamei (2000) tackles this difficulty and defines pro wrestling as belonging to the sphere of entertainment. Kamei states that pro wrestling

is “a type of stage performance that is centered on a style using gestures and postures with configuration of dancing and theatrical play and at the same time, it contains values of entertainment and commerciality” (2000, p.13). This definition was made by referring to a study on entertainment by Moriya (1992).

Moriya (1992) categorizes styles of entertainment from the aspects of how physical bodies are expressed. Moriya introduces four styles of entertainment: visual expression, auditory expression, basic (direct) expression and expansive (indirect) expression (see Figure 1). Visual expression includes dancing, pantomime and other expressions that use physical functions in order to appeal to the eyes of viewers. Auditory expression includes singing, talking, telling and other expressions that use physical functions. Basic (direct) expressions are expressions where performers use their own bodies directly, while expansive (indirect) expression means expressions using tools, such as musical instruments. Moriya (1992) divides the four styles into two axes of: “visual expression—auditory expression” and “basic (direct) expression—expansive (indirect) expression.” Moriya also points out that although the four styles can be exhibited individually, they may be mixed with others and can form a complicated genre.

The styles of pro wrestling belong to both visual and basic expressions. In other words, pro wrestling belongs to “a style using gestures and postures” (see Figure 1). In a style using gestures and postures, performers use

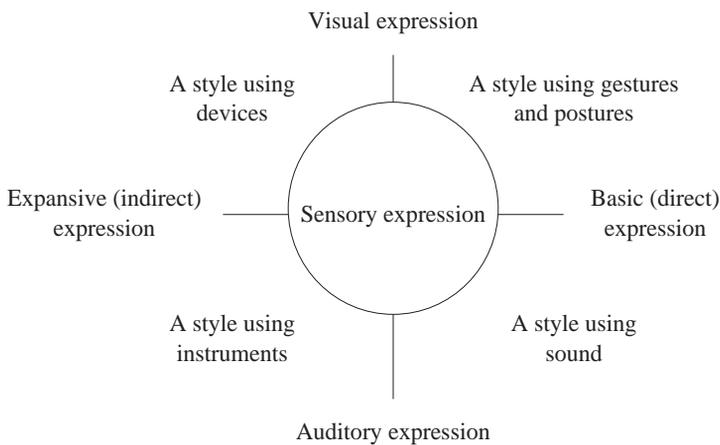


Figure 1 Styles of entertainment
Source: Moriya (1992)

their bodies but do not use musical instruments or other types of devices (Moriya, 1992).

Moriya (1992) also categorizes entertainment according to the aspects of expression configuration. Moriya introduces four expression configurations that are categorized by two axes: “a style using gestures and postures—a style using instruments” and “a style using sound—a style using devices” (see Figure 2). In other words, there are four configurations: dancing and theatrical play, music, sporting games and acrobatics, and spectacle. Among these, sporting games include *sumo*, in which wrestlers ram directly into each other, and acrobatics include flip-flops and conjuring tricks. Handiworks, machines and certain puppet plays are used in the configuration of spectacle.

Kamei argues that pro wrestling has the configurations of dancing and theatrical play in the categories set out by Moriya (1992). This point is also included in the definition made by Takahashi who was a referee for New Japan Pro-wrestling (Shin nihon puroresu), an organization of men’s pro wrestling. Takahashi defines pro wrestling as “a wrestling theatrical performance in which wrestlers show their best performances by using their well-trained bodies and well-honed moves” (Takahashi, 2001, p.219).

I agree with both Takahashi and Kamei that pro wrestling has theatrical elements. This is because the performances that are exhibited by many pro

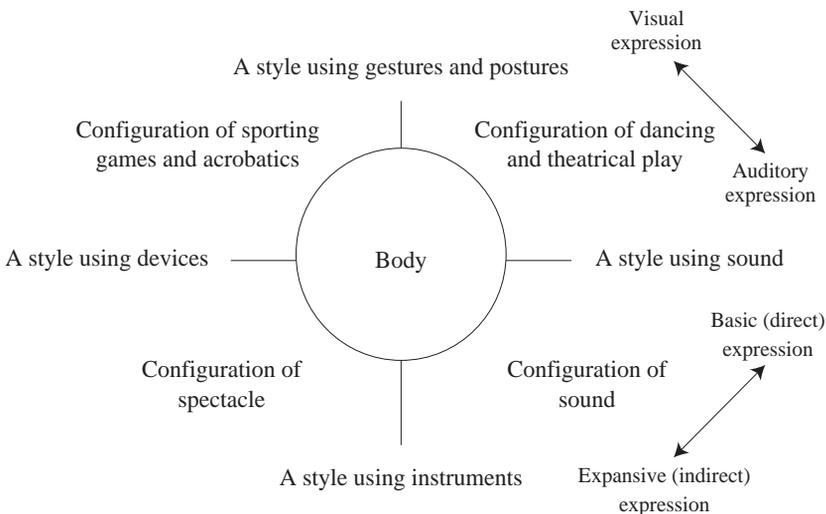


Figure 2 Configuration of entertainment
Source: Moriya (1992)

wrestling organizations have stories that connect some matches. The aim of this is to attract as much of an audience as possible, as TV drama series do. For an instance, a women's pro wrestling organization called GAIA Japan set up a tag team ⁽¹⁾ match with a team consisting of Nagashima Chikayo and Sugar Sato vs. a tag team made up of Uematsu Toshie and Ran YuYu on January 11, 2004. The team of Uematsu and Ran won the match in an underhanded way called ring-out. Wrestlers are allowed to fight outside the wrestling ring, but if they do not come back into the ring before the referee finishes counting from 1 to 20, the team will lose the match. This rule is called "ring-out." During the match, Uematsu and Ran lured away Nagashima and Sugar Sato to the outside of the ring, and they fought outside the ring. But later Uematsu and Ran managed to be back in the ring on time and the other team failed to do so. The team of Uematsu continued winning matches by using this half measure until they had a tag match against the team of Nagashima and Sugar Sato on March 21, 2004. In this match, the team of Uematsu lost. In other words, the team of Uematsu and Ran had to lose against the team of Nagashima and Sugar Sato on that day. The reason for this is to be found in the speech made by Sugar Sato just after they had their victory. She said, "There is a team we cannot avoid fighting. The name of the team is Crush 2000 (a reunited tag team of Nagayo Chigusa and Lioness Asuka). We want to fight against them for a champion belt. Ms. Nagayo and Ms. Asuka, please fight against us!" This can be interpreted as the team of Uematsu being forced not to win the match so that a match with the team of Nagashima and Sugar Sato vs. Crush 2000 could be set up as a highlight for the 9th championship tournament on April 30, 2004. This tournament was to celebrate the 9th year since GAIA Japan was established.

Pro wrestling has theatrical elements, but the core of pro wrestling is to show how wrestlers use wrestling techniques by using their bodies directly. If pro wrestlers use only theatrical expressions without showing any wrestling techniques, pro wrestling will be too close to theatrical plays. If pro wrestling becomes a theatrical play, we need actors and not pro wrestlers. Since Kamei (2000) treats the theatrical elements as the core of her definition of pro wrestling, she fails to understand the point that the core of pro wrestling is a performance using moves expressed by directly using the wrestlers' bodies.

As described earlier, one of Moriya's categories (1992) is the configuration of sporting games and acrobatics (see Figure 2). Moriya describes how sporting games such as *sumo* will gradually develop special qualifications

and will change to “acrobatics” (Moriya, 1992, p.36). Similarly, pro wrestling is a configuration in which wrestlers ram their bodies directly into their opponents, like *sumo*, but pro wrestling has developed into a style where wrestlers show special moves or techniques without worrying about victory or defeat in matches. Therefore, pro wrestling also has an element of acrobatics. Based on the studies described so far, I define pro wrestling as a type of stage performance that is centered on expressions derived from sporting games and acrobatics in addition to expression derived from dancing and theatrical play, while having values of entertainment and commerciality.

Basic styles of matches

In 2004, about 5 matches were held per women’s pro wrestling exhibition. At each exhibition, 3 matches were held in the first half and the second half began after a break. However, this is only the case for a regular-sized exhibition. If a bigger-sized exhibition is organized, a larger number of matches are held with many women pro wrestlers who are invited from various women’s pro wrestling organizations existing around this time. Each regular-sized exhibition is run for about 2 to 2.5 hours. Larger-sized exhibitions may run for more than 3 hours. The place where matches are held is called a “ring.” The ring is a square space with one iron pillar at each corner and three ropes that are laid out using the four iron-pipe pillars. The size of the ring is different depending on each pro wrestling organization. For example, the ring used by GAEA Japan is 6 meters square, and the height between the ground-level and the top rope is 2.10 meters (“Za ringu,” 2005a). Pro wrestling matches can be watched from all directions. The blue-colored corner (called the blue corner) is on the observers’ left as they face the ring, and the red-colored corner (called the red corner) stands diagonally to the blue corner and is thought of as the front. The area outside the ropes of the ring is called the “apron.”

Each match begins with the entry of the pro wrestlers. In Japanese pro wrestling, pro wrestlers are called a “player.” As the ring announcer, who coordinates matches in the ring, calls each wrestler’s name, the theme music of the wrestler is played and the wrestler comes up to the ring. In a Japanese women’s pro wrestling exhibition, the wrestler in the blue corner tends to make an entry before the wrestler in the red corner. After all of the wrestlers have appeared in the ring, the ring announcer calls out the names of each wrestler and introduces their weights in pounds, one at a time. The wrestler whose name is introduced moves to the center of the ring and makes some

action, like raising her hands, in order to make an appeal to the audience. In Japanese women's pro wrestling, as a wrestler makes such an appeal, her fans often toss paper tapes in the image color ⁽²⁾ of the wrestler into the ring. Wrestlers take off their gowns and stretch as they prepare for the match while having a shower of paper tapes thrown over them. Each match begins with the high-pitched sound of a bell.

Each match of women's pro wrestling is conducted in the style of a one-game match. The length of time set for the match is also announced in minutes. The time limit is usually between 30 and 60 minutes for each match. However, I observed 16 matches organized by a variety of women's pro wrestling organizations in 2003 and found that the average length of time for each match was 12 minutes 23 seconds. This average was calculated from 16 matches that were a mix of matches between first matches and semi-finals. When matches are conducted for a championship or with popular wrestlers, final matches last at least 15 minutes and some last longer than 20 minutes. Unlike other competitive sports, pro wrestling matches last for a relatively long period of time because it is important for pro wrestling to entertain the audience, since the audience pays money to watch the matches. The main styles of matches are a single-match and a tag-match, according to Monma (1990). A single-match is a style where two wrestlers fight against each other. A tag-match is a style where two wrestlers are against two wrestlers in each team. There is also a style called a six people tag-match. This style derives from the tag-match with two people in each team, but each team has three wrestlers.

The basic rules of pro wrestling will be introduced next, in accordance with the rules introduced by Monma (1990). The most common decisive factor for victory and defeat in each match is a rule called a "fall." According to this rule, if a wrestler manages to press the shoulders of her opponent onto the mattress on the floor inside the wrestling ring for about three seconds (called a three-count), the former wins the match. When a wrestler lies on the floor and cannot stand up for about ten seconds (called a ten-count), then the wrestler will be announced defeated. Calling "give-up" means that a wrestler shows defeat clearly. When the referee (or doctor) of a match judges that the continuation of the match will cause significant danger to wrestler(s), then the match can be stopped on the authority of the referee (or doctor). This is called a referee-stop (or doctor-stop). If a wrestler commits an outrage on the referee or uses a weapon, or if her "second" ⁽³⁾ bursts into the match, the wrestler will lose the match. This is called a defeat by com-

mitting a foul.

However, these rules are not applied as strictly as with other competitive sports. For example, it is a foul if a wrestler grabs chairs from the audience or if they use any other weapon, but it is not a foul if the wrestler releases the weapon from her hand(s) while the referee is counting five (Monma, 1990). A foul that often occurs in women's pro wrestling is grabbing the hair of the opponent. Wrestlers do it until the referee finishes counting five and release when the counting is completed, but immediately grab the hair again. This action is repeated over and over. Although attacking the eyes and throat and biting opponents are prohibited, these actions are not judged a foul in many cases since wrestlers take advantage of the so called "five-second rule."

The length of a "three-count" in pro wrestling is not the same as 3 seconds in our daily life (Kawamura, 1994). The referee begins counting after he or she "approves" the action committed, then he or she continues counting up to three if it is necessary. But the durations between numbers are not necessarily the same. Referees change the speed of counting depending on "who is in the match, who is attacking or whether the match is at the beginning or end" (Kawamura, 1994, p.33).

Weapons are often brought to the ring by wrestlers in women's pro wrestling matches and referees warn them about the weapons. But usually the weapons are used in matches anyway. As far as I could observe of women's pro wrestling for this study, none of the wrestlers lost matches by committing a foul of using weapons. Wrestlers who use weapons are called "heels" that play the role of a devil figure in women's pro wrestling, and each "heel" has her favorite weapon. For example, a wrestler named Aja Kong uses an 18-litre square can that is painted with the same color as the paint on her face. Lioness Asuka who has changed from a "baby-face" (good wrestler) to a "heel" uses a pipe-chair, and a wrestler named Inoue Takako uses a stun gun.

When a win and loss are decided, a bell is rung to indicate the end of the match. The referee of each match pulls one arm of the winning wrestler up high and shows who has won the match. If the match is a long and hard-hitting one, the winning wrestler may climb up one of the ring-posts in the ring to express joy of the victory to the audience. Usually, the winner bows to the audience in four directions and comes down from the ring. Then, the winner retires from the game through the *hanamichi* (the path the wrestlers come and go along after and before each match), while her theme music is being

played. The loser of each match often hobbles and teeters on the *hanamichi*, or she may teeter while leaning over the shoulder of her second.

A match between the new and old queens of pro wrestling—Tamura Yoshiko vs. Toyota Manami

This section describes a pro wrestling match called “a match between the new and old queens of women’s pro wrestling.” The match was the final match in the exhibition *Brace Up '05*, which was organized by NEO and held in Korakuen Hall in Tokyo on September 18, 2005. The details of the match are described based on a video titled *NEO 9.18 Korakuen Hall Brace Up '05* (Pro Wrestling.JP, 2006). This match was a fight between Tamura Yoshiko, who was a top wrestler at NEO, and Toyota Manami, who was one of the top wrestlers of the All Japan Women’s Pro Wrestling Corporation (Zenjo for short)⁽⁴⁾ and was wrestling as a free wrestler in 2005. The purpose of this section is to supply an image of a women’s pro wrestling match for the readers of this book. This section includes my description and commentary about the match through my observations.

In women’s pro wrestling tournaments, the top wrestlers of pro wrestling organizations perform at around the end of the tournament. Therefore, rookies usually perform in the first match of each tournament, and the importance of the position of the wrestlers becomes a clue for when she performs. Each exhibition is designed in a way so that important matches will be shown when their audience is the most excited. In the case of NEO, too, rookies perform in the first match of each tournament, and “enjoyable and interesting” pro wrestling matches, which are some of the sales points of NEO, are presented in the middle of each tournament. Then, at the end, Tamura Yoshiko—“the top wrestler Ms. Tamura”—exhibits her hard-hitting fighting style.

(1) A cold and solitary queen

Tamura Yoshiko, the top wrestler at NEO, was born in 1976 and was a 29 year-old when the match was held. She made her debut in September 15, 1994, with Zenjo, which was the main women’s pro wrestling organization in Japan. At the time of the match against Toyota Manami in September 18, 2005, Tamura Yoshiko had an 11-year career as a pro wrestler. Tamura wrestled for Zenjo till the organization faced financial crisis in 1997. She then changed her organization to a women’s pro wrestling organization named NEO Ladies with other rookie wrestlers. NEO Ladies was established in

1998 by Inoue Kyoko, who was senior to Tamura and other wrestlers. NEO Ladies also faced a financial crisis, but Koda Tetsuya took over the operation of NEO Ladies and established NEO in 2000. Many wrestlers shifted from NEO Ladies to NEO, and Tamura Yoshiko also became one of the wrestlers at NEO.

In 2000, Tamura became the first woman pro wrestler to hold the title of champion in the two categories of NWA Women Pacific and NEO-Certified Single. Since then, she became the champion in many matches and was known as a strong wrestler. According to a booklet published by NEO, Tamura was 165cm in height and 70kg in weight. She did not look very big in wrestling rings, but she had very big thighs that give an impression that the lower half of her body was muscular.

She shows her presence by exhibiting a uniquely heavy and cold atmosphere when she makes her appearance. When her theme music “galaxy express” is played, she appears in front of her audience. This music is a style of instrumental music that gives an impression of being solitary in a big city. She also tries to send a message to the audience that she has a cold and solitary existence. Tamura stands in her *kimono*-like blue and silver gown in the spotlight. Her champion belt is over her shoulder and she shouts “Yeah!” with her index fingers stuck out. This *kimono*-like gown has silver-colored frilled sleeves. The silver patterns of the gown shine in the spotlight and draw attention from the audience. Her hair is short and she is wearing black sunglasses. She walks around the wrestling ring slowly and does high fives to the audience in the front row on the ring side. It is difficult to see the expression on her face since she is wearing sunglasses. Her lips show no sign of smiling. After she climbs into the ring, she climbs up on the second rope of one corner on the south side. She swallows some water from a plastic bottle and then mists the audience with the water. When the referee calls her name, she takes off her gown and sunglasses. Her fearless expression appears on her face. She wears blue eye shadow on her eyes. This color is the same as her gown. The costume under her gown is black with some blue as an accent. Her costume is not gorgeous but rather it is designed to give a simple, tight and cold impression. She looks as if she has dignity and strength, which are the characteristics suited for a champion. Through her performance soon after she enters the stadium, and her gown and costume, she flaunts that she is the champion of NEO and expresses her cold fighting spirit with which she will defeat anyone.

(2) A glamorous queen

If Tamura is a cold and solitary queen, Toyota Manami is a glamorous and sleek queen. She is a senior wrestler to Tamura. Toyota was also a former wrestler of Zenjo. She was born in 1971 and was 34 years old when she fought with Tamura. She made her debut as a wrestler in 1987, and thus she had an 18-year career by the time of the match. She was known not only as a veteran wrestler, but also had a history of winning the WWWA World Single championship, which is the apex of single-match titles. When Zenjo faced its financial crisis, many top wrestlers became free wrestlers, set up new wrestling organizations or moved to other organizations. Toyota was one of a few top wrestlers who remained in Zenjo. She was wrestling for Zenjo when it had reached such a condition that it could no longer pay its wrestlers. However, she became a free wrestler in 2002 and she was fighting mainly in the rings of GAEA Japan. Toyota appeared in fights organized by various wrestling organizations by 2004.

Like Tamura, Toyota Manami also draws a lot of attention at her entry from the *hanamichi*. In 2004, as soon as the introduction of her theme music “Grind” is played as if announcing that this was a beginning of a story, Toyota Manami appears in a red, gorgeous gown of which the sleeves and collar are covered with cascade⁽⁵⁾, while flying her long black hair. She walks up onto the ring slowly and leans over one of the ring-posts and stretches her arms and grabs the top rope. Then she faces the front. The frills of the sleeves open up like lilies. Her gown has stitches with a big black arabesque design between her chest and waist. The stomach-area of the costume is covered by big frills. The gown is so long that the length touches the floor. She stands in her posture in the ring until her opponent appears in the ring. Toyota is not unlike a pure princess in a fairy tale. She stands in front of the audience as a queen who has had a lot of experiences and achievements. The audience knows from her gorgeous gown and her dignified attitude that she has a special existence.

When her name is called, she takes off her red gown and shows her black costume. In the period between 2004 and 2005, Toyota appeared in the combination of a red gown and black costume. The black costume she was wearing in the match against Tamura was based on a swimming costume with the area of the chest and back widely open. The black costume is covered with gold stitches and silver spangles, and they shine in the spotlight.

According to “*Ōru karā nisengo nihonjin resurā meikan*” [All Color 2005: a directory of Japanese wrestlers] (*Shuukan Gongu*, 2005), Toyota



Picture 1 Kuragaki Tsubasa jumps over another wrestler, Command Bolshoi, using the move called moonsault. (© JWP)

was 167 cm in height and 72 kg in weight. Her thighs and her hips are big. Her body is big, but not well-muscled. Her body appears to have a lot of fat and is well-rounded. She uses various kinds of pro wrestling techniques, including jump techniques such as the Moonsault (see Picture 1). She has developed many techniques that are named “Japanese oceans” since she is originally from Shimane prefecture in Japan, which is near the Japan Sea.

(3) The story behind the match

What is the story behind the match of the two queens? The pairing of a match in women’s pro wrestling is usually constructed by setting up a back story. Not all matches have stories but matches for big tournaments usually come with foreshadowing based on the results of previous matches and a conversation and argument that took place earlier. The video used for this section describes before the match explains the story of how Toyota and Tamura are about to have a fight.

According to the video, Toyota succeeded in beating 30 opponents in succession in 1997. In this style of matches, a wrestler fights against 30 wrestlers in succession. This success for Toyota marked a record in women’s

pro wrestling and nobody broke the record until Tamura beat 31 opponents in succession in 2004. This incident is explained as fateful for the two wrestlers in the video. Tamura succeeded in beating 31 opponents in succession, but this was not for provoking Toyota. However, according to the narration in the video, this match was a fated clash.

Toyota and Tamura had a tag-match on July 3, 2005, but the match ended in a draw as it ran out of time. The narration tells that they fought hard even after the match was over and it was expected that they would settle the matter in a single match. In the video, it appears that Toyota and Tamura are unsatisfied with the results and are tussling after the match, instead of paying a tribute to their fight. It is not obvious why they fought hard after the match, and it seems that a match-maker in NEO was trying to give an impression that the two wrestlers were already confronting each other even before the next match started. The fighting and tussling could also be their performance.

Having a “rivalry,” Tamura came up into the wrestling ring with a bunch of flowers after a match with Toyota in NEO’s Itabashi tournament held on August 28, 2005. Tamura held a microphone and talked to Toyota. “Ms. Toyota, I respect you greatly for fighting for such a long period of time in your life.” Saying this, Tamura tried to give the flowers to Toyota. Toyota replied saying, “Ha? What is this for?” She looked at Tamura in suspicion. Tamura said, “I heard you are going to retire if you lose the match against Hikaru. It is a shame since I was hoping to fight it out with you in Korakuen. I am disappointed with this situation.” Tamura tried to give the flowers to Toyota again. This was done before the single match between Toyota and Hikaru. Thus, this incident was meant to imply that Tamura believed Toyota would lose the match against Hikaru and that Tamura and Toyota would have no matches anymore, and thus Tamura came up to the ring to celebrate the glorious history of Toyota in advance. Toyota replies to Tamura. “No way will Hikaru defeat me! Do you want have a single match against me?” Tamura nods slightly. “Then, come to Korakuen.” Toyota says this and leaves the ring. In this, Toyota asked Tamura whether she was willing to have a single match and Tamura agreed by nodding. They hinted at their future direct match.

On September 10, 2005, Toyota defeated Hikaru as she had promised. The next day, Tamura and Toyota fought in a 6-people tag-match in NEO’s Itabashi tournament. Toyota brought down Tamura to defeat by a “three-count.” Toyota said to Tamura, “I don’t feel like I will ever lose a match

against you.” Then, she threw away the microphone she was using and left the scene. This incident led up to the story of the fight in Korakuen Hall on September 18, as the fans of pro wrestling were excited and wondering if Toyota would win the single match too, or if Tamura would defeat Toyota and become the new “queen” of women’s pro wrestling. In this way, a story is created prior to a big match in order to trigger interest among the audience.

On the day of the fateful match, Tamura and Toyota confront each other in the ring. Toyota stretches her right hand out to Tamura. It is a gesture suggesting a fighting grip. Tamura refuses to grip and tries to go back to the blue corner, but she comes back and stretches her right hand out. It appears that Tamura will stretch her left hand next to grip, instead, Tamura puts both her hands against Toyota’s back while grabbing Toyota’s hand, and she throws Toyota backward onto the floor. Toyota stands up and Tamura runs towards Toyota to pull a move on her, but near the red corner Toyota throws Tamura out to the outside of the ring by using Tamura’s speed and power. Tamura walks around the ring to the front on the south side, grabs the rope while her eyes are focusing on Toyota and stands on the apron of the ring. But Tamura cannot get inside the ropes of the ring because Toyota is approaching her. Toyota uses both her hands to jab at the head of Tamura, who still stands on the apron. Toyota runs into the ropes on the opposite side and turns so that her back will touch the ropes. Using the backlash of the ropes, she tries to kick Tamura, but Tamura shifts her body slightly aside and avoids the kick. As the kick is evaded, Toyota falls onto the floor outside of the ring with her hands grabbing the rope in an effort to control the frontal lash.

Though it is a general rule for the wrestlers to receive their opponents’ moves, when the moves are evaded, the wrestlers trying to use the technique will receive damage to their own bodies instead. In this way, it is very dangerous for the attacking-side if some techniques are evaded by opponent wrestlers because the attacking-side would go out the ring. Also, when a wrestler in the ring flies down at the other wrestler outside the ring by using techniques such as *tope-suicide* ⁽⁶⁾ and *Moonsault*, it is dangerous for the wrestler flying down when her technique is evaded by the other wrestler outside the ring. Because of this, when wrestler A in the ring flies down at wrestler B outside the ring, wrestler B in most of the cases catches wrestler A. Wrestler B outside the ring catches wrestler A and both fall down on the ground together. When I observed this interaction between wrestler A and

wrestler B, pro wrestling is not a fight to decide who is the winner and loser, but rather it is a fight involving collaboration. Wrestler A may fly down at wrestler B, who may receive some damage by catching wrestler A. Wrestler A does this, not because she wants to defeat the other wrestler outside the ring but because she wants to show to the audience her move such as flying in the air. For this purpose, wrestler B outside the ring teams up with wrestler A who is in flight so that wrestler A will succeed in showing her performance without being injured.

After Toyota falls down onto the floor outside the ring, Tamura also comes down to the outside of the ring. Tamura grabs Toyota's hair and throws Toyota towards the audience on the west side. This is a style of fighting called a "ring-side battle." Wrestlers basically do not exchange their techniques outside the ring. Outside the ring, a thin mattress is spread on the floor near to the ring, but except for this space the floor is made of concrete, and any move or technique is rarely exchanged on this concrete space. Most ring-side battles involve actions where a wrestler throws another wrestler at the audience's chairs.

A ring-side battle has the aim of scaring and exciting the audience. The audience imagines and worries over whether a wrestler will throw the other wrestler at them or nearby, but at the same time they also hope that a wrestler will be thrown at them or nearby so that they can see the wrestler up very close. When a ring-side battle begins, the ring announcer shouts to the audience through a microphone, "Move backward! Move backward! People near the wrestlers are in danger!" Each ring-side battle is conducted with full preparation by seconds who support the wrestlers in the ring. Seconds read the actions of the wrestlers and run to the area where one of the wrestlers throws the other wrestler. Then, the second may ask the audience nearby to stand up by saying, "Step back!", and take a position to guard the audience by standing in front of them⁽⁷⁾. The wrestlers are checking the actions taken by the second and, once the second evacuates the audience, one of the wrestlers throws the other wrestler at the audience area.

Tamura and Toyota fight for a while, and then both return to the ring. Tamura kicks Toyota with one leg to stop Toyota from moving. Tamura then catches Toyota and fixes Toyota's body to the ropes of the ring. She places the top-rope of the ring under both arms of Toyota, and then Tamura stands outside of the ropes and kicks Toyota's right side of neck many times. Toyota furrows her brow while Tamura is attacking her. Then, Tamura tries a grappling technique on Toyota, but Toyota loosens herself from Tamura and

fixes her to the ropes of the ring. This time, Toyota stands outside the ropes and kicks Tamura's neck. It is a return attack by Toyota. As the pro wrestlers exchange techniques, such "return" attacks are often seen.

This is Tamura's turn where she endures a technique from Toyota. Tamura stands and does not use a technique. She can loosen the ropes and escape, but she does not do so. It is because it is Toyota's turn to show her technique to the audience. Toyota begins clapping to the beat. This is an action which tells the audience that her show-time is about to start. Toyota often claps to the beat and raises her right hand with her index finger up and shouts "Let's go!" in a high voice at the beginning of her performance. Toyota's fans clap to the beat in return. Once Toyota draws enough attention from the audience, she runs towards the ropes of the opposite side from where Tamura stands. She turns so that her back will touch the ropes and, using the backlash of the ropes, she runs back towards Tamura and kicks Tamura with her right leg. When Tamura is thrown forward, and both her arms are released from the ropes. She falls on her back. Both Toyota, who kicks, and Tamura, who is kicked, open their hands wide, and before their bodies are banged against the ring, they hit each other and have a back break fall. Through doing a break fall (*ukemi* in Japanese), a wrestler can reduce the impact of moves and attacks by the opponent and thereby protect the head and neck especially.

Toyota sits on Tamura, who lies on her stomach. She makes a cross with Tamura's legs and then using both hands, Toyota pulls the left leg of Tamura upward. This is a move called a "knee-bar" (see Picture 2). Toyota pulls Tamura's knee further and falls down to pull the leg more. While Toyota is grinding Tamura with the move, the ring announcer announces, "Five minutes have passed! Five minutes have passed." Toyota lets Tamura's legs go and tries to throw Tamura at the ropes. But Tamura manages to not be thrown at the ropes and, controlling the push-back, kicks Toyota.

Tamura drops Toyota onto the outside of the ring and she also goes outside the ring. Then, Tamura grabs a wide table used by the announcer and the executives of pro wrestling organizations attending the matches. She drags the table to the south side of the ring and tries to put Toyota, who is lying on the floor, onto the table. Tamura holds Toyota and places her on the table, and Toyota lies on her back on the table without trying to escape. This means that Toyota is ready for Tamura's attack. Tamura puts both her feet on the second rope in the red corner. She puts her right hand up, sticks her index finger up and shouts "Yeah!" Then, she climbs up to the top rope in

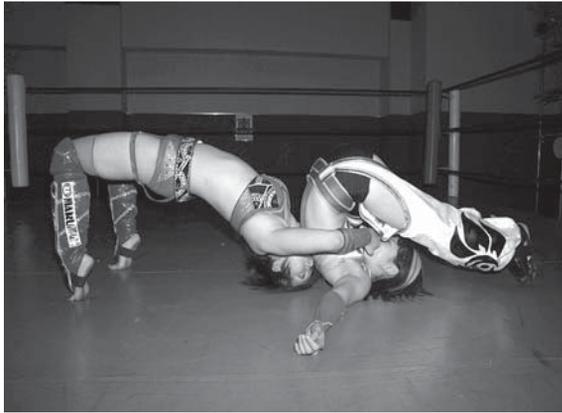


Picture 2 Kana pulls a knee-bar on Shirai Mio (© Office Kana)

the corner, and she jumps forward and falls on Toyota, who is still lying on the table. This technique is called a “con giro.” The table bends as Tamura jumps on Toyota, and Toyota falls off from the table. Using the table and chairs is a foul in pro wrestling, but the referee does not stop Tamura. Tamura usually does not use things such as a table to cause damage to her opponents. Tamura is doing something she has never done before in this match.

A man’s voice in the audience shouts, “Toyota!” Tamura drags Toyota up to the ring. Exploiting a gap, Toyota begins her counterattack. Toyota uses a technique called a “German suplex” (see Picture 3) on Tamura. The referee tries to give a three-count but counts up only to two. Toyota climbs up to the top rope and then uses “moonsault” (see Picture 1) on Tamura, who is lying on her stomach. A moonsault is one of Toyota’s significant moves. Just before Toyota falls on Tamura, Tamura uses her knees and hits Toyota’s stomach. Toyota falls down to the outside of the ring. Toyota puts her hands on her stomach and bends down to express pain. As Tamura approaches Toyota in the ring, Toyota grabs Tamura’s legs and pulls her down to the outside of the ring. Toyota throws a pipe-chair at Tamura, showing her anger that Tamura has prevented her from using the technique that Toyota is very good at. Toyota puts Tamura, who now has an empty expression on her face, into the ring. An exchange of moves begins. The cheers supporting both wrestlers become very loud by the time the ring announcer announces, “Twenty minutes have passed! Twenty minutes have passed.” Both Tamura and Toyota are sweating, and their red faces look very tired. Their actions such as standing and making the other stand are obviously slower than when they began the match.

Both become more aggressive as they want to end the match as soon as



Picture 3 Kana puts a German suplex on Shirai Mio (© Office Kana)

possible. Toyota is breathing hard. Tamura tries to endure the situation by putting her face down. NEO's wrestlers Tanny Mouse and Miyazaki Yuki acting as seconds on the day, are banging the floor and cheering Tamura by calling her name. Toyota stands up slowly and tries to make a technique by dropping Tamura from her head, but it is not complete. Toyota is too tired to hold Tamura immediately after the technique; she crawls to Tamura and holds her body on Tamura for a three-count, but fails again. Both Tamura and Toyota cannot stand up immediately. At first Toyota stands up slowly. Toyota slowly reaches Tamura, and she grabs her hair to pull her up and make Tamura stand. Just before standing up, Tamura breaks free from Toyota. Tamura uses a technique called an "elbow bat" (see Picture 4) over and over again on Toyota. Tamura gives Toyota's neck a kick using her right foot. Toyota falls onto the floor. Tamura goes over to Toyota immediately and pins Toyota on the floor. Photographers run over to the apron area of the ring and get ready for the moment of victory and defeat. The referee counts up to three. Miyazaki, one of the seconds, shows relief on her face, and Tamura falls down on her back.

Tamura stands up with an expression of pain on her face. The referee grabs her right hand and raises it to indicate she is the winner. Tamura sticks the index finger of her left hand up in the air. She shouts "Heey!" (at least I heard on the video) to the audience on the south side. Her face shows a pride and fearlessness that is similar to what she showed at the beginning of the match. Tamura sees Toyota still lying on the floor of the ring and approaches her. Although I am afraid that Tamura might kick Toyota, Toyota immedi-



Picture 4 Kana attacks Shirai Mio with elbow bat (© Office Kana)

ately moves and falls down to the outside of the ring. Sometimes, in pro wrestling winners grab any opportunity to insult losers, and this is the same in women's pro wrestling. However, Tamura did not do so in this match. The action of insulting the loser, which is usually denounced in sports, is often used as a kind of performance played by "heels," the devil figures in pro wrestling (Fiske, 1987). Also this is used to set up a story for a new match between the winner and loser. Tamura, who has won the match, walks around in the ring and shows off her performance using a microphone. She says, "Although the god of pro wrestling is testing us in various ways this year, we, women's pro wrestling, will not surrender."

The year 2005 was a year of struggle for women's pro wrestling in Japan. On April 10, GAEA Japan, which was founded by Nagayo Chigusa, who was one of the famous tag team called Crush Gals, was deactivated, and on April 17, Zenjo ended its 37-year history. GAEA Japan was the most successful women's pro wrestling organization in Japan, according to Ito (2003). However, it broke up when Nagayo Chigusa retired, as it was expected to be difficult to continue exhibitions without Nagayo Chigusa. Zenjo had financial difficulties already in 1997, but it continued with small-sized exhibitions until 2005. The breakups of these organizations tell us that women's pro wrestling was in the doldrums. Tamura's words, "The

god of pro wrestling is testing us in various ways,” indicates that women’s pro wrestling was facing difficulties. Tamura also says in the video, “This Tamura of NEO is the one who will improve women’s pro wrestling. It’s formally decided!” Then, she puts her right hand with her thumb and index finger stuck out on her chest, and shouts “It’s decided” as she pushes her right hand upright. Tamura uses this gesture and pose when she decides to do something, even if it is something against the CEO of NEO and even if the decision is unreasonable. After this match, too, Tamura makes appeals about her strength and NEO, and concludes not only her own match but all exhibitions on that day.

The match represents a story in which Tamura fought hard, defeated Toyota and won the position of being the new queen of women’s pro wrestling. It appears that the victory by Tamura was fixed before the match in order to exhibit this story. In other words, pro wrestling has a script just as theater has. Pro wrestling is often criticized, as the victories and defeats in matches are fixed and not serious. However, this criticism makes us misjudge the essential quality of pro wrestling. Unlike other sports, pro wrestlers do not fight in order to decide who the winner of each match is, but they fight to exhibit their techniques by using their bodies in order to entertain their audience. What is important for pro wrestlers is the technique they perform in order to entertain the audience, and victory or defeat in each match is of secondary importance to them. The details of this will be discussed in Chapter 6.

What is a fight in pro wrestling?

The previous section describes the basic characteristics of pro wrestling. This section will explain the actual “fight” illuminated by interviews with women pro wrestlers. All of the names appearing in the following are pseudonyms and are listed in Table 1.

Fights in pro wrestling are not fights based on conflict

(1) Fights based on trust

Watching women’s pro wrestling for the first time, some people may have the impression that pro wrestlers are fighting from real grudges and hostility because the pro wrestlers shout abuse at each other with fierce expressions on their faces, and they use not only their techniques but also kick and hit each other. It appears as if they are fighting because they hate each other. I shared the same impression about pro wrestling at the beginning of

this research, believing that the purpose of pro wrestling was to exhibit violence to the audience.

However, my interviews with pro wrestlers corrected such misconceptions. According to Yuko, pro wrestling is the same as combat sports⁽⁸⁾ and wrestlers are fighting not because “they hate their opponents.” “Fighting because of hate is a fight based on conflict,” and thus, pro wrestling is not like a fight based on conflict. This view is also pointed out by Rei, Sachi and many other pro wrestlers. Maki, who played the role of a “heel” for a while, told that she was fighting, “while tormenting opponents⁽⁹⁾, showing it to customers⁽¹⁰⁾, toying with the customers and thinking of how to provoke the customers more.” What is important here is that Maki is saying that she was, “toying with the customers,” not with her opponents. Although the person whom she was tormenting was her opposing pro wrestler, she was doing this in order to make the audience angry. She was not fighting because she hated the opposing wrestler.

As pro wrestlers are also human beings, their negative feelings toward their opponents may influence their fights in the ring. Sanae confesses that if her relation with an opponent is “delicate” outside the ring, she sometimes hesitates to fight. A “delicate” relationship means probably that they do not hate each other but they do not like each other either. She adds, “During fights, I’m scared sometimes, as I think that if I attack now, the opponent may fight me back double for what I did.” Sanae feels that she should not think this, but such an idea sometimes goes through her mind. Like Sanae, some pro wrestlers may feel scared about this “retaliating double” by other wrestlers. However, this is an exceptional case and many wrestlers fight and attack other wrestlers in rings without being influenced by emotions they may have outside the ring.

In a pro wrestling exhibition, pro wrestlers call their matches “fights.” Thus, pro wrestlers often say something like “having a fight tomorrow.” But Ryoko, for example, does not use the word “fight.” Instead, she uses the word “job” when she talks about a “fight.” This is because she thinks, “If I say ‘having a fight,’ it will sound as if having a fight with a woman is based on conflict.” Ryoko understands pro wrestling as “one kind of show” that has fights or matches in them. It is a show; therefore, it is a job of exhibition. She believes that if she thinks of wrestling as a fight, then winning the match will become more important than exhibiting wrestling, and as a result an obsession about winning will provoke wrestlers’ emotions, which will be close to a fight based on conflict.

Many pro wrestlers say strongly that pro wrestling is not a fight based on conflict. However, Maho confesses that she often becomes emotional in matches. In a match in the past, her opponent suddenly gave her a punch. It “flared me up” and “it was like a dogfight after that.” Maho says that she and her opponent were not interested in pro wrestling after the flare-up. They punched and kicked each other during the whole match, and they could not stand up anymore by the end. The match was judged as a KO for both (that is, a draw). Maho says that having such a fight is rare under normal circumstances, doing such an outrageous thing was an interesting essence of pro wrestling. Maki, who says that she has a good control over her emotions, also says that, though it is not her style, if two wrestlers exchange punches because their anger is provoked and if the audience enjoy “a fight between two women,” then it is good. Many pro wrestlers think that pro wrestling is something to entertain their audience, and thus, even if they are engaging in wrestling like a fight based on conflict, it is acceptable as long as their audience is enjoying it.

There is a match similar to a scrap between two pro wrestlers under the guise of pro wrestling. In the world of pro wrestling, the type of wrestling where wrestlers do not wrestle but fight in an attempt to crush their opponent in the ring is called a “cement match” (Kandori, 1997, p.117). Kandori Shinobu (1997) confesses in her memoirs about having this type of cement match. Kandori boycotted matches as a way of expressing her dissatisfaction with her organization, Japan Women’s Pro Wrestling. When Kandori returned to the exhibition, she had a match with Jackie Sato (now deceased). With Maki Ueda, Jackie Sato was a famous woman pro wrestler who formed a pair-team called Beauty Pair that made the first boom in women’s pro wrestling in the second half of the 1970s. Jackie Sato was involved in founding Japan Women’s Pro Wrestling and the star in the organization. Kandori describes how in the match, “Jackie used a technique called “clothesline” to my face, actually to above my right eye where I have an injury. A very hard punch” (Kandori, 1997, p.114). Clothesline is a technique used by wrestlers to hit the throat of their opponent by moving their own arm in the horizontal (Kakutou tanteidan, 2001). When Kandori was punched on her injured face, she believed that Jackie did it on purpose. That is because “it was easy to believe so circumstantially, and a clothesline is usually aimed at areas like the breast and neck, not at the face, especially not at the eyes” (Kandori, 1997, p.114). Kandori believed that Jackie was picking a fight with her. Kandori appealed directly to her organization for

a single match with Jackie Sato, while thinking, "I'll take up this fight that was picked with me" (Kandori, 1997, p.114). The organization tried to stop Jackie Sato but she accepted the appeal. Their single match was set for two weeks later.

Kandori was angry at Jackie Sato because Jackie attacked her right eye where she had an injury (Kandori, 1997). The condition of Kandori's right eye around the time was bad, having damage to the nerves in the eye, and there was a danger of her losing her eyesight completely if it suffered further physical damage. Kandori believed that the reason why Jackie Sato aimed to attack her injured right eye was that Jackie had "never experienced real pain in her life" (Kandori, 1997, p.115). Therefore, Kandori "decided to teach Jackie what real pain is like" in the ring (Kandori, 1997, p.115).

Kandori decided that she would wrestle with Jackie Sato only for the first three minutes in the single match, and she would then have a scrap with Jackie in the remaining time of the match (Kandori, 1997). This plan was made probably because Kandori thought her idea would be too obvious if she challenged Jackie without showing any pro wrestling. After three minutes had passed in the match, Kandori began attacking Jackie Sato. She hit Jackie's face over and over until Jackie's face began swelling up. Kandori put the upper half of her own body on the chest of Jackie thoroughly and pressed Jackie's ribcage carefully to prevent Jackie from breathing comfortably. Kandori says she "put my legs at the back of her arms, pushed her neck with my knees to stop her from vocalizing... held her arms and used an "armlock" on her joints to prevent her from signaling a give-up" (Kandori, 1997, p.119). An armlock is a technique used to attack the arms of opponents in pro wrestling. Kandori says, "I am sure she sensed the possibility of dying. But, at that moment, the people who knew that Jackie was facing the fear of death were only two, Jackie and I, in the big stadium" (Kandori, 1997, p.119). The audience and other wrestlers thought Jackie was "in pain because of the armlock but struggling not to give up," according to Kandori (Kandori, 1997, p.119).

What is opposite to such a fight is a fight based on trust. Sanae says that she cannot have a hard fight without trust with the opponent wrestlers. Maki also says that if you are in the world of pro wrestling, you will gradually understand "the sense of trust exists only between the wrestlers fighting one another... understanding the meaning of hitting hard to have a match." Just after joining the pro wrestling organization, Maki felt inhibited to hit her opponents hard as she worried it would be too painful for them. But after be-

ing trained as a pro wrestler, her inhibition disappeared. She points out that this feeling of hitting somebody hard based on trust may be weird for people outside the pro wrestling world.

What does trusting the opponents in pro wrestling mean? This is about the type of trust where, for example, when two wrestlers have a match, one wrestler knows that the other wrestler will receive her technique properly without being injured. In other words, if one wrestler is worried about whether the other wrestler can receive her technique properly without any injuries, there is no relation of trust between them. Rie says, "When I have a match against a rookie who has just joined us, I cannot use any high-impact moves naturally." She adds, when she worries about "whether this wrestler can receive my technique," she cannot use a technique that is likely to injure her. She says, "I only use techniques that I think are good enough for her to receive." Mika says that she has a judgmental standard in that "I don't use a certain technique to pro wrestlers who are at a very lower ranking, whose body is not properly developed yet." But she still needs to win the match, so "I use techniques that are unlikely to injure her." Pro wrestling exists on the relations of trust whereby a wrestler uses techniques knowing that she will not injure the other, while the wrestler who receives the technique knows that she can receive the technique without being injured, and because of this trust, the wrestlers can fight hard.

However, some wrestlers admit that physical pain sometimes provokes in them a feeling of anger, although they know that their opponents trust them and they are not attacking them because of hostility. Aya says, "Hitting each other and feeling pain, I know that I am not supposed to but I sometimes hit the opponents with my fist, and I think secretly they deserve that." She also says that she is "not easily provoked emotionally." Although Aya knows that she and the opponent wrestler are wrestling, when she is attacked and in pain, she "feel annoyed" and plays dirty a little. This is one of the attractions of pro wrestling, because the fans of pro wrestling see this as wrestlers who are not supposed to be emotional become emotionally charged.

Yumiko says that even if the opponent is one of her friends outside the ring and even if the other is not hurting her on purpose, if the opponent uses an "elbow bat" "over and over on me and hits my face, I get angry (laughs)." She says that she "gets angry," but this does not mean that she becomes out of control because of her anger. A pro wrestler gets angry because of pain, and thus she does the same thing to her opponent over and over again. As

a result, faces of both wrestlers swell up. Yumiko says that after matches, “my opponents complain very often that it was painful.” She says that she says back to the wrestlers in the situation, “You started it; it is neither your nor my fault (laughs).” Although wrestlers are sometimes angry at others for causing them pain during matches, they smile and talk after the match because of their relations of trust.

(2) Punching and kicking

One of the reasons why I misunderstood pro wrestling as a fight based on conflict is that pro wrestlers often punch and kick their opponent wrestlers as well as use wrestling moves and techniques. This punching and kicking give the impression that pro wrestling is the same as the quarrels and fights you may see in streets or some other places outside wrestling rings. What kinds of meaning do punching and kicking have in pro wrestling? According to Rie, punching and kicking have different meanings from using techniques in pro wrestling. She said, “If I want to execute a technique against the opponent suddenly, I swear that the opponent guard herself or switch my move.” Rie says that it is necessary “to stop the opponent by punching and kicking before using techniques.” This is the reason why they punch and kick each other. It is equivalent to *judo*’s “sweeping leg and throwing. Wrestlers need to catch their opponent off guard before using their own techniques,” Rie says. In many cases, punching and kicking are like a preparation for making their techniques more effective, not for showing their punching and kicking to their audience. This is different from the fights in which people punch and kick each other in order to defeat each other.

Rie continues that punching and kicking are a kind of preparation for executing her techniques, but “there are wrestlers who try to show their punching and kicking to their audience.” These pro wrestlers “practice punching and kicking more than other wrestlers so that they look cool when they do that.” “If their customers get excited because of their cool punching and kicking, they are getting glory out of it,” Rie says. This tells us that punching and kicking can win the hearts of the audience, just as the wrestler’s significant move. This winning the hearts and minds of the audience marks the difference between pro wrestling and combat sports. The following section will describe this point.

Pro wrestling is something to entertain the audience

Sayaka describes the difference between pro wrestling and combat

sports. Practicing more and becoming stronger are very important in combat sports, but for pro wrestling, even if wrestlers become stronger, “if they cannot show their moves to their audience, it won’t mean anything.” Sayaka says that pro wrestlers show their techniques and entertain their audience while “fighting for victory,” so “it is very difficult.” According to her, after she became a pro wrestler, she realized that the occupation she had chosen was something very difficult.

How pro wrestlers think about the reactions from their audience support this aspect of pro wrestling as something to entertain an audience. Pro wrestlers usually do not feel good about kicking and punching their opponents, rather when they succeed in making techniques or doing break falls, they enjoy a feeling of exhilaration and fulfillment. Mika says, for example, that she feels good when “I succeed in making a good technique,” and this feeling is different from feeling refreshed after she punches her opponents. Sayaka says that she thinks “Yeah!” especially when she throws big wrestlers. “I did well, and that I feel when it happens,” she says.

However, many women pro wrestlers say that they feel good and excited the most when they have a good reaction from their audience and feel strongly that they are succeeding in entertaining their audience. Sanae describes that in combat sports, “I felt exhilarated when I punched my opponents, but I feel excited rather than exhilarated when I hit my opponents and my audience gets excited in pro wrestling.” Maki says that even if she feels frustrated by being punched, and “even if I am bleeding from a cut in my mouth, if the customers are excited and shout their excitement, I feel good (laughs).” The sense of frustration doesn’t seem to matter for pro wrestlers as long as their audience is being entertained. Akiko describes her feelings as:

The customers are very honest about what they think beautiful, cool, and other things they think great. When I succeed in doing those things, I feel satisfied and good, and I think I did very well. Then, as the customers show me their excitement about what I did, I feel strongly that I did well.

The interviews suggest that pro wrestlers are not wrestling and fighting only for winning their matches, but they wrestle and fight in order to entertain their audience. In the end, this seems to be their purpose.

Untold rules in pro wrestling

Pro wrestling is not a fight based on conflict. It is also different from combat sports. In combat sports, players guard themselves from techniques made by their opponents, and they try to win the match as soon as possible. Mika says, “we don’t guard ourselves from techniques made by others in pro wrestling, but we dare to receive the technique made by our opponents.” In other words, pro wrestlers show their audience, their “strength of body and how they receive the technique of their opponent. Nevertheless we attack our opponent to win at the end.” Because of this, pro wrestlers fight in their matches while thinking about many complicated matters. First, pro wrestlers receive techniques made by the opponents, but if they receive too many techniques, they will surely lose their match. However, Mika says, “winning the matches without receiving techniques from the opponent will not be approved by the customers.” It requires a strategy of when you receive techniques and when you evade techniques. Sachi says that if the audience wants to see particular techniques, she will receive them if she can, but for winning matches, “if I think I should not receive the risky technique or otherwise I will lose... I will never receive it.”

It also does not mean that pro wrestlers can do anything to win matches. Pro wrestlers are expected to win matches without injuring their opponents but they are allowed to cause a certain amount of damage to their opponents. Pro wrestlers say that they can win matches by causing serious damage, such as cutting the tendon of their opponents, if they really want to, but they do not do so. Mika says that if her opponents are “the wrestlers whose body is not properly developed yet,” she only uses moves that her opponents are capable of receiving. This is because the purpose of pro wrestling is to entertain the audience, not battling or killing. In summarizing what Mika described, we now know that there are two untold rules in pro wrestling. The first rule is that wrestlers have to receive techniques made by other wrestlers as much as possible. The second rule is that wrestlers should not injure their opponent wrestlers.

The first rule is the best part in pro wrestling. Rei says, “I can’t shine unless I am in the square ring” of pro wrestling. She thinks what shines for her is “My break fall, because I believe that pro wrestlers cannot be wrestlers unless they can do a break fall.” She says, “I want to receive any types of techniques because I am strong enough.” This suggests that she believes that a break fall is one of her ways of expressing her strength. When Rei was a rookie, she used to worry that if she receives a technique she might lose

matches. This was because she thought techniques could cause damage to her while she was receiving them. Because of this sense of worry, she went through a period in which she tried to win matches without receiving the opponents' techniques and instead executing techniques to opponent wrestlers. However, she learned her lesson, and now she tries to shine by receiving the technique made by opponent wrestlers without any hesitation.

Kiriko points out that when pro wrestlers are doing a break fall, it is very "natural" and "it is a normal scene, thus everyone sees it without giving much thought," but actually they are doing a break fall from a very high position; when, for example, they do a break fall while falling from the top rope in the ring. "Falling from our backs and landing on the floor from a standing position is painful enough for us, but we make a break fall by falling from a higher position," she says. Kiriko is not conscious about this usually, but when she "explain about pro wrestling to other people" and when she tells them that she is falling from such a high position and doing a break fall, it "re-assures me that I am doing something great." Though break falling is nothing special in pro wrestling, she feels pride in doing break falls. As she describes it, pro wrestlers do a break fall as if it is nothing special, but learning to do a break fall is not so easy even for a wrestler. The details of this point will be discussed in Chapter 4.

The second rule of not causing injuries to opponent wrestlers is a rule that supports a wrestler's life. As Mika says, pro wrestlers are capable of harming other wrestlers very badly if they want to. But some pro wrestlers point out that if wrestlers harm other wrestlers very badly, in many cases, their audience will be frightened by the resulting dreadfulness. Moreover, if a pro wrestler is injured badly in a match, for example, she will not be able to wrestle after the match for several months or perhaps for life. Such an incident is a problem not only for injured wrestler but also for all the pro wrestlers. This is a big loss for someone whose occupation is pro wrestling, and when pro wrestling is something she enjoys and is providing her bread and butter. Thus, many pro wrestlers make efforts to not injure their opponents in matches. For example, Sayaka says that there are some parts of the body where they can and cannot hit. She says that pro wrestling is not something done to injure others, thus wrestlers usually hit the chest or other parts of body that can produce only noise when hit.

However, not every wrestler follows the second rule of not injuring opponent wrestlers. For example, in Zenjo, which had a 37-year history, there were wrestlers who believed that it was acceptable to injure other wrestlers.

For example, Yamada Toshiyo, who was one of the well-known wrestlers in Zenjo, says in *Shuukan puroresu bessatsu toukigo* (Weekly Pro Wrestling: Winter Additional Volume) (2004), “I thought that it is OK as long as I am having fun, though now I realize that I couldn’t wrestle without other wrestlers, and I was lacking in professional sense and I didn’t care how badly the other wrestlers were injured” (Sugawāru, 2004). Zenjo had many pro wrestlers at that time and it was not easy for wrestlers to fight in matches. Then, the competition among the wrestlers was very severe. Under these circumstances, some wrestlers seemed to use their significant moves even on wrestlers whose bodies were not yet well developed as pro wrestlers.

History of women’s pro wrestling in Japan: From a sexual spectacle to a “real fight”

Early period of women’s pro wrestling

The history of women’s pro wrestling, from the early period to the second boom, is described in detail in *Jyoshipuroresu Minzokushi* (2000) by Kamei Yoshie. The history of women’s pro wrestling in those days will be described based mainly on the book written by Kamei. The history from the period of group competitions, which took place after the second boom, until 2004 is described based on my analysis.

The first exhibition of women’s pro wrestling in Japan was conducted in 1948 by comedy actors, Pan Igari and Shopin Igari, who were brothers, and their sister Igari Sadako. They exhibited women’s pro wrestling as a sports show performed in an American army camp (Kamei, 2000). Incidentally, the first men’s pro wrestling match in Japan was conducted in 1954 between Rikidozan and the Sharpe brothers. Thus, an exhibition of women’s pro wrestling was held six years earlier than men’s pro wrestling, as Kamei points out (2000). The women’s pro wrestling started by the brothers Pan Igari and Shopin Igari was different from women’s pro wrestling today. The women’s pro wrestling performed by the Igari brothers was basically a comic show, and in the early period of their women’s pro wrestling, wrestlers were battling over a garter belt (“Za ringu,” 2005b).

A pro wrestling boom in Japan began in 1954 when Rikidozan had a match against the Sharpe brothers. Many organizations for women’s pro wrestling were founded as the boom began, and these organizations together set up All Japan Women’s Pro Wrestling Federation in August 1955. In September

of the same year, the first all Japan women pro wrestlers match was held by the affiliate groups of the Federation (Kamei, 2000). In 1956, a second battle for the championship was held, and many groups for women's pro wrestling were set up in Japan. Some show managers "started organizing strip-show-like battles over a garter belt by using women wrestlers" (Kamei, 2000, p.42). Even the organizations that were actually organizing women's pro wrestling as a sport could not use public sports gyms for exhibitions, thus they held exhibitions in places like nightclubs and strip joints (Kamei, 2000). On the other hand, as some organizations that presented women's pro wrestling as sports show failed to rent a public gymnasium for their exhibition, they staged their show in night clubs or strip show theaters (Kamei, 2000). This is probably because women's pro wrestling was understood as a sexual spectacle in general, regardless of the differences in the exhibitions organized by different organizations.

Women's pro wrestling was in the doldrums in the period between 1956 and 1968. This was caused by the ambiguity of whether women's pro wrestling was a pro wrestling show or a strip show, and it failed to draw people's interest (Kamei, 2000). After about 10 years of such dark days, wrestlers who did not belong to any organizations got together and set up a Japan Women's Pro Wrestling organization in 1967 (Kamei, 2000). This organization was broken up later, and Matsunaga Takashi founded *Zen nihon joshi puroresu kyokai* (the All Japan Women's Pro Wrestling Corporation, called Zenjo for short) in 1968 (Hara, Izui & Tanaka, 2003). The exhibitions organized by Zenjo became the core of women's pro wrestling until Japan Women's Pro Wrestling was founded in 1986.

Matsunaga Takashi began being involved in women's pro wrestling after his sister, Reiko, became a woman pro wrestler. Reiko was a wrestler of *Zen nihon joshi puroresuringu kyokai* that was set up after the boom launched by Rikidozan (Kamei, 2000). Matsunaga had some knowledge and experience about *judo* and thus he was asked by the organization to teach break fall to women pro wrestlers (2002 *Joshi puroresu sūpā catarogu*, 2002.3.15). In later years, three brothers of Matsunaga Takashi were also involved in women's pro wrestling. During the dark days from 1956 to 1968, their organization was also having its exhibitions in places such as strip show theaters and cabarets. When *Zen nihon jyoshi puroresu kyokai* (later, Zenjo) was founded in 1968, most of its wrestlers were relatives of Matsunaga Takashi. There were not enough people who were interested in becoming wrestlers around that time, so future wrestlers seemed to be recruited by using Matsunaga-

naga's relatives (2002 *Jyoshi puroresu sūpā catarogu*, 2002.3.15). Women pro wrestlers Yoshiba Reiko and Yamaguchi Yoko were younger sisters of Matsunaga, and Okada Kyoko was his cousin, and Kyo Aiko was a niece of Matsunaga Kenji who was Matsunaga Takashi's older brother (2002 *Jyoshi puroresu sūpā catarogu*, 2002.3.15). It was like a family business, and this is probably one of the reasons they managed to continue with the small-scale business of women's pro wrestling in such dark days.

Three big booms of women's pro wrestling

Until 1986, the core organization of women's pro wrestling was Zenjo, and they created a boom for women's pro wrestling. The three big booms of women's pro wrestling were: the first boom, which was the period between 1977 and 1979, in which the core wrestlers were Beauty Pair (Maki Ueda and Jackie Sato); the second boom, which was the period between 1983 and 1989, of which the core wrestlers were Crush Gals (Nagayo Chigusa and Lioness Asuka); and the third boom, which was the period of group competitions between 1993 and 1994, during which wrestler such as Hokuto Akira were the core wrestlers (*Redeisu*, March, 15, 2003)⁽¹¹⁾.

Before explaining about the boom involving Beauty Pair (hereinafter Beauty), a woman pro wrestler called Mach Fumiake has to be introduced. Watanabe Fumie, who was 175cm in height and 72 kg in weight, joined Zenjo in 1974 and made a debut as Mach Fumiake in the same year. When she was at junior high school, she entered and lost in the final of a singing competition called "Star Tanjo," which was considered to be a gateway to success for people wanting to be professional singers. Incidentally, the winner of the competition was Yamaguchi Momoe, who became one of the most well-known singers in Japan (Hara, Izui & Tanaka, 2003). Because she became a pro wrestler with her brilliant career, her debut match was broadcast on TV, which was very exceptional for rookies (Kamei, 2000). Mach Fumiake also made her debut as a singer in March 1975 and sang in a pro-wrestling ring. Her past news hook and singing in the ring made her well-known among all generations in Japan as "a singing pro wrestler" (Kamei, 2000, p.24). However, Mach Fumiake sang only once in the ring. It seemed that Beauty started the custom of singing in the ring after every match (Hara, Izui & Tanaka, 2003).

Around the time when Mach Fumiake was popular, Fuji Television Network (herein after Fuji TV) started broadcasting women's pro wrestling regularly on TV. Until then, Nippon Television Network Corporation

was broadcasting women's pro wrestling only on an irregular basis. This was in April 1975 (Kamei, 2000). Fuji TV adopted "Fuji TV for mothers and their children" as its slogan at that time. Because of this, the Network faced problems in broadcasting women's pro wrestling without making any changes since pro wrestling had the image of being an erotic sideshow for men. The Network "tried to add gorgeous and healthy images to women's pro wrestling by creating a glitzy atmosphere for matches. Thus, women pro wrestlers began singing and wearing special costumes" (Kamei, 2000, p.24). This change in the image of women's pro wrestling increased women fans, and many women began knowing about women's pro wrestling through TV. This new image of women's pro wrestling broadcast on TV apparently made a base for the boom in women's pro wrestling that took place later.

But Mach Fumiake retired from pro wrestling suddenly in 1976. Though she did not create a big boom like the boom that came after the debut of Beauty, the retirement of Mach Fumiake caused a decrease in the size of the audience who came to wrestling matches, because after all Mach had made women's pro wrestling very popular throughout Japan. It was necessary to create a new star for women's pro wrestling urgently. In consequence, a tag team called Beauty Pair was immediately formed. Fuji TV was behind this. Fuji TV had begun the broadcasting of women's pro wrestling on TV since the debut of Mach Fumiake on the condition that women pro wrestlers would sing songs every time (Hara, Izui & Tanaka, 2003). A producer who was in charge of entertainment in Fuji TV made Jackie Sato and Maki Ueda form a pair as a resolution. The producer had an image of creating a couple in the mold of the very popular play by the Takarazuka Revue Company in 1974 called *The Rose of Versailles*, and Jackie Sato was to play the role of a man and Maki Ueda the role of a woman. Around this time in Japan a pair of women singers called Pink Lady was also very popular and this also affected the decision about creating a pair in the wrestling world (Kamei, 2000, p.25). In November 25 1976, Beauty released a song called *Kakemeguru Seishun* that means blossoms of youth flashing.

Beauty was formed to replace the position created by Mach Fumiake, and they became popular but not instantly. At the beginning of 1977, Zenjo came back to Kanto area including Tokyo after touring local places in Japan. On February 25 of the same year, Zenjo had an exhibition in a hall of the Yokohama Cultural Gymnasium. Junior high school and high school girls poured into the hall to see Beauty. This was the beginning of the explosive popularity of Beauty (Kamei, 2000). "The school girls threw paper tapes to

the ring as soon as Beauty appeared. It was like a concert by idol singers” (Kamei, 2000, p.26). In the early period of this boom, the audience used to get excited only when Beauty sang, and it was completely quiet during actual matches (Hara, Izui & Tanaka, 2003). This was considered a dramatic change, because almost all of the audience had consisted of men during the early period of women’s pro wrestling. This change was caused by Mach Fumiake, who generated awareness about women’s pro wrestling amongst a wide fan base, while Beauty mobilized women, and especially teenage girls, to pro wrestling exhibitions (Kamei, 2000).

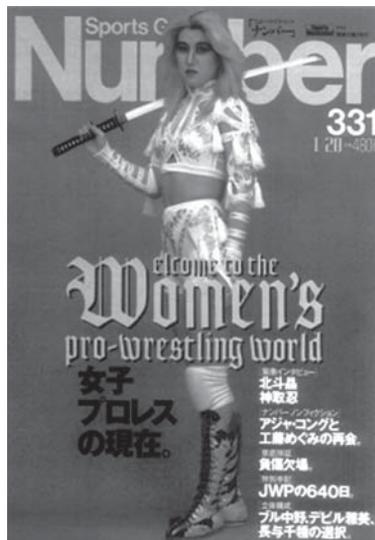
The second boom in women’s pro wrestling, after the era of Beauty, was created by Crush Gals (hereinafter Crush), which was formed in 1983. Nagayo Chigusa and Lioness Asuka of Crush gained popularity by doing aggressive and extreme pro wrestling that “was not the same as the women’s pro wrestling that existed earlier. Wrestlers used to execute techniques while caring about their opponents earlier” (Kamei, 2000, p.29). Rather Crush executed techniques to defeat the opponents and their matches were almost like real fights (Kamei, 2000). In 1984, Crush also released their first record *Honou no Seisho* (meaning the Bible in flames), and they won an explosive popularity. Many girls in junior high schools and high schools idealized Crush and wished to be like them. They poured into tryout tests for Zenjo. As many as 2,500 girls applied for the tryout tests in 1986 (“Zennihon,” 1995).

After the era of Mach Fumiake, pro wrestling continued to be popular as it was broadcast on TV. Many women pro wrestlers who were interviewed for this book told that they knew Beauty and Crush through TV (see Chapter 3). Women’s pro wrestling became something familiar to many people, especially to girls, because they could see it on TV and on road shows. Many girls knew about women’s pro wrestling through TV and they became fans of pro wrestling. Eventually they began to think that they wanted to be women pro wrestlers themselves.

The third boom in Zenjo was the era of group competitions between 1993 and 1994 (Hara, Izui & Tanaka, 2003). Since the establishment of Zenjo in 1968, women’s pro wrestling meant Zenjo in Japan, but a strong rival for it appeared in 1986. Japan Women’s Pro Wrestling started up an enterprise. This organization was divided into JWP and LLPW eventually in 1992. In 1989, a men’s pro wrestling group called FMW was founded. FMW had a division for women and women pro wrestlers were wrestling in its exhibitions. These events marked the end of the monopoly of Zenjo in

the world of women's pro wrestling. Beside Zenjo, other pro wrestling organizations began organizing exhibitions.

Under these circumstances, some women's pro wrestling organizations began to organize and show group competitions in their exhibitions after September of 1992. In contrast, men's pro wrestling organization did not bring these group competitions into reality (Kamei, 2000). In 1993, group competitions started occurring with four women's pro wrestling organizations (Zenjo, JWP, LLPW and FMW). During this period, matches were held in huge-sized halls. For instance, the All-Star tournament of April 1993 was held in Yokoyama Arena and the last tournament of the group competitions was held in Tokyo Dome in November 1994 (Hara, Izui & Tanaka, 2003). The core wrestler in those group competitions was Hokuto Akira. She had had a match against Kandori Shinobu of LLPW in the All-Star tournament of April 1993 in Yokohama Arena, and she defeated Kandori after a bloody fight. After this victory she also did very well in the group competitions held until the tournament in Tokyo Dome. Because of this achievement, she appeared on the cover of a magazine, *Supōtsu gurafuikku nambā* (Sports Graphic Number) (1994, No.331): the first women pro wrestler to



Picture 5 Hokuto Akira on the cover of the magazine *Supōtsu gurafuikku nambā* (Sports Graphic Number) (No. 331 edition, 1994, Bungeishunju).

appear in this way (see Picture 5).

The school girls who had been dominating tournaments halls during the era of Crush stopped appearing in the halls when Nagayo Chigusa and Lioness Asuka of Crush retired in 1989, and the audience segment began changing in the 1990's. In March 1990, a new men's pro wrestling organization, Universal Pro Wrestling, was set up and Zenjo lent its women pro wrestlers to exhibitions organized by Universal Pro Wrestling. After this, male fans started appearing at exhibitions of women's pro wrestling (Kamei, 2000). According to Kamei, the male audience "seemed to come to see the feminine Bison Kimura and Takahashi Mika" (2000, p.191) and the unique character of Aja Kong at the beginning. Between 1990 and 1992 Bull Nakano, the top wrestler in Zenjo in those days, and Aja Kong had the first match (Hara, Izui & Tanaka, 2003) and the number of male fans increased as they wanted to watch the extreme fights—fights that were started by Crush originally—presented by the wrestlers of Zenjo (Kamei, 2000). The male fans who were interested in the Zenjo exhibitions were also attracted to the group competitions held after September 1992. As they came to watch the group competitions, they also became interested in other women's pro wrestling organizations.

Slump in popularity and business difficulties: women's pro wrestling after group competitions

In this way, exhibitions that had become almost empty of support after the enthusiastic school-girls fans of Crush left, were filled up again by male fans. Nagayo Chigusa, one of the Crush, made a comeback to pro wrestling and founded GAEA Japan in 1995. More female fans came to the exhibitions of GAEA Japan, but more male fans came to the exhibitions organized by other pro wrestling organizations and the male audience accounted for 80-90 % of the total audience at each exhibition. The number of fans decreased on the whole after the era of group competitions, and each women's pro wrestling organization suffered financially. The style of group competitions helped to lure male pro wrestling fans to the exhibitions of women's pro wrestling, but it failed to cultivate new pro wrestling fans. The school girls who supported Crush never poured into the exhibitions of women's pro wrestling again.

(1) Slump in popularity of women's pro wrestling

This slump in popularity probably happened because the amount of TV

broadcasting of women's pro wrestling decreased dramatically after Crush retired and this minimized the opportunity for different generations of school girls to know more about women's pro wrestling. During the era of Crush, Fuji TV was showing the matches organized by Zenjo every Monday from 7:00 to 7:30 pm, between July 9, 1984, and September 22, 1986.

Some active pro wrestlers who were interviewed for this study told that they became women pro wrestlers because they watched Crush on TV and thought of them as cool women pro wrestlers. After the matches disappeared from TV screens, girls from junior high schools and high schools had much fewer opportunities to watch women's pro wrestling. Beauty, who made the first boom of women's pro wrestling, had caught the hearts of school girls with their first song and this increased the popularity of women's pro wrestling. But after the 1990s, being a singer was not an essential factor for success in the entertainment world in Japan (Ogawa, 1991). Thus, even if women pro wrestlers released records or CDs, they could not sell themselves as idols anymore, since the centripetal force of the songs themselves was already weak.

(2) Increase in women's pro wrestling organizations

The size of the audience for women's pro wrestling decreased but the number of organizations for women's pro wrestling increased. As described earlier, Nagayo Chigusa started GAEA Japan in 1995. In 1996, a new organization named Jd' was set up, and Jaguar Yokota and Bison Kimura, who used to belong to Zenjo, became its core wrestlers. One of the reasons why the number of women's pro wrestling organizations increased was that Zenjo diversified its business and failed during the bubble years (the boom period between the late 80's and the early 90's), and then for the second time, one of their checks bounced in 1997. Zenjo could not pay the salaries of its pro wrestlers for a while before this bouncing check, and some wrestlers left and some established new organizations after this (Rosy Ogawa, 1997). Rosy Ogawa, who had been a key person in the exhibitions at Zenjo, founded ARSION together with some of the main wrestlers at Zenjo in 1998 (*Shuukan puroresu*, 1998a). Inoue Kyoko, one of the main wrestlers at Zenjo, also set up a new women's pro wrestling organization called NEO Ladies in the same year (*Shuukan puroresu*, 1998b). Meanwhile, some wrestlers stayed free-lancers without joining any women's pro wrestling organizations and appeared in the exhibitions organized by them.

As the number of organizations increased, the organizations had to fight

Table 2 Brief chronology of women's pro wrestling

Year	Main events	Main organizations	Successful pro wrestlers
1948	Brothers Pan Igari and Shopin Igari and their sister, Sadako, conducted the Japan's first exhibition of women's pro wrestling		
1968	All Japan Women's Pro Wrestling Corporation (later, Zenjo) was founded		
1974	Debut of Mach Fumiake	Zenjo	
1977-1979	The first boom	Zenjo	Beauty Pair
83	Beginning of the second boom	Zenjo	Crush Gals
84			
85			
86	Japan Women's Pro Wrestling was founded		
87			
88			
89	End of the second boom in women's pro wrestling FMW was founded		
1992	Japan Women's Pro Wrestling was divided into JWP and LLPW		
1993-1994	The third boom (group competitions)	Zenjo, JWP, LLPW, FMW	Hokuto Akira

Note: A heavy line indicates a number of years is skipped.

over the limited numbers of the audience, since the number of pro wrestling fans was not increasing. Unsurprisingly, every organization faced financial difficulties, and some began reconstruction and some broke up. Jd' is one of the examples of an organization that conducted reconstruction. Jd' was run originally by Yoshimoto Kogyo Co., Ltd., that is one of the prominent production companies in Japan ("Uwasano," 1995), but it did not seem to produce much of a profit ("*JD sutā*," 2004). In April 2004, J Office Co., Ltd bought up Jd' and changed its name to JD Star. However, its business never improved ("*JD sutā*," 2004), and JD Star fired many of its women pro wrestlers in April, 2004. After this, JD Star became a production company

that invite women pro wrestlers each time they organized exhibitions called “Kakutoubi” (that means “fighting beauty”). However, their business never turned up, eventually JD Star closed its operation in 2007 (“Kakutoubi,” 2008). Meanwhile, the wrestlers who were fired by JD Star founded an organization called Team OK in 2004 and conducted the first performance on September 20, 2004 (field note). Later, Bloody and Fang Suzuki as their main wrestlers retired, and Team OK also ended its operations.

One of the examples of a break-up is ARSION. Hotta Yumiko of Zenjo and other wrestlers joined ARSION and founded a “major women’s pro wrestling called A to Z” on July 25, 2003 (Hara, Izui, Tanaka, Ito & Akatsuki, 2004). But many wrestlers who used to belong to ARSION left this new organization, A to Z. A to Z had a business alliance with JD Star (Redeisu Shuukan Gongu, 2006.1.5) but was not successful as a pro wrestling organization. Later it stopped its operations.

Many women’s pro wrestling organizations had financial difficulties, and thus, some wrestlers had a second job. Six of the wrestlers among the interviewees for this study had a second job for a living. One of the six wrestlers spent more time on her second job than on pro wrestling, and she worked as a pro wrestler only on weekends. Two of the wrestlers did not have a second job because they are well-known free-lance pro wrestlers. Two other wrestlers among the interviewees did not have a second job because they were living with their parents. Therefore, they did not seem to have extra expenses. Around 2004, it was said that only the wrestlers at GAEA Japan did not need to have a second job to make a living (Ito, 2003). However, the interviews for this study found that six wrestlers who belong to X organization were doing pro wrestling without needing a second job for a living. One of the six wrestlers said that almost all of the wrestlers in X organization were involved in different kinds of tasks related to organizing matches, such as match making⁽¹²⁾, selling tickets and booking places for matches. This helped X organization by reducing the number of staff. The wrestlers of X organization are sometimes invited to do pro wrestling in matches set up by other organizations, and money paid for these matches is an important source of income for them. The wrestlers, however, have to be engaged in jobs and activities outside of their matches, and thus, their working hours are long although their income is increased. Except for a few top wrestlers and those wrestlers who belong to a certain pro wrestling organization, it is very difficult for pro wrestlers to live on their income from wrestling.

(3) A decline in the number of women making their debut as woman wrestlers

A decline in audience size as a whole, and especially a decline of the size of the female audience, has caused a decline in the number of women making their debut as pro wrestlers, in addition to the slump in popularity for women's pro wrestling. Most of the fans of women's pro wrestling were girls from junior high school and high school during the first and second boom of women's pro wrestling. Many girls wished to be women pro wrestlers and many of them became pro wrestlers during that period. But a decline in the size of the female audience caused a decline in the number of women who wanted to be wrestlers. This phenomenon can also be seen in the decreased number of women who make their debut as pro wrestlers. A comparison was made between the women pro wrestlers of Zenjo who made their debut in the period from 1984 to 1994 (called Group A in what follows) and those who made their debut from 1995 to 2004 (called Group B in what follows) ⁽¹³⁾. The year 1984 was the next year after Crush was formed, and the year 1994 was the year of the boom in group competitions. The wrestlers in Zenjo were chosen for this study because the year of entry and retirement of each wrestler can be found in pro wrestling magazines and that makes it easier to find out the history of their careers than is the case with wrestlers in other organizations. The numbers are: 79 wrestlers in Group A and 28 in Group B. The number of Group A is 2.8 times more than for Group B, and this shows how the popularity and interest in women's pro wrestling impacted the number of women making their debut as pro wrestlers.

As described so far, in the year 2004 when many women pro wrestlers were interviewed for this study, women's pro wrestling was in a severe and difficult situation compared to the time before the era of group competitions. This was caused by the slump in popularity of women's pro wrestling and the increase in women's pro wrestling organizations. In spite of these difficulties, some women's pro wrestling organizations held exhibitions in relatively small places around Tokyo every weekend. As of January 2004, there were seven women's pro wrestling organizations and 103 women pro wrestlers in Japan ⁽¹⁴⁾. Many women pro wrestlers belonged to women's pro wrestling organizations, and there were also wrestlers who were wrestling as free-lance wrestlers. Nine out of the 103 wrestlers belonged to men's pro wrestling organizations. These wrestlers fought in matches organized only for women pro wrestlers or fought in mixed-matches ⁽¹⁵⁾.

Japanese women's pro wrestling in the world

Can we find women pro wrestlers who exhibit fights as aggressive as Japanese women pro wrestlers do in other parts of the world? In this section, comparisons are made between women's pro wrestling in the US and Mexico and women's pro wrestling in Japan, by making reference to earlier studies related to women's pro wrestling in the US and Mexico.

Women's pro wrestling in the US

There are some significant differences between Japanese women's pro wrestling and American women's pro wrestling. Mazer (1998) made an observation of the match between the women pro wrestlers, Linda Dallas and Misty Blue. The match was part of an exhibition held by a pro wrestling school in Brooklyn, New York. According to this observation, the two women pro wrestlers were showing their techniques, but the matches were after all designed to show their bodies sexually. The problem in Mazer's description (1998) lies in that it is not clear whether Mazer made this analysis after observing other women's pro wrestling matches or if she presented the match between Linda Dallas and Misty Blue as a typical example of women's pro wrestling in the US. However, I found the same tendency to present women pro wrestlers as sexual subjects by analyzing the matches organized by WWE, a popular pro wrestling organization in the US. The analysis was made of the women's pro wrestling matches appearing in a WWE video *Taboo Tuesday 2004* (World Wrestling Entertainment and Dunn, 2004). Women pro wrestlers are called Divas. In this video, six Divas fought for a championship. Most of them wore high-cut shorts and miniskirts. They wear miniskirts to show their shorts to their audience when they walk or jump over the ropes in the ring. Their pro wrestling involves mostly punching and kicking, and you hardly ever see pro wrestling technique that requires skills. The purpose of their pro wrestling is to exhibit their underwear and bodies, and thus, they do not need to use pro wrestling moves and techniques. For example, there is a scene in which a Diva called Victoria uses her foot to push the neck of another Diva called Trish. I cannot see their underwear on the TV screen, but some audiences near the ring could see it for sure.

There are some wrestlers who exhibit their bodies sexually in women's pro wrestling in Japan. When they do this, they exhibit their bodies in two ways. One way is to wear a sexy costume that helps the wrestlers expose their skin. The other way is to perform in a sexy manner in matches. One

example for the first is the case of Japanese women pro wrestler called Ozaki Mayumi who used to appear mainly in the matches organized by GAEA Japan as of 2004. Japanese women pro wrestlers usually wear costumes that use plenty of cloth so that their bodies are always covered, even if they are very active during matches. However, Ozaki was very often wearing halter-neckline tops. A halter-neckline is “a neckline using a single strap or material that runs from the front of the garment and goes behind the neck or back of the person” (Onuma, Ogimura & Fukai, 1999, p.77). This line is often used for the top of a woman’s bathing costume. It is designed to expose the neckline, shoulders and back of a woman. The main costume that Ozaki was wearing in the match organized by GAEA Japan on March 21, 2004, was this halter-neckline top. A tub-like cloth covered her between her neckline and hips and thin straps ran from her front, and the straps were merely tied up at the back of her neck.

Though she wears such a sexy costume, Ozaki never presents her body or the body of her opponent sexually in her pro wrestling. She is a talented pro wrestler who has mastered various kinds of techniques, and uses chains or other weapons to give a hard time to her opponents. She uses such mean tactics because she is a “heel” wrestler.

Kazama Rumi, a woman pro wrestler with LLPW, used to present sexiness in her performance during matches. During a match versus Endo Mizuki on May 16, 2003, Kazama made Endo sit on her knees in the ring. Endo stretched her arms and looked down. The posture was as if Endo was giving a prayer to Kazama. Kazama put her left foot on Endo’s right hand, and put her right foot on Endo’s left hand. Then, while Kazama step down Endo’s hands, she shook her hips to the beat of claps from the audience, and she pushed her fingers through her hair and put one hand on her hips. This is the “sexy pose” of Kazama. She often shows this pose in her matches, though it is shown only once in each match. She uses many pro wrestling techniques and goes toe-to-toe with other women pro wrestlers, apart from this pose.

Some women pro wrestlers use a technique to exhibit not their bodies but the bodies of other wrestlers sexually. For instance, Tanny Mouse and Miyazaki Yuki of NEO have a technique named “*hazukashi gatame*” (which means, grappling with shame). This technique makes the legs of their opponents spread widely. In the matches organized by NEO, Tanny Mouse and Miyazaki Yuki often appeared as a tag team called “NEO machine-guns,” and they used to exhibit fun pro wrestling for their audience. They mostly use this “grappling with shame” when their opponent wrestlers are of the idol kind of

wrestlers. They use this technique with an assumption that these idol wrestlers will feel embarrassed if their legs are forced to be spread widely, and this is also why this technique has such a name (see Chapter 6 about idols and idol wrestlers). Although these wrestlers are forced to spread their legs widely in front of the audience, it does not mean that these wrestlers are wearing sexy underwear. Actually, women pro wrestlers often spread their legs when they exchange their techniques, thus this is not really something special. Both Tanny Mouse and Miyazaki Yuki have and exhibit a lot more techniques besides “grappling with shame.” Therefore, exhibiting bodies of other wrestlers sexually occupies a very small portion in their whole performance.

In this way, there are cases of exhibiting women’s bodies somewhat sexually in Japanese women’s pro wrestling, but this is limited to certain cases. In fact, there is another genre that aims to exhibit women’s bodies sexually. This exhibition is called a “cat fight” and to be distinguished from women’s pro wrestling. I observed a match of cat fight presented by Cat Panic Entertainment on August 21, 2004. In the match, women cat fighters do hand-to-hand fight without using any pro wrestling technique. The fighters were too busy spreading the legs of their opponents widely to show the opponent’s underwear, and they were also too busy making the brassiere come off their opponents’ breasts to expose them. In the audience, some men were taking photos of those scenes.

Mazer (1998) also points out that the performances of American women pro wrestlers are divided into two categories: feminine and non-feminine. The pro wrestlers belonging to the feminine category speak calmly and keep up with the male wrestlers, while the wrestlers of the non-feminine category are noisy and clearly specify that men are morally corrupted. As described earlier, the fights organized by women’s pro wrestling in Japan are conducted as fights between women, women pro wrestlers’ performances are not defined by the relations with men pro wrestlers. Moreover, the difference in the way of speaking among women pro wrestlers that is pointed out by Mazer (1998) is not found among women pro wrestlers in Japan. The women pro wrestlers in Japan are trained to shout loudly, thus they tend to use loud voices in matches regardless of their characters as wrestlers. The words they use during fights are such as: “bitch,” “wake up!” and “eat this!” In Japanese society, these words are used during fights based on conflict and considered words that women should not use. The details of performances by women pro wrestlers will be discussed in Chapter 6.

Women's pro wrestling in Mexico

Since Levi (2008) mentions in her book about women pro wrestlers in Mexico called *luchadora*, her analysis can be made reference to as a subject of comparison in this section. Levi (2008) points out that the performance by *luchadora* is not sexual, unlike the case with American women pro wrestlers argued by Mazer (1998). Levi (2008) also explains that *luchadora* are divided into a group of good wrestlers and a group of bad wrestlers, and there are three differences between the two groups.

During the era of Crush in 1980, there was a clear schema involving the good wrestlers, Crush, and a group of bad wrestlers called Gokuaku Domei (which means devilish alliance), of which the main wrestler in this group was Dump Matsumoto. Such a schema between good and bad wrestlers has hardly been used since Crush retired from women's pro wrestling in 1989. Moreover, Kamei (2000) argues that such a clear difference between good wrestlers ("baby faces") and bad wrestlers ("heels") is disappearing. She shows the case of a Japanese women pro wrestler, Inoue Takako, as an example.

After Inoue Takako holds the body of her opponent as preparation for a move called "pile-driver," she makes a turn to show it in four directions to her audience. Then, she kicks her opponent's head with her knees. When she exhibits this set performance, she shows the character of a "heel," although she is a "baby-face" normally (Kamei, 2000, p.194).

Inoue changed her role from "baby-face" to "heel" after she left Zenjo in 1999, and she began using a baton-like stun-gun as her weapon. The analysis offered by Levi (2008) is not clear about whether the roles of either good wrestlers or bad wrestlers are fixed without any changes in Mexican women's pro wrestling. In Japanese women's pro wrestling, the roles of "heel" and "baby-face" are not clear, and one wrestler can have the two aspects by altering her personality between "heel" and "baby-face."

According to Levi (2008), the first difference between good and bad wrestlers in Mexican women's pro wrestling is that good wrestlers have an appearance that fits the standard of beauty seen in cities in Mexico; they are thin and more acrobatic than bad wrestlers, whereas bad wrestlers are heavy built, clumsy and powerful. In Japanese women's pro wrestling, too, wrestlers who are heavy and big and who are not likely to be sympathized with by the audience will be given the role of "heel," according to the women

wrestlers. At the same time, Japanese “heel” wrestlers such as Ozaki Mayumi, KAORU and Inoue Takako have firm bodies, and exhibit their varieties of techniques in sexy costumes. This indicates that the shape of a wrestler’s body varies even among the same group, such as a “heel” or “baby-face,” and it is difficult to categorize wrestlers through the shape of their bodies.

As Levi (2008) points out, the second characteristic of bad wrestlers is that they behave in accordance with their passion and anger, and are considered meaner than good wrestlers. The kinds of reasons why “heel” wrestlers do some harmful acts in the ring are not questioned in women’s pro wrestling in Japan. One example of conduct that can be interpreted as a mean act is the case of a match at the exhibition organized by GAEA Japan on September 22, 2002 (field note). Ozaki Mayumi threw a metal-chain at her opponent wrestler, Hamada Ayako, and Hamada dodged it. The chain ended up hitting the referee in the ring. The referee bled from her forehead. Another example took place in a match organized by GAEA Japan on March 21, 2004 (field note). KAORU, who had defaulted due to injury, appeared as a second for Ozaki Mayumi, and she teased the opponent of Ozaki by using her walking crutches and her arms wrapped up in bandages.

The third difference pointed out by Levi (2008) is that bad wrestlers in Mexican women’s pro wrestling clearly indicate that they cannot cooperate with their other team members and this point is emphasized more than is the case with bad wrestlers in men’s pro wrestling. This difference, however, does not fit the case in Japanese women’s pro wrestling. It is possible that when “heel” wrestlers perform they will fight among themselves. However, such discord could not be observed in the matches held between 2002 and 2004. A team called “Dump-system sect” existed as a “heel corps” during the time when the observations were conducted for this study. The Dump-system sect was a part of the women’s pro wrestling organization called JD Star. Dump Matsumoto, who was the fateful enemy of Crush, returned to the world of women’s pro wrestling in 2004 (“Juugo nen,” 2003). She formed a “heel corps” by using some wrestlers at JD Star and fought repeatedly against the “rebels” who were “baby-face” wrestlers. In the matches involving the Dump-system sect, not only wrestlers but also seconds were ganging together and attacking the rebels in ways as nasty as possible. Thus, observation did not find bad wrestlers emphasizing any characteristics suggesting that they cannot cooperate with other team members. Levi (2008) also points out that the emphasis on internal discord among bad wrestlers is more significant among women pro wrestlers than men pro wrestlers, but

this point cannot be discussed since no observation was made of Japanese men's pro wrestling for this study.

Performances presenting women's bodies sexually were observed only in a few cases in Japanese women's pro wrestling, unlike American women's pro wrestling. Moreover, unlike Mexican women's pro wrestling, Japanese women pro wrestlers are not restricted by fights of good wrestlers versus bad wrestlers. Japanese women pro wrestlers present their fights by using a variety of pro wrestling techniques and their bodies in order to entertain their audience. The details of how Japanese women pro wrestlers entertain their audience will be discussed in Chapter 6.

In the next chapter, examinations will be made into how teenage girls decided to become pro wrestlers, what kind of efforts the girls make in order to realize their dreams and what kind of difficulties they face in the process of making their dreams come true.

Notes

- (1) A type of team that consists of two or more wrestlers.
- (2) A color used to signify the identity of a wrestler. The same color is often used for the costume the wrestler wears in matches. The color is carefully chosen so as not to be the same as the image color used by other wrestlers or especially by one's senior wrestlers. Famous image colors are the red-color used by Nagayo Chigusa and the blue-color used by Lioness Asuka of Crush.
- (3) A second is a role to support wrestlers in matches. Work of a second includes guiding between an anteroom and a ring upon wrestlers' enter and exist, cheering during a match, providing water, evacuating audiences during a fight outside a ring. A second also delivers and receives weapons when wrestlers in a match use them. In the period when each organization holds many wrestlers, rookies take a second's job, but around 2004 all the wrestlers take turns to do it.
- (4) Although I used "Zenjyo" in Aiba (2011), I use "Zenjo" to indicate the same organization.
- (5) A type of decorative cloth that hand and flap like a waterfall (Onuma et al., 1999).
- (6) One of the aerial techniques in pro wrestling. A wrestler jumps over at a wrestler outside the ring through the gap between the top rope and the

- second rope. The wrestlers stretch their arms forward when they jump (Kakutou tanteidan, 2001).
- (7) If the second at matches do not guide the audience properly, some audiences will end up making contact with the wrestler(s) during the match, as I did. I was sitting on a chair side of the *hanamichi* and on the third or fourth row from the front on the east side of Korakuen Hall in Tokyo. I was watching the third match by JWP on October 4, 2009. It was a match of JWP (Abe Sachie, KAZUKI and Tojuki Leon) versus Passion Red (Takahashi Nanae, Kana and Passion Hotty (ex-Zenjo wrestler, Hotta Yumiko). Several minutes after the match started, a ring-side battle began, and soon I realized that Hotta was almost throwing Abe Sachie in the direction of where I was sitting. I stood up immediately and dodged by moving to the left side, but the body of Abe came in touch with my left hip. Their second did not alert us at all, so I failed to escape. There was a bruise of 1 cm in diameter on the spot where I had contact with Abe, when I checked it later.
- (8) The word “combat sports” (*kakutougi* in Japanese) cannot be found in the *Koujien*, a Japanese-language dictionary, but its synonymous word *kakugi* is found in the same dictionary (*Koujien*, fifth edition, Shinmura, 1998). It means “a sports game in which players grapple with one to one in order to decide who defeats whom. For example *judo*, *kendo*, *sumo*, *karate* (one of Japanese martial arts) and wrestling.” In the context of this book, “combat sports” in Yuko’s talk means *kakugi*. Other wrestlers also, use this term. “Combative sports,” which I define later in this book (see Chapter 5), are different from “combat sports.”
- (9) The quotations extracted from interviews with the wrestlers are put in speech marks. When I chose to add some words to a sentence to make it more understandable, [] is used.
- (10) When pro wrestlers talk about their audience, they call the audience “customers,” and thus, the term “customers” is used in quotations from interviews.
- (11) In *Redeisu Shuukan Gongu* (May, 14, 2003), the three biggest booms of women’s pro wrestling are introduced as the eras of Beauty Pair, Crush Gals and group competitions, but it also mentions the first boom of women’s pro wrestling as the era when Mach Fumiake was popular. Kamei points out that Mach Fumiake made the name of Zenjo famous in Japan but she did not create an “explosive boom” (2000, p.25) in women’s pro wrestling. Thus, in this book, a boom in women’s pro

- wrestling means an explosive sort of boom and the three biggest booms of women's pro wrestling consist of the eras of Beauty Pair, Crush Gals and group competitions.
- (12) This is a kind of job to decide the pairings of wrestlers for battles in such events as exhibitions and tournaments.
- (13) The analysis is made by using two articles: Hara, Izui & Ikeda (2003) and "Honshi de shika dekinai" (2008).
- (14) The seven women's pro wrestling organizations include: GAEA Japan, Zenjo, A to Z, JWP, LLPW, JD Star and NEO (*Redeisu Shuukan Gongu*, 2004). Aiba (2013) listed up the seven women's pro wrestling organizations including GAEA Japan, Gatōkūnyan, Zenjo, A to Z, JWP, LLPW and NEO. Since I found out that as of January 2004, Gatōkūnyan had not started its business and JD Star still exists, I changed the names of seven organizations here. *Joshi puroresurā zen resurā meikan nisenroku* (A Directory of All Women Pro Wrestlers 2006), "*Ōru karā nisengo nihonjin resurā meikan*" (All Color 2005: a directory of Japanese wrestlers), *Nisenni joshi puroresu ōru sutā sūpā catarogu* (2002 Women Pro Wrestlers All-Star Super Catalog) were used in order to determine the number of pro wrestlers for this study. However, it was not possible to determine exactly the number of women pro wrestlers. One of the reasons for this difficulty is that some women pro wrestlers belong to men's pro wrestling organizations besides the major pro men's wrestling organizations such as Zen nihon puroresu (All Japan Pro Wrestling) and Shin nihon puroresu (New Japan Pro Wrestling) and may not be counted in these materials. Another reason is that it is difficult to find out whether certain pro wrestlers are still active, because some wrestlers retire and then come back repeatedly. The wrestlers for "cat fight" are not counted as women pro wrestlers in this book. Cat fight is a sex show in which women wrestlers wearing skimpy underwear or bathing clothes fight in the ring.
- (15) A mixed-match means a match between two tag teams. Each team consists of one man and one woman or some men and some women. The proportion between men and women should be the same between the teams. Men and women are mixed in a tag team. In many cases, women pro wrestlers fight against women pro wrestlers in their opponent team, but they also fight against men occasionally.

CHAPTER THREE

Dreams of Becoming a Pro Wrestler: Aiming to Pass Tryouts

The occupation of a woman pro wrestler was not something many women wished to consider around the time when the interviews were conducted for this book. Physical strength for executing and receiving techniques is a priority element for women if they want to be a pro wrestler. Moreover, pro wrestlers are required to entertain their audience by showing performances during their fights in the ring, although pro wrestling is presented by a match style. Having physical strength for executing and receiving techniques, and fighting are characteristics and actions that have been encouraged among men in Japan traditionally. This chapter will discuss how and why girls, especially those in their teens, had the dream of becoming a pro wrestler, an occupation of which the characteristics and actions are traditionally encouraged among men. It will also describe what kinds of efforts these girls have made and what kinds of difficulties they have faced in the process of realizing their dream. When girls decide to become pro wrestlers, they need to pass tryouts, a kind of screening process, conducted by pro wrestling organizations. The process of these girls becoming pro wrestlers will be focused on in this chapter. Furthermore, studies are conducted on the procedures of passing the tryout, joining a pro wrestling organization and making a debut as a woman pro wrestler.

Why did girls aspire to be a woman pro wrestler?

Finding out about pro wrestling

Most of the girls who became pro wrestlers learned about women's pro

wrestling at the beginning by watching matches on TV. Some of them found out about women's pro wrestling by watching the matches organized by Zenjo that used to tour all over Japan. Some girls became pro wrestlers because they were influenced by their fathers, brothers or other male relatives in their families. For instance, Sachi learned about pro wrestling through her father. When she was very young, her father was a big fan of Antonio Inoki, a well-known Japanese male pro wrestler at Shin nihon puroresu (New Japan Pro Wrestling). Also at New Japan Pro Wrestling, Sayama Satoru had been very popular as the first Tiger Mask in Japan since 1981. Sachi was at primary school when she saw Tiger Mask for the first time. She said, "I thought he was great when I saw Sayama Satoru's Tiger Mask." She became a big fan of pro wrestling after this incident. "So I started my pro wrestling from Tiger Mask," she says. She liked only Tiger Mask, thus she was watching only men's pro wrestling at the beginning. Later in the year, though, Crush became stars in women's pro wrestling. Then, Sachi became crazy about Crush and yearned to become like them.

Experience in sports before joining a pro wrestling organization

The majority of women pro wrestlers have experience of being involved in sports activities at school before they joined their pro-wrestling organization. Only a few wrestlers had no experience of playing sports before joining a pro wrestling organization.

(1) Confidence in physical strength

When the wrestlers talked about their experiences in playing sports in the interviews for this study, they often talked about that they liked moving their bodies and had in the strength of their bodies. Kiriko, for example, played basketball from around 11 years old and for another three years when she was at junior high school. She says that she liked moving her body and what she could be proud of was having great reflexes. Nana, in another example, played a few sports when she was young. She was doing track-and-field sports in the summer and basketball in winter. When she was at junior high school, she played badminton. She had confidence in the strength of her body and believed that she was physically stronger than other girls. She thought she could use her strength if she began pro wrestling. Maki began playing *kendo* when she was around eight or nine years old. She quit *kendo* when she was around 15 and began playing basketball. She also began track-and-field sports when she was in the first year of high school. She

was good at track-and-field but she already had a dream of becoming a pro wrestler, thus she moved on to doing *karate*. She began *karate* because she wanted to be involved with something where she “could punch and kick in reality, since I really wanted to be in pro wrestling.”

Pro wrestlers in general have a long history of playing sports and many of them do not tell that they were bad at playing sports. However, Rie says that she was bad at sports. “I was not good at the horizontal bar. When I did a broad jump, it became only a jump, it was only a big step. I could do neither a forward roll nor a backward roll, and I could not jump over a vaulting box well either,” she says. “I was very girlish. I had a ribbon on my hair and wore a skirt. I was the type of girl whose interest was only in studying,” she says. However, when she was around 12 years old, she suddenly became a fan of women’s pro wrestling and was interested in becoming a woman pro wrestler. That changed her life. Moreover, one day she went to cheer her younger brother, who was in a *judo* match and she suddenly thought she wanted “to do *judo*.” Presumably, a girl who had no interest in sports suddenly became interested in doing *judo* because she was under the influence of women’s pro wrestling. Soon after she started *judo*, Rie succeeded in doing forward rolls, and she came second place in a *judo* tournament. She decided then to continue with *judo*. However, her “interest in pro wrestling became stronger” when she was around 14 years old. She wanted to join a pro wrestling organization as soon as she graduated from junior high school, but her parents strongly objected to this idea. Thus, she gave up the idea and entered a high school. There was no *judo* club for women in the high school, but she asked one of her senior friends from her junior high school to arrange so that she could join a *judo* club for men. She joined a pro wrestling organization after she graduated from high school, though her parents were still against the idea.

(2) Not in favor of playing sports

There are some pro wrestlers who had never liked playing sports, yet they became pro wrestlers after making many efforts towards realizing their dreams. Sanae had the dream of becoming a pro wrestler when she was in the sixth grade of elementary school, and she started doing weight training. She was a member of *kendo* clubs when she was at junior high school. When she was at high school, she also started going to a *dojo*, where she could learn *judo*, *karate* and other combat sports. However, she “never liked playing sports from the beginning.” Because she did not have good reflexes,

her “marks in physical education in school were always two or three out of five.” She really wanted to be a pro wrestler and this was only reason why she was doing *kendo* and other combat sports.

Sanae neither liked nor favored doing sports but she kept at it because she wanted to be a pro wrestler. Some women became pro wrestlers without having almost any experience of playing sports. Sayaka is a good example of such a woman. She “used to hate sports” and moving her body. Therefore, she believes that she is not really suited to pro wrestling. She still hates moving her body. She became a member of a volleyball club when she was at junior high school but she quit in six months. She joined the club because everyone she knew was doing it and it looked interesting. Thus, she was not really eager to do so. Many pro wrestlers chose pro wrestling as their occupation because they like playing sports or moving their bodies, as well as having confidence in their physical strength. It is rare that someone who hates playing sports so much becomes a pro wrestler. In the case of Sayaka, she was not only no good at playing sports, but she could not even manage a few push-ups in her tryout. This was partly because she did not have much physical strength. However, she made her debut as a pro wrestling after all. A certain level of physical ability is essential for becoming a pro wrestler, but at the same time pro wrestlers are also required to have a certain level of ability at performing to attract their audience. This means that even women who hate playing sports and do not have physical strength still have the chance of becoming pro wrestlers if they are trained properly after joining pro wrestling organizations.

Many pro wrestlers liked moving their bodies since they were young, and many of them played sports in sport clubs. This point relates to their motivation for becoming pro wrestlers, which will be discussed in a later section.

The charms for girls of women's pro wrestling

In analyzing the interviews with women pro wrestlers, it was found that pro wrestling comprises of three factors attracting these women when they were approximately in their teens. One of the factors is that women who appear in pro wrestling have various types of bodies. The second factor is that women pro wrestlers perform by moving their bodies in various ways. Finally, the third factor is that pro wrestling is an occupation. Furthermore, pro wrestlers who have all of these factors appear gorgeous and attractive to some girls.

(1) Various types of bodies

The bodies of women pro wrestlers come in various types and even girls with big bodies will not be excluded from women's pro wrestling. This point will be discussed in more detail again in Chapter 4. In contrast, the size of one's body is not a component for an ideal female body in daily lives. According to a study among high school students conducted by Fujita (2005), both male and female students in the study perceived the male body as tall and big and the female body as short and thin.

The perception is very different in women's pro wrestling. Tall and big women are highly valued as they make for a good show, and their actions look big when they are executing techniques. In the era of Crush, for example, one of the criteria for selection for Zenjo was that a woman should be 160 cm tall or more to be a pro wrestler.

When Yuko was at elementary school, for example, Beauty was very popular and she watched them on TV without strong interests. She did it a lot not because she liked it so much but mainly because many of her friends were watching. She had a big body, thus she was often teased that she should be a pro wrestler. However, she "used to think that it looked painful and didn't appear interesting." When she was at high school, Crush were popular on TV. She "happened to see them on TV and got hooked." When she saw Crush on TV, "they looked very cool." Yuko says, "Then, I must have thought that I wished to be like them." She thought so because she "was always big and teased as a big child, thus this had become a complex." She continues by saying that in pro wrestling, "even big women can fight well and hard, and they looked gorgeous. They looked as if they were shining and attractive to me." Women pro wrestlers with big bodies attract girls with big bodies like Yuko.

(2) Performances using the body in various ways

The performances exhibited by women pro wrestlers with their bodies have various kinds of aspects. Some of the pro wrestlers who were interviewed were attracted by the strength exhibited by women pro wrestlers when they were girls. Rei, Yumiko and Sachi talked about the strength of Crush as one of the attracting features. The pro wrestling that Rei saw for the first time in her life was the match of Crush versus Gokuaku Domei on TV when she was an elementary school student. Both members of Crush were bleeding but fighting against the members of Gokuaku Domei. Rei then thought Crush were "cool for fighting hard against Gokuraku Domei

and their great fighting is not like women.” Although Rei was still young, she believed somehow “women are weak I thought, so watching strong women made me really happy.” After this incident, she watched many other women’s pro wrestling matches on TV, and also she used to go to see the exhibitions when Zenjo toured near the home of her grandparents. When Yumiko was an elementary school student, Zenjo came to perform near her home. Yumiko did not have much interest in pro wrestling, but one of her friends was a big fan of Crush, thus she was taken to the exhibition by the friend. Yumiko went along with the friend wondering what pro wrestling was. Crush were extremely popular at that time and there were a lot of people at the exhibition. Yumiko thought, “how come they can fight so hard though they are women,” and she became hooked on pro wrestling by watching this match. She thought Crush were “cool.” After this, she bought magazines that contained some information about Crush and listened to the songs by Crush. She thought they were “cool” more and more.

Rei says that she realized that pro wrestling would help her express something that existed within her, as she was attracted to Crush who presented strength. Rei also had a dream of becoming a children’s nurse before she became a pro wrestler. However, after wondering which she should choose, she decided to become a pro wrestler. The reason for choosing pro wrestling was because she thought, “pro wrestling is the thing by which I can express who I am.” She believed that she could express only the quiet and easygoing parts of her character if she became engaged in other occupations, while pro wrestling would help her to express a “different something” in her. She had realized that “another I,” who was different from the normal her, existed within her. Meanwhile, the normal her was not as good as whom she wanted to be. As Rei describes herself, she was not clever, and she was not good at studying when she was at school. She was a reserve position in a sports club in her junior high school. There was no sports club at her high school. She did not have anything she could be proud of, but she was thinking at that time, “I want to do something to try my ability. I am not such an incapable person.” She thought then, “What I am good at is maybe pro wrestling, and pro wrestling is the one thing that can help me improve and progress.” She believed that pro wrestling was the one thing that would help her show her “different self” and give her confidence about herself. Fortunately, she had confidence in her physical strength. She thinks now that using her body “suited her” rather than using her brain. She says that she is enjoying presenting her “different self” through pro wrestling now.

Rie says that gorgeousness was not only the reason why she was attracted to women's pro wrestling, but she believed "women's pro wrestling had so many things I did not have." She listed some examples. One of them is the strength exhibited by Dynamite Kansai, a (then) JWP pro wrestler. Rie was brought up in a girlish way. She used to learn calligraphy, flower arrangement and tea ceremony. She was scared even of tiny puddles on the surface of a road. Rie was attracted to the strength of Dynamite Kansai as "she was a woman but appeared as if she was a cool man."

Sanae, on the other hand, was attracted to pro wrestling because women pro wrestlers entertain their audience by exhibiting performances using their bodies. When she was in the sixth grade of elementary school, she went to see an exhibition organized by Zenjo. Before the first match began, a woman pro wrestler called Kazuko appeared in the match held as a curtain-raiser. Though Kazuko was only an opening act, she was very good at exciting the audience. Sanae describes Kazuko as "a person like an amusement park." Kazuko amused, scared and moved the audience. Kazuko did all of these things only by herself. Sanae enjoyed the taste of excitement as if she could not help rise up from the chair. She "got goose bumps, though I was a child." She cannot remember the other wrestlers and even whom Kazuko was fighting against. But Sanae can still remember the scene of Kazuko in a ring-side battle. Sanae decided to become a pro wrestler after this match, which was the first pro-wrestling match of her life. Sanae had a hankering for Kazuko as an entertainer.

Women pro wrestlers often exhibit acrobatic movements in their matches. This feature of women's pro wrestling also attracted Rie and Mami. Mami happened to watch women's pro wrestling with her friend when she was in the second grade of high school. It was during the summer holidays. When she watched it, she thought, "Unbelievable, and I want to do this." The matches she saw were organized by Zenjo. The impression she received from watching the matches was "Unbelievable!" as cute and ordinary-looking women exhibited their strong fighting spirit and other wrestlers showed acrobatic movements. Some wrestlers looked outstanding, but she remembered all of the wrestlers as amazing people.

In pro wrestling matches, "heels" often appear. The "heels" are the pro wrestlers who usually ignore the rules and exhibit vile actions. Rie liked Ozaki Mayumi, a "heel" women pro wrestler, because Rie had been brought up and thought of as a quiet, obedient and good child, and she probably "had a hankering for something bad." She was attracted to women's pro wrestling

as a world where she could do something that she would not do if she was not a pro wrestler.

(3) An occupation using the body

Pro wrestlers are paid for conducting pro wrestling. Some girls were attracted to pro wrestling as an occupation. Maki always believed that earning money by using her own body is something cool and this was why she liked *sumo*. She always thought that she would be a *sumo* wrestler if she was a man. However, women cannot be *sumo* wrestlers. Therefore, she believed that, as a woman, pro wrestling is the job that would help her in realizing her dream of earning money by using her own body.

Yoshie is another example of someone who believed that she could be economically independent if she became a pro wrestler. She watched women's pro wrestling for the first time in her life when she just happened to be watching TV with her older brother. She says, "It was a match involving Devil Masami versus Jaguar Yokota. My older brother was supporting Jaguar Yokota so I was supporting Devil Masami. It was the first women's pro wrestling I ever watched." Several years later she saw Crush on TV. She says, "I also noticed Devil Masami and Jaguar Yokota on TV. I started watching pro wrestling matches on TV while thinking that I remembered seeing these wrestlers in the past. At that time I thought I already wanted to be a pro wrestler, too." Around this time, she was forced to live with her relatives for family reasons, and she was in a situation where she needed to support herself economically once she graduated from junior high school. When she watched women's pro wrestling, she thought, "I'll pay my way by women's pro wrestling."

(4) The gorgeousness of women's pro wrestling

Women's pro wrestling presents pro wrestling as something gorgeous through the three factors already described. Some girls were attracted to this gorgeousness in women's pro wrestling; for example, Crush, who created a boom in women's pro wrestling used to sing songs before their matches, sold records and appeared in magazines for idols, on music TV programs, on radio and in TV dramas ("Kurasshu gyaruzu," 2003).

Crush were active in the entertainment business outside of pro wrestling, too, and this fascinated and attracted Sawako and Sachi, for example. When Sawako was a child, Beauty became popular. She thought Beauty was great and watched them as if they were in another world. Thus, she did not think

that she wanted to be a woman pro wrestler like Beauty at that time. She watched Crush on TV when she was a junior high school student and she was attracted to them. She thought they were cool. Crush became her favorite idols, and then she became their fan. Crush released songs around this time, and Sawako says, “Crush were different from other singers” and they looked “strong and cool.” Crush had strength and coolness that she could not find as qualities in other singers, and these qualities attracted Sawako.

Sachi shares the same opinion with Sawako. Crush were very cool for her. She says that one of the factors composing coolness is strength. According to Sachi, another factor that made Crush very attractive was that they were not only wrestling but also singing.

Meanwhile, Sachi explains the reason why she wanted to be a woman pro wrestler:

I was a tomboy and used to play with boys outside, I used to do pro... a kind of pro wrestling. So, how do I explain? So, let me see, it was, kind of suited to me, I think.

She was fond of doing something active and used to play with boys doing something similar to the pro wrestling of Crush, thus she thought she also could do pro wrestling. Sachi has a long history of playing sports. She was especially fond of playing hard sports before she joined a pro wrestling organization. However, the important point here is the fact that Sachi was attracted not only to pro wrestling but also to Crush, wrestlers who sang. This indicates not only that she wanted to be a woman pro wrestler because she could use her own characteristics effectively but also that she could be someone like Crush, whom she yearned for through pro wrestling.

The gorgeousness of women’s pro wrestling was exhibited by other women pro wrestlers even in the troubled time for women’s pro wrestling after Crush retired. Mika, for instance, happened to see the words “women’s pro wrestling” in a TV schedule for an evening when she was 11 or 12 years old, and she happened to record the program. This is how she watched women’s pro wrestling for the first time in her life. When she watched it, she “was shocked” and thought “simply that it was interesting.” She says, “I wanted to watch the show next week, and then I wanted to watch it again and then again. I was hooked on women’s pro wrestling more and more.” She had had a prejudice against women’s pro wrestling before she watched the recorded program on TV. She says, “I had imagined that women’s pro

wrestling was something scary to watch and something short-haired, man-nish women were involved with. My understanding was only at this level.” However, the women’s pro wrestling she watched was different from what she had imagined.

They dressed up nicely. They looked kind of gorgeous, and some were beautiful and some looked scary, and some showed strong characters and looked very interesting. Yes, their costumes were stunning anyway.

This is what she thought when she watched women’s pro wrestling for the first time. Mika was first attracted to the costume of women pro wrestlers that were “shining and flapping very much.” She was also attracted to pro wrestlers who had long hair, “looked feminine” and “had a strong aura.” Mika’s example indicates that women pro wrestlers who were characterized by a quality that was different from Crush also had the charms to attract young girls. Yoshie and Maki were also cases of girls who were attracted to the gorgeousness of women pro wrestlers, such as Devil Masami and the Mexican women pro wrestlers.

Difficulties in becoming a pro wrestler

Consent from parents

Even if girls decide to become pro wrestlers and wish to join pro wrestling organizations, there is a hurdle waiting for them: to have consent from their parents. Especially if girls who have just graduated from junior high school or high school wish to be pro wrestlers, they are required to have consent from their parents before they join pro wrestling organizations, because they are minors.

Many of the pro wrestlers who were interviewed faced objections from their parents when they presented their wish to their parents, albeit different degree. Among the parents, Kiriko’s mother was different. She supported Kiriko without hesitation at all for her daughter to become a pro wrestler. Kiriko had expected to face an objection from her mother if she told her that she was going to take a tryout for a pro wrestling organization. However, her mother saw the names of famous pro wrestlers on the list of the judges for the test, and offered to come to the tryout with Kiriko because she wanted to meet these judges. Since Kiriko had become a fan of women’s pro wrestling, they had started to watch women’s pro wrestling on TV together. Her

mother did not expect her daughter to pass the test, thus she did not think too seriously and went to meet the judges with her daughter. Kiriko realized after she passed the test that she passed partly because of her mother's appearance on that day. She believes that her mother's appearance gave an impression to the judges that her mother had given Kiriko consent to join pro wrestling already.

Although some parents were clearly opposed to the idea of their daughters becoming pro wrestlers, they believed that their daughters would not pass the tryout anyway, thus they allowed their daughters to try out for it until they would give it up ⁽¹⁾. Masumi's parents were not an exception. When Masumi told her parents that she wanted to be a woman pro wrestler, her parents did not take it seriously. However, when Masumi began talking in detail about the tryout, her parents started to oppose the idea seriously. Masumi did not give up becoming a pro wrestler, thus she ended up having arguments with her parents. Even after these arguments, Masumi did not change her mind. Then her parents told her, "Suit yourself!" and she "went to the tryout without worrying about them." The reason behind her mother's objection was that Masumi would get injured from doing something as hard as pro wrestling since she had played no sport at high school. Her father was opposed to the idea for a different reason. His reason was that women pro wrestlers appeared in bathing suits in front of many people, they got excited and made loud noises, and, of course, they got injured.

The image Masumi's father described reflects the image some people in Japanese society have about women's pro wrestling. Certainly, women pro wrestlers in general wear a costume called a "bathing suit." The "bathing suit" can expose their skin. Wearing a bathing suit can be interpreted as exhibiting the body for sexual purposes. It is true that women pro wrestlers were thought of as sexual spectacles in the early period of women's pro wrestling. Women pro wrestlers, however, expose their body not only because they want to be seen as sexy, but also because they want to exhibit their upper arms, thighs and abdominal muscles that are well developed because of their training. Moreover, their costumes are not only of the sexy type. They are designed in various types in order to exhibit the individuality of each wrestler. Thus, Masumi's father's knowledge about the costume was very narrow.

It is true that women pro wrestlers shout loudly when they pull off techniques on other wrestlers, and they often shout things such as "Let's go!", "Eat this!" and "Damn, bitch!" at each other. Women pro wrestlers usually

shout in order to maximize their own power, attract the audience's attention and show what is going on to the audience who are sitting far from the ring. Thus, their screams and shouts have genuine reasons (see Chapter 6). Many wrestlers actually continue to do wrestling while they have pains and injuries. However, they are not doing pro wrestling because they want to be injured. They get injured and injured badly sometimes partly because, for example, their bodies are not ready for executing and receiving big techniques that have high destructive power, or because their timing for a break fall is off.

Sanae's parents opposed to Sanae's wish to become a pro wrestler for a reason that was a little different from other parents. Sanae's mother believed that Sanae would never be able to be a wrestler since Sanae had bad reflexes since her childhood. Her mother also wanted Sanae to learn playing the piano and ballet, and she wanted her to dress up like a doll and wanted her to be very girlish. Sanae's dream conflicted with her mother's dream, thus she opposed to Sanae. Sanae's father was a fan of pro wrestling and he knew that the world of pro wrestling was very severe. Thus, his attitude was, "if you can do it, do it; though it is impossible for you."

Some parents were absolutely opposed to the idea of their daughters becoming pro wrestlers. However, some girls became pro wrestlers by overcoming the strong opposition of their parents.

Sawako wanted to join a pro wrestling organization as soon as she graduated from junior high school. Her father strongly opposed to the idea. Her father opposed Sawako partly because he was worrying about how their relatives, who happened to live near them, would react to the whole situation. He seemed to be afraid that if his daughter became a pro wrestler, their relatives would criticize him for allowing his daughter to take up such a barbaric occupation. The irony was that Sawako's relatives were always teasing her since she was at kindergarten that she should be a pro wrestler, because Sawako was taller than the children of her age. Therefore, when she was told by her father that their relatives might criticize him if she became a pro wrestler, Sawako became angry at her father and said that their relatives were the ones who used to tell her to be a pro wrestler. Another reason for her father's objection was that Sawako was his only daughter and he was hoping that she would graduate from high school and become a bride one day. Sawako also thinks that her father opposed her dream partly because he was infirm. He was worried that if she became a pro wrestler, the occupation might harm her health, too.

Sawako's father succeeded in convincing her in the end and she finally went to high school. After she became a high school student, she was still telling her father about her dream, and she also asked her father's permission to take a tryout for Zenjo. However, her father would not allow her to do so. Sawako then made a decision that she would not talk to her father until her father gave her permission to take a tryout. This began around October, when pro wrestling organizations begin recruiting candidates for their tryouts. Her parents had treated Sawako very kindly and her relationship with her parents was very close, but the situation in which Sawako and her father had no conversation at all lasted for several months. At last, on the day after the tryout for the year, her father told Sawako, "Why don't you take tryouts?" for pro wrestling organizations. Sawako thinks that her father allowed her to take the tryouts in the end because he was suffering from not being able to have any conversation with her, but also it was probably because her mother advised him that she would not pass the tests anyway, since there were so many applicants around that time.

In this way, many parents do not agree with the idea of their daughters becoming pro wrestlers. Rather, some parents oppose to the extent that they fight with their daughters to make them change their minds about becoming pro wrestlers. In spite of this situation, many girls and women became pro wrestlers by following their own will.

Competitive tryouts

When women's pro wrestling was growing in popularity, candidates for tryouts had to go through a narrow gate to join women's pro wrestling organizations (note: only Zenjo existed as an organization for women's pro wrestling before 1986). Women's pro wrestling was a very popular occupation among girls at junior high schools and high schools around that time, and many of the girls applied for the tests. The first stage of the tryout was applicant screening. Zenjo set a bar for eliminating girls whose height was under 160 cm (Ozaki, 1990; Cuty Suzuki, 1996; Shiono, 1985). Because of this bar, for example, Ozaki Mayumi, whose height was under 160cm, was eliminated from this first stage and she could not join Zenjo ⁽²⁾. Only those who passed the first stage of applicant screening could go on to the test held at Fuji TV.

Why did they go to Fuji TV? Fuji TV was broadcasting the matches of Zenjo on TV around this time, and these matches were getting a high viewing rate. This is why Fuji TV was helping Zenjo. Fuji TV had been broad-

casting women's pro wrestling on TV and the program had been popular because of Beauty since 15 July, 1977. The program was called "Zennihon joshi puroresu, *Makkana Seishun*" (Zenjo, blazing youth-flashing), and used to come on the air between 7:00 and 7:30 p.m. every Friday. It is also presumed that Zenjo had an extremely large number of applicants around that time and could not offer proper space for the test at their facility. The tryouts for new pro wrestlers of Zenjo were held at Fuji TV until 1990.

At the tryout for new pro wrestlers for Zenjo held in 1977, when Beauty was enjoying great popularity, Zenjo had 600 applicants for the year and only 9 applicants passed the final test. The applicants who passed the first stage of applicant screening were sift through three stages of physical fitness tests. These three stages consisted of: first, running inside the studio of Fuji TV, jumping along in a squatting position and jumping rope; second, rolling, a bridge ⁽³⁾ and push-ups; and third, jumping, sit-ups, exercises with dumbbells and lifting barbells ("Zennihon," 1995).

In 1986, when Crush were very popular, the number of applicants was as high as 2,500. Many of the girls who wanted to be women pro wrestlers took the tryout after preparing carefully. Then what kinds of preparations did the girls do to pass the test to become pro wrestlers? ⁽⁴⁾

(1) Two groups and their preparation

A comparative study was conducted into how the interviewees prepared for their tryouts before they joined their organization. The interviewees were divided into two groups; those who made their debut between 1983 and 1994 as the first group; and, those who made their debut after 1995 as the second group. The period for the first group is the time when women's pro wrestling was booming, and the period for the second group is the time when the popularity of women's pro wrestling was in decline. The period between 1983 and 1994 includes the period when Crush were enjoying popularity (from 1983 to 1989) and the boom in group competitions (from 1993 to 1994). The popularity of women's pro wrestling began showing a decline in 1995.

The difference between these two groups in their preparation for the tryouts was that the wrestlers in the first group prepared for a longer time than the wrestlers in the second group. It was also found that only one candidate in the first group passed the tryout and became a pro wrestler without making any preparation for the tests, while four candidates in the second group passed the test without any preparation at all.

(2) Preparing for a long period

Yoshie and Sanae prepared for their tryout for the longest time among the interviewees in this study. They belong to the first group. There are no other pro wrestlers who prepared as much as they did, and the case of Yoshie will be introduced as an example.

Yoshie decided to become a pro wrestler when she was around 12-13 years old, and she prepared for the tryout systematically. She started with sit-ups and push-ups, and decided to increase the number of times she could do these exercises one-by-one every day, and before she graduated from elementary school she was capable of doing 50 repetitions for both exercises. When she was a junior high school student, she decided to try combat sports. She was interested in starting *karate* because Crush were doing it, but *karate* club was not available at her school and was unwillingly to join an *aikido* club. When she was in the second grade of junior high school, she found a *karate dojo* in her town. Her daily routine around this time was to get up at five every day, go running, and then exercise at *kata* by doing a series of *karate* forms. At school, she used to sleep in classes and in the breaks between classes, and used to wake up and join in only during physical education classes. She retired from the *aikido* club in October when she was in the third grade of junior high school. Yoshie thought her body would get out of shape if she did not do anything, thus she then joined a free *judo* school organized by a police station near her home. She was the only junior high school student at the school, thus she used to teach smaller children while she was being given lessons by elderly policemen.

(3) Passing the tryout without any preparation

Among those interviewees in the second group who did not make special preparations but passed the tryout, two wrestlers played sports and were involved in other activities. Aoi was practicing *kendo* at school. Yumiko was engaged in a job teaching swimming to children. Meanwhile, Tomoko and Masumi were not playing any sports and were also not involved in physical activities. Because of this, Tomoko especially had difficulties in keeping up with the training after she joined her pro wrestling organization. Regardless of the differences among them, none of the four did any exercises such as *judo*, *karate* or squats ⁽⁵⁾ many applicants believed necessary. These sports and exercises were considered essential for pro wrestling at the time when women's pro wrestling was booming. In spite of this, these four managed to pass the tryout tests to become pro wrestlers because they took the tests

at the right time. During the second group's era, which was after 1995, the number of applicants for the tryouts had declined and pro wrestling organizations were struggling to find talented trainees. Thus, they changed their policies regarding their methods of recruiting trainees and began taking any candidates who had a strong desire to be pro wrestlers and observed how they performed in training.

The wrestlers in the first group prepared for a longer time than the wrestlers in the second group for their tryouts. Many women pro wrestlers realized the dreams of their girlhood by making certain efforts before passing their tryouts.

In the next chapter, discussion will be conducted as to how the bodies of the women who passed the tryout and joined pro wrestling organizations changed. I will focus on how these women, who overcame various difficulties to become pro wrestlers, developed their bodies for pro wrestling and how they perceive their own bodies.

Notes

- (1) Maho's mother opposed the idea of Maho becoming a pro wrestler, but from the interviews it was not clear how much her mother objected to the idea.
- (2) Ozaki became a pro wrestler after she passed the tryout for Japan Women's Pro Wrestling, in which the height of applicants was not one of the screening standards.
- (3) In order to form a bridge with your body, you lie down on your back and lift your hips upward so that you hold your head and trunk of your body (Yahoo! jisho).
- (4) The interviews with Ryoko and Sachi did not indicate how much preparation they made for their tryouts, and thus they were excluded from the analysis of this chapter.
- (5) A bending and stretching exercise for your knees while keeping your upper body straight (Yahoo! jisho).

CHAPTER FOUR

Transformation of the Body for Pro Wrestling

This chapter will focus on how women who want to be pro wrestlers have attained a body suitable for pro wrestling, and how they perceive their own bodies. Kamei (2000) and Kawashima (1999) have studied earlier how women have developed their bodies so that they could conduct pro wrestling. The study by Kawashima (1999) describes briefly how candidates go through procedures from tryouts for joining a pro wrestling organization to professional tests (hereinafter pro tests) for becoming pro wrestlers. However, Kawashima's study does not describe how the candidates feel and perceive the process and the changes taking place in their bodies. Kamei's study (2000) describes in detail how candidates join their pro wrestling organization and how they make their debut by using interviews conducted with one pro wrestler as an example. The description is written in a more detailed way than Kawashima's study. However, Kamei's study also does not describe how pro wrestlers perceive the changes to their own bodies when they are transformed through special training, by comparing before and after they join their pro wrestling organization. Moreover, Kawashima (1999) mentions how the candidates are trained and what kinds of stress the trainees have before they pass their pro tests to become pro wrestlers, but this description cannot be satisfactory. Therefore, this chapter will focus on the points that are not illuminated by Kamei (2000) and Kawashima (1999). This study conducts interviews with 25 pro wrestlers, while the study by Kamei (2000) conducted an interview with only one pro wrestler. This study will demonstrate the commonality and diversity of physical transformation through its interviews.

In terms of two aspects, this study will analyze the transformation of the

bodies of women pro wrestlers. The first aspect is to explore how women pro wrestlers perceive the changes in their bodies in the process of joining a pro wrestling organization to pass a pro test to be pro wrestlers. The second aspect is to consider what kinds of images of the ideal female body women pro wrestlers have once they attain a body suited to pro wrestling. As will be described later, the physical type of many women pro wrestlers' deviates from the "thin" body that many girls and women in between their teens and twenties idealize in modern Japanese society. This study will focus on how women pro wrestlers who have bodies that deviate from the ideal female body perceive their own bodies. If women pro wrestlers evaluate their bodies positively, they will show the possibility to be free from the "thin" body image that is equal to the ideal female body that is a dominant value especially for girls and women in their teens and twenties. The bodies of women pro wrestlers will be discussed in order to investigate this possibility. Prior to the analysis, the physical characteristics of women pro wrestlers will be described in the next section.

Physical characteristics of women pro wrestlers

The bodies of women pro wrestlers are extremely diverse. Some are small but well-muscled, and some are tall and thin without much muscle. Some wrestlers grow too big to move quickly, while the sales point of some wrestlers is their thin and well-toned bodies. Such diverseness reflects the point that the figures of their bodies are important means to express their own image. Especially, the wrestlers who have transformed their bodies into fat and giant forms stand out from the rest. For example, Aja Kong is 100 kg (GAEA Japan pamphlet 2002) and Eagle Sawai is 120 kg (LLPW pamphlet 2002).

Not all women pro wrestlers become enormous. According to a calculation made with the wrestlers interviewed for this study using the BMI (Body Mass Index) ⁽¹⁾ of the wrestlers aged between 20 and 29, 70.6 % (12 out of 17 wrestlers) of them fall into the category of obesity as their BMI was 25 and over. On the other hand, only 7.0 % of Japanese women aged from 20 to 29 falls in the category of obesity (Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, 2003). This indicates that the bodies of women pro wrestlers are very different from women in Japan in general.

Moreover, a difference in body size is apparent even among the wrestlers. For example, in a film titled *GAEA Girls* (Longinotto and Williams, 2000), when Sato, who was a trainee joined GAEA Japan, and her senior

wrestler did squats, two bodies were in contrast. Sato's legs had neither fat nor muscle and were very thin. On the other hand, the thighs of her senior wrestler were thick and big. We can predict that a body like Sato's will be transformed later by intensive training. The following section will describe how girls attain bodies suited to pro wrestling after they join a pro wrestling organization, based on interviews made with women pro wrestlers.

The process of physical transformation from trainees to rookies

Training from just after joining an organization to taking a pro test

Days of hard training until a pro test wait for the candidates who have passed tryouts and joined their pro wrestling organization. Once trainees pass pro tests to become pro wrestlers, their pro wrestling organization sets a schedule for their debut match. The debut matches serve the purpose of announcing the birth of rookies to their audience. Thus, passing a pro test is a big hurdle for the trainees.

The women who have just joined pro wrestling organizations are called *renshusei* (meaning trainees) in Japanese. It is too difficult for trainees to do a pro wrestling break fall and other techniques at the beginning, and thus they spend their first several months for improving their basic physical fitness (Kamei, 2000). Once their basic physical fitness improves, they are allowed to learn and practice a break fall, rope work—movements using ropes of the ring—and pro wrestling techniques. Then they move to the stage of actual practice of pro wrestling, called sparring for a pro test. After they pass a pro test, they still continue sparring as preparation for their debut matches.

As described already, women's pro wrestling was in a boom up to the first half of the 1990's and thus it had many trainees. During this period, trainees spent a long time improving their basic physical fitness, and then they moved to the next stages, such as practicing technique. This situation changed after 1995 when group competitions were exhibited. The number of new candidates for becoming pro wrestlers was in decline. Many pro wrestling organizations tried to make their trainees' debut after a short period of preparation. This is because the number of wrestlers in each organization decreased and the combination of wrestlers in matches became similar, and thus the organizations were required to increase the number of pro wrestlers who could fight in matches to warm up their exhibitions. When trainees were expected to make their debuts early, they were first trained to improve their basic physical fitness. Then, they were trained to practice a break fall,

rope work and pro wrestling techniques by mixing all this together.

Trainees usually had to be engaged in exercises that were designed to improve their basic physical fitness from morning to night before their break fall practices began. Basic physical fitness is muscle training that includes the bridge, push-ups, sit-ups and squats. Some interviewees for this study told of how hard the exercises for basic physical fitness were. Kiriko remembers clearly what happened to her and her co-trainees on the first day of training. On the first day, they were very nervous and greeted the senior members in the organization. The senior wrestlers greeted them back and one of the members “told us, you do 500 squats now. Huh? What did you say just now? That’s what I thought.” Kiriko could not believe what they were told to do but had no choice but doing the squats. She wondered then if training by doing 500 squats would be conducted every day, and it was. There were days when she could not even move her legs after training. She had pains all over her body because of the training for basic physical fitness, and she had difficulty moving her body every day. When she was a trainee, she was living in a room on the second floor of a three-storey dormitory building. She used to have bad muscle pains and could not go up steps in a normal posture. Thus, she used to “crawl up and down the stairs (laughs).”

One of special exercises for pro wrestlers in the training for basic physical fitness is to strengthen the neck. Trainees are required to strengthen their necks because they have to do various kinds of break fall. Especially when wrestlers have a back break fall, they need to pull their own neck upright to prevent their head from hurting, and thus, strengthening the neck is essential for wrestlers. To train at strengthening the neck, they put one trainee on her stomach while doing a bridge with her body, and then they do an exercise called *kubioshi* (which means pushing the neck)⁽²⁾. Akiko describes the physical pain caused by the training for strengthening her neck:

I could not move to a sitting posture from my bed... even when I was eating, I could not bend down my head. I could not pick food with chopsticks, so I’d use my hand like this (showing a gesture of supporting her head with her hand) and eat (laughs). I could not lower my head unless I supported my head with my hand. Because it was so painful.

Once the trainees became good at managing the basic physical fitness, they began break fall training. A break fall works in general to absorb the damage in someone’s move, and is basically categorized into three styles:

forward rolling break fall, forward break fall and back break fall (Kamei, 2000). In pro wrestling, receiving the opponent's technique is fundamental, and thus, it is extremely important to master any break fall. A forward break fall and a back break fall are often used in pro wrestling training. A forward break fall is a posture taken in order to soften the damage to the bodies of wrestlers when the wrestler falls forward. When wrestlers fall forward, they hit the mattress on the floor hard by forming their arms in a kind of triangle shape. This action reduces the impact on the rest of the body hitting the mattress on the floor. It is difficult to do a forward break fall from a standing position at the early stage of training, and therefore, trainees practice doing the forward break fall from a stance of being on their knees.

Rie says that she used to have bleeding from her elbows every day as she practiced the forward break fall. She had to do break fall practice 100 times continuously every day, so she had "chafing on the elbows and nothing could stop it. It is probably because the elbows are sticking out most." When the forward break fall is performed, pro wrestlers stick their elbows out to make a kind of triangle shape with their arms. This is why their elbows get injured most. "We had to do that practice every day, so we had no chance to have any recovery in that spot. It bled every day, so it, really, never got a chance of recovery." "I don't remember when it became better." "We all have scars on our elbows," and she laughed.

In practicing a break fall, trainees repeat the actions of falling forward and backward from their standing position about 100 times and thus they tend to have abnormalities on their legs too. Sachi recalls what happened to her:

In the beginning, almost suddenly... purple, kinds of dark purple bruises on my legs, on the whole of my legs. Because we hit our legs, you know, bang! (making a nose of hitting), because, our bodies are not used to that, you know.

The skin of the trainees' bodies changed to dark purple, but the practicing of break fall continued.

A back break fall is more difficult to learn than a forward break fall. A back break fall is more difficult because trainers are expected to fall backwards to where they cannot see. For a back break fall, wrestlers stretch both their arms horizontally and pull their head upright as if they are looking at their navel, while slamming their arms on the mattress on the floor in order to absorb the impact. The practice of a back break fall begins by taking a

posture of being on one's back with the head erect and slamming both arms on the mattress on the floor. In the pro wrestling film *GAEA Girls* (Longinotto and Williams 2000), there is a scene where Wakabayashi, who eventually runs away under the cover of darkness, was practicing back break falls. In the film, Wakabayashi cannot keep her head straight, thus her senior pro wrestler, Satomura, holds Wakabayashi's head during practice.

Around the time when trainees practice the break fall, they start practicing rope work. Actions and performances using ropes are unique to pro wrestling. According to Rei, once she masters rope work, she feels like she has become a real pro wrestler. In actual pro wrestling matches, wrestlers are thrown towards the ropes in the ring by opponent wrestlers, but in practice at the beginning they run into the ropes by themselves and practice rope work by using the backlash of the ropes. Though Rei enjoyed practicing rope work at the beginning, the ropes were hard and painful until her body got used to it. Rei says, "Banging into ropes, you feel a kind of burning sensation, it is a kind of pain. If you get used to it, it becomes... smooth... smooth, but it was painful at first." Trainees run into the ropes and bang their back into the ropes. It is painful. While bearing the pain, they run into the ropes on the opposite side. They bang their backs with the ropes and feel pain again. Mika says that because the ropes were quite hard when she had just started practicing rope work, she had "on my back, three lines, of a kind of bruise, I could not lie on my back, they were like welts, and if something touched there, it was painful."

Once the skin on the back of their bodies gets harder, trainees are able to move back and forth between the ropes on opposite sides without feeling pain and can move "smoothly" as Rei describes. As was the case with their elbows, their backs eventually became strong enough to feel no pain even if they bounced on their backs. Sachi says that the human body is incredible, "Really, I think so."

Once Rie mastered rope work, she learned basic pro wrestling techniques such as the "headlock throw" ⁽³⁾, "body drop" ⁽⁴⁾ and "forearm throw" ⁽⁵⁾. Then she had to do sparring using these three techniques and locking techniques. Trainees also learn the "body slam" (see Picture 6) and "drop kick" (see Picture 7), as Rei says. At the beginning of training, trainees do not learn jumping and batting techniques that are characteristics of pro wrestling. Rie says that she did not know how to fight when she tried to do sparing at first. She says:

I was coming to grips with an opponent but not knowing what to do at the beginning, so we jostle each other tentatively... then won by jostling, but then what we do... It was not possible to make attacks... didn't know how.

As we get used to watch streams of attacks and defenses endlessly in a pro wrestling match, it is difficult for us to imagine pro wrestling without such attacks and defenses. Through training with such basic sparring, trainees learn how to construct attacks, and learn and master how to do flowing exchanges of attacks and defense.

A pro test consists of basic physical fitness, break falls and sparring, and each pro test is conducted by each pro wrestling organization. Some organizations do not have a pro test. According to Yuko, the purpose of a pro test is “to check how much physical strength each trainee has, so each trainee is expected to show her maximum strength.” She says that she had to do 50 knuckle push-ups.

The duration between the time when trainees join an organization and the time when they pass a pro test was calculated based on the interviews for this study, and it was found that 12 wrestlers passed the test in under 6 months or less and 4 wrestlers passed it in 7 months or more. Data could



Picture 6 Kana who throws Shirai Mio using a body slam (© Office Kana)



Picture 7 Matsuo Haruka giving a drop kick to Matsumoto Hiroyo (© NEO Entertainment Co., Ltd.)

not be gathered from the other 9 wrestlers since some did not have tests and some did not remember when exactly they took the test.

Yuko and Sachi passed the test the earliest among these interviewees as they passed within two months after joining their organizations. Both had experience at playing sports, and also spent some time on improving their basic physical fitness prior to joining their organizations. These two factors are probably part of reason why they could pass the test so early. On the other hand, Yoshie was the slowest to pass the test among the interviewees. She recalls that around the time “it was very painful” to see everybody else passing the test but “I did not know when I could debut.” The number of girls and women who joined one of the women’s pro wrestling organizations together with Yoshie was in double figures, but they quit pro wrestling one after another. Yoshie was one of the last two to pass the test. Why did it take so long for Yoshie to pass the test to become a pro wrestler? Analyzing herself, Yoshie describes the reason that she did not have a distinct persona that made her look stunning and different from many other trainees. This point will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6. The second slowest to pass the test after Yoshie was Sayaka, and it took her 10 months. When she took tryouts to join her organization, she could do sit-ups only a few times. She improved her physical strength before she joined her organization, but it still took a long time to improve her basic physical fitness.

Differences in training courses for pro wrestlers

This study found that the processes between joining organizations and a pro test were different depending on organizations and eras. Wrestlers admit that Zenjo did not supply enough food to trainees. They also admit that trainees after the era of group competitions felt more solitary during their training in comparison to those who joined the organization in the era of the boom in women's pro wrestling.

(1) Training on an empty stomach

A wrestler called Bull Nakano published an autobiography called *Kanaami no Seishun* (which means: a flashing youth among chicken wire) (1991). She joined Zenjo in 1983 and became a marquee "heel" wrestler. In this book, she mentions that the meals given to trainees were not sufficient in Zenjo in the 1980's. She failed her pro tests twice and had to train really hard with two other trainees who also did not pass the test.

Bull Nakano wrote in her book, "There was something more painful than the training. That is, the harder you train, the hungrier you get" (Bull Nakano, 1991, p.82). Around the time when Nakano was a trainee, Zenjo was paying 50,000 yen to each trainee as a salary. The rent for a room in the dormitory was 5,000 yen and it was extracted from the salary each month. Some rice was supplied from the organization, but trainees had to buy any other food they needed from their own money. Thus, trainees used to put their money together to buy food. Yuko has also mentioned this point earlier. "When I was just paid my salary, I could buy cans of tuna and corn that were my favorite. But I was 15 years old and I could eat a lot. I could eat a can of tuna fish in one go if I really wanted" (Bull Nakano, 1991, p.82). She was eating plenty. Money was disappearing quickly and she "realized one day, I had only 200 yen left although it was only halfway through the month" (Bull Nakano, 1991, p.82). At this time of emergency, Bull Nakano and Komatsu, who joined the organization in the same year as Nakano, had a great idea. The idea was to pay 140 yen each, buy red-colored packed ginger for professional use and eat it with the rice that was supplied by their organization. They ate the rice three times a day as meals.

I was shocked by this story about eating "red-colored ginger." Even if not doing pro wrestling, 15 year-old girls can eat plenty. These trainees were practicing pro wrestling for a long time every day, and thus, I imagine they needed to eat a lot more food other than rice.

I thought that food was not something each trainee had to take care of by

themselves, rather the organization was responsible for supplying it to them. Was Zenjo really making their trainees feel as hungry as Nakano wrote in her book? Moreover, was this happening in other organizations, too?

Yuko points out that the food during her life in the dormitory was insufficient. She joined Zenjo in the latter half of the 1980's. She and some trainees who joined the organization in the same year put their money together and used to take turns at cooking every day. However, the amount of food was only a little. To my question of whether they were hungry all the time, Yuko replies, "Not, really. When we were hungry we used to, like, go out. We did not have the experience of the extreme poor life." She says that the food was insufficient, but they used to manage somehow by helping each other with other trainees who had joined the same year. Moreover, Yuko's parents used to help her out financially when, for example, she went out for meals. Bull Nakano does not mention in her autobiography whether her parents helped her financially. Yuko coped with hunger by receiving financial support from her parents, but Bull Nakano had no support from her parents and thus she had no choice but a life of eating "red-colored ginger."

Then, how did the wrestlers around that period perceive such a situation? Yuko points out that "it was wrong" that Bull Nakano was eating rice with "red-colored ginger" as meals every day. Yuko argues that, first of all, such a diet was wrong for building up her physique. She continues that, on TV, some women pro wrestlers "often talk about how much hardship they had by saying they had no choice but eating things such as pot noodles when they were rookies. But the hardship all of them went through was not normal, was it?" She also says, "The company was also not doing the right thing, I think." She says this because the hardships the trainees had were meaningless pains created by the company called Zenjo. The purpose of the company in supplying only rice to their trainees was, according to Yuko, that "they should experience hardship while they were young." Yuko argues, "The company believes, absolutely, that the stars were all... made their way upwards by experiencing hardship." The trainees "have heard also that their senior wrestlers experienced hardship. So they believe that is normal," according to Yuko.

None of the wrestlers who were trained by Zenjo in the first half of the 1990's talked about difficulties related to their food. During that period, food was not prepared by the trainees by taking turns at the duty, but the organization supplied the food. However, after this, Zenjo had financial difficulties, thus it was possible that the trainees were put back to taking turns at the duty of preparing their food again. The wrestlers who were training in

other pro wrestling organizations did not mention about how little food they had. Therefore, at least the trainees at Zenjo in the 1980's perceive that their training was hard and their food was inadequate. In spite of this perception, the trainees took the hardships for granted since it was what their senior wrestlers had come through, and they did not have any doubts about the organization that created such conditions, as Yuko also mentioned.

(2) Solitary training

The situation for trainees changes as time passes from training on an empty stomach to training alone to pass a pro test. The number of women who joined women's pro wrestling as trainees decreased in the latter half of the 1990's, compared to the boom made by Crush. Even during the boom era, some trainees quit before they could make their debut. However, because the number of trainees who had just joined their organizations decreased, dropouts before the debut let some trainees experience training alone. Mami says that what was hard for her, in addition to the toughness of her training, was "feeling lonely." She says, "I had no other trainees who joined the organization together with me... my senior wrestlers in the dormitory were kind, but they were still my seniors, so getting closer to them was difficult." She says, "It was the first time for me to leave my parents, and I had no friend whom I could speak to freely."

When Mika joined her organization, there was another trainee who joined the organization together with her, but she quit the organization within one week. Mika's solitary training began after that. She recalls, "Training was hard, but what was harder was that I was taught about wrestling alone; everyone was looking at me all the time and I had to practice single-mindedly." "Everyone" meant her senior wrestlers. She says about the senior wrestlers, "their existence was scary enough." She was the only one there, and "it was very hard to have no one I could compare myself with. I could not know if I was a quick learner or a slow learner, or how I was doing."

When Yoshie was a trainee, she had many other trainees who joined the organization in the same year. There was competition among the trainees, and it took a long time for Yoshie to make her debut. When Mami and Mika were trainees, there was no competition with other trainees who joined their organization in the same year. They did not have peers together with whom they could put up with their hard training, or with whom they could compare their skills. They faced solitude during training that Yoshie never experienced.

Transformation of the body and self-perception prior to debut

As described so far, though there are differences among organizations and eras, each trainee had to endure special and painful training for about half a year in order to build up her physique for a woman pro wrestler. During this process, are the women pro wrestlers conscious of the changes taking place in their bodies? Some wrestlers interviewed report that they were not conscious about the changes happening to their bodies between the time when they joined their organizations and the time when they passed a pro test. Many other wrestlers do not describe the changes happening to their bodies in detail, but they mention the changes happening to certain parts of their bodies. These parts are the neck, arms and thighs.

Kiriko's neck became thicker, and she says, "Ordinary necklaces were too tight to put on, so I needed to have the chain longer (laughs)." Yumiko also says, "I think my neck was also getting thicker." She thinks so because "This turtleneck kind of sweater was too tight to feel comfortable." The second change was that their arms became bigger. Aki describes her upper arms becoming thicker, "If I wore clothes without sleeves, I felt the muscles on my arms were very swollen." The third change was that their thighs became thicker. Kiriko says that when she tried to put on a new pair of trousers, she could not pull them up because they were caught around her thighs.

Some pro wrestlers say that the muscles on their shoulders became bigger. Rie says that through the training after she joined her organization, her shoulders became "like the shoulders of a cartoon character such as in *Dragon Ball* ⁽⁶⁾. Probably other people won't become like that even if they have muscles on their shoulders, but I have very sloping shoulders... like only my shoulders got swollen. They were like the shape of men pro wrestlers." She says that the muscles on her shoulders grew bigger and thus shoulder bags stopped slipping from her shoulder. Akiko says, "the chest... other people have said that my chest is thick, and it seemed that it got thicker." Sayaka says, "The muscles on my calves grew bigger, and I was surprised that they could be so hard (laughs)." Aki says she "started losing fat and became muscled, and then my stomach muscles became apparent (laughs)."

Maho talks about how her arms and neck became bigger as an example of changes to her body, but what made her happy was that her weight increased and she became heavier than when she joined her organization. She says, "In my case, I don't gain weight easily so even a little gain makes me happy." It is because "I am not interested in eating so much," so "if I don't

be careful, I keep losing weight and get thinner.” Mika says that when she was a trainee, “I was told that I should gain more weight and I was forced to eat.” Not often, but when she went out for dinner with her senior wrestlers, a lot of dishes were put right in front of her and she kept eating even after she became full. According to Maki, this is because there is a custom in the pro wrestling world. When senior members buy meals for junior members, the junior members have to eat all of the food on the table. “Eating is a job for the wrestlers at the bottom of the hierarchy,” says Maki. Eating has the purpose of making wrestlers’ bodies bigger and it makes them look good when the wrestlers are in the ring. In the women’s pro wrestling world, it is believed that tall wrestlers with a lot of muscle and fat on their bodies attract their audiences when they are in the ring, compared with small and thin bodies. Another purpose of eating is to put more fat on a wrestlers’ body to absorb the impact caused by techniques of the opponent. This is because the impact is absorbed only by fat, not by muscle (Nakano, 1998).

Many wrestlers do not notice the changes to their muscles in certain parts of their bodies directly. They usually notice these changes when they put on necklaces, sweaters and other clothes or accessories that have been used regularly in their daily lives. Some wrestlers notice the changes to their bodies for the first time, when they are told of it by other people. Kiriko says, “I didn’t notice the changes by myself but,” her mother “saw my body that was rapidly becoming the body of a wrestler (laughs) and she told me that it was amazing” when she saw her mother once in a while. That made her notice the changes to her body.

Some wrestlers talked about the changes to all parts of their bodies, rather than to certain parts of their bodies. Sayaka did not get engaged in the sort of activities that made her body move before she joined her organization. The change Sayaka felt in her body was that her body was getting tightened. This change became apparent two months after she joined her organization. There was no change in her weight at that time. When she went home for a New Year holiday, she put on her old pair of trousers. They were loose. “So my weight was the same as before but my body tightened. I was very surprised by it.” She thought everyday training caused her body to get tighter. “I was kind of amazed by it. Wow, it’s actually happening, I thought.” When she made a debut as a pro wrestler, her body was “sharper than when I joined the organization. My body was tighter.” She says that she thought she had “succeeded in tightening my body.”

Why do wrestlers not notice the changes to their bodies easily? The first

factor is that trainees repeatedly train their bodies for a long time and are tired every day. Thus, they do not have the space in their minds to observe their own bodies consciously. Nana says, "I did not think like, changes are occurring to my body and so on (laughs), I was not conscious about it especially," in the period between the time when she joined her organization and the time when she passed the test to become a pro wrestler. It was because, "I was training as hard as possible every day, so I did not have extra time or room in my mind to think of such a thing." Mami also says that the training before her debut was just painful, so she does not even want to remember it.

Trainees do their training based on the training menu prepared by their senior wrestlers, until they pass a pro test. Each period of training lasted for a long time and each menu was repeated over and over again. Beside the time for training, trainees are expected to clean their *dojo*, the place where training is conducted, and then to prepare meals. In addition to their fatigue and stress, they feel other types of stress from inadequate food or solitary training depending on which pro wrestling organization they belong to. Thus, as Nana tells it, just spending a day requires a lot of energy. They do not have a sense of purpose as to how they are building their own bodies and they do not pay much attention to their bodies.

The nature of training conducted by each organization is another factor as to why trainees do not pay much attention to their bodies. Masumi was not conscious of gaining muscle because of the training organized by her organization. After she passed a pro test, she left for a while and trained at a gym. At the gym, she thought, "This was how you put muscle on your body, because I was given an explanation about each part of the muscles in my body and taught that if I was conscious about my body, then more muscle I could gain." Does this mean that women's pro wrestling organizations do not focus most of their attention on training to build up muscles? To my question, Masumi responds, "It doesn't mean that they do not place importance on it. But we train ourselves through being ordered to repeat the same training over and over again. So it was like, just doing what we are told." Rie also says,

Probably, when you are trainees, you have to put on muscles, of course, but if anything, training for basic physical fitness is also to improve your physical strength on the whole. Physical strength and endurance. Repeating the same exercise 100 or 200 times is something mental, I think. Let me see... perhaps, the primary purpose of training is not to put muscle on, I think.

According to some studies, how a body is built up by doing muscle training is influenced by the level of weights and the number of repetitions of the same action in training (Hanaoka, 2004). If muscle training is conducted by using high-load weights and by repeating the same actions for a small number of times, muscles will develop thickness, but if training is conducted using low-load weights and by repeating the same actions for a large number of times, muscle will not develop so thickly. The training to improve basic physical fitness conducted by women's pro wrestling organizations is mainly training using low-load weights and repeating the same actions for a large number of times. This is probably one of the reasons why trainees did not gain so much muscle that they could see the muscle gain obviously.

Because only a few wrestlers were conscious of the changes to their own bodies, there were not many wrestlers who mentioned any self-perception of their own transformed bodies. Yoshie says that she was happy to know that there was a clear muscle line to her body in a photo she took around the time when she passed a pro test. Midori was also happy to notice a change to her body when she realized that her smallish necklace was too tight to put on. She was happy because it meant that she trained her neck well. Sayaka, who did not play sport much before she joined her pro wrestling organization, recalls the changes to her body as, "Everything about the changes was like an unknown world to me," and as her body became tighter she could only think it was "Amazing!" but "it was not like, I was motivated to try harder." To a question about what they thought of their own transformed bodies, Tomiko thinks for a while and responds with, "I just thought, I might be different from other girls." Aki also says that she did not think she wanted to hide her "swollen" arms, but she also did not think that she wanted to show them to someone else. In other words, she was not ashamed of her muscular arms, but at the same time she was not interested specially in boasting about them to others.

From such comments made by the interviewees, it has become clear that many pro wrestlers have no room in their minds to pay attention to the changes to their bodies before they pass a pro test, and even if they notice the changes, they notice only certain changes and notice them indirectly. As a result, only a few wrestlers are proud of such changes to their bodies, and few wrestlers try to boast about those changes to others. At the same time, none of the interviewees feel anxiety or fear about their bodies becoming different from a thin body that is the ideal female body form in Japan today.

The ordeal of rookies

Once trainees pass a pro test, they are entitled to appear as a pro wrestler in matches. However, a women's pro wrestling organization is a society in which the longer the wrestlers stay with their organization, the higher their position is in its hierarchy. Thus, pro wrestlers who have just made their debut are called *shinjin resurā* (rookies), and they are positioned at the bottom of the hierarchy. In Chapter 7, an analysis will be made as to what girls and women obtain by becoming pro wrestlers, and thus what kinds of stress rookies receive besides their training will be discussed in this chapter.

Once trainees make their debut as pro wrestlers, they can fight in matches as pro wrestlers but they will also be ordered to do various kinds of jobs that are related to pro wrestling exhibitions managed by their organizations. Through such jobs, they begin dealing with the senior pro wrestlers in their organizations. According to Sachi, before trainees pass the test, they can be involved with the jobs of building rings and of selling pamphlets or paper boards with wrestlers' autographs written on them at shops at pro wrestling exhibitions. However, they are not allowed to enter the anterooms of senior pro wrestlers or to talk to them. This is because "the period before becoming pro wrestlers means that we are not pro wrestlers, so trainees are not treated as team mates." Rookies will begin the job of acting as seconds once they make their debut. As described earlier, the jobs of a second include setting up the anterooms of the wrestlers, staying with some wrestlers, leading the wrestlers to rings from their anterooms and keeping tabs on their costumes.

Many wrestlers, who had experience as seconds in the period between the era of Crush and that of group competitions, say that there were a lot of small jobs besides the setting up of anterooms. If anterooms were on the first floor of the building where they were having exhibitions, they put up things such as newspapers on the windows of the room in order to prevent the inside from being seen. Rookies are also expected to bring down the luggage of their senior wrestlers from the buses they use for traveling between exhibitions and to take their costumes out from their luggage. During the era of group competitions, rookies at Zenjo used to carry a bag called *hikaeshitsu-bukuro* (meaning an anteroom bag) and they had to put everything needed in the bag and check it. They entered the anteroom and decided where each of their senior wrestlers were to be seated and displayed items such as tissue papers and hair dryers on each spot. According to Mika, this practice was simplified after the era of group competitions in other organizations.

In the case where a rookie was leading her senior wrestler from her anteroom to the ring where the wrestler would fight, the rookie would keep her eyes on the match before her senior wrestler fought, and every time the ring announcer for the match announced the times (for example, five minutes has passed, 10 minutes has passed and 20 minutes has passed), the rookie would run to the anteroom to report the time. This was to let her senior wrestler know how long before her fight would begin, and the wrestler would prepare for her fight.

Seconds have to take care of the costumes of their senior wrestlers. If a senior wrestler has many costumes, a second has to ask her what she is going to wear next and prepare that costume. Maki says that when, for example, a senior wrestler takes off her wrestling gown briskly, her second has to “fold the gown carefully, as if she is touching something like furniture.” Washing the costumes after the matches is also a job for a second.

Wrestlers who have made their debut have to do such jobs as seconds while they are getting ready for their own matches. Many wrestlers say that no matter how hard they worked, they could never satisfy their senior wrestlers and that they were constantly scolded by them. They used to be scolded as they “put out the costume without care, dragging the costumes... [Though seconds have to cheer their wrestlers in a loud voice, they] were not cheering in loud voice [They have to run to do whatever they are doing but] they were seen walking because they were tired,” says Sachi.

Many wrestlers who were interviewed said that they were scolded because they did not do things right. However, Yuko says that many rookies quit pro wrestling because they were bullied by their senior wrestlers. To my question, “Was there any bullying?” Sawako also responds, “... (a silence of three seconds) well, yes... (a silence of four seconds) there was”⁽⁷⁾ and she admits it with reluctance. Though she admitted that there was bullying, she said that she could continue wrestling because there were also senior wrestlers who tried to stop rookies from being bullied.

Midori is the only interviewee who talks about an incident of irrational punishment that she received when she was a rookie. One day, in a tour bus, one of her senior wrestlers was sitting at the end of the bus lecturing the rookies by making them stand in the aisle of the bus. Midori was standing at the farthest position from the senior wrestler, thus she could not hear what the wrestler was saying at all. Midori could not say that she could not hear, thus she was nodding as the other rookies nodded, and she was leaning sideways a bit from the line and acting as if she was nodding to the talk. Then, another senior wrestler who was sitting right beside her accused Midori,

saying “You are nodding without hearing anything.” Midori says, “I said sorry, and then suddenly she hit my face with her shoe and I bled from my nose.” Midori says, at that time “I thought I was not that bad. How could I hear what the senior wrestler was saying anyway in that situation? And I thought the action was irrational.”

The reason why such irrational punishments are meted out in women’s pro wrestling is that it was believed that whatever a senior wrestler says is absolutely right. Yuko says, “When senior wrestlers say that something is black though it is white, it is black.” She emphasizes this by banging on the table. Similarly, Maki says that her senior wrestler stepped on her foot and it was the wrestler’s fault, but Maki apologized to the wrestler saying “sorry.” In other words, senior wrestlers were considered as having an absolute existence by rookies. Management of Zenjo also gave silent approval for such practices. According to Yuko, this practice was given silent approval because of the belief that it was normal for rookies to put up with such stresses since even famous wrestlers had built their status after bearing such a hierarchical relationship with their senior wrestlers. This is the same as the theory described where trainees have to endure inadequate amounts of food as discussed earlier in this chapter.

Self-perception of a body that is good enough for pro wrestling

As discussed in the first section, pro wrestlers have a tendency to build their bodies bigger by putting fat and muscle on their bodies, even though their bodies are rich in diversity. In contrast, what kind of body is the ideal female body in Japan today? This matter will be discussed first.

The ideal female body in Japan today

Ogino (2002) argues that the norms of beauty have moved to the direction of thinness since the 1960’s, and though a healthy body and a strong body were added to these norms from 1970, the schema of “thinness = youth = beauty” has not changed. Kato points out that since the mid-1980’s, “the ideal body is a slim and tightened body and with a sharp body line” (2004, p.176), and the “sharp” body includes a large size bust. Very few academic studies have been conducted on the image of the ideal female body that is dominant in modern Japan. Thus, this study makes reference to a study of the body images of women whose ages are close to women who join pro wrestling organizations (i.e., college and university students). This is be-

cause when people build up their bodies, they make their own reference to the ideal female body and the ideal male body that are dominant in society (Ehara, 2001). Naturally, it does not mean that all of the women in society accept the dominant image of the ideal female body, but the body many women aim at reflects the ideal female body that is dominant in society.

First of all, it was found in the case of examples of female junior college students that their ideal female body is “slim and tightened, a so-called androgynous body” (Tanaka, 1997, p.337). Moreover, according to a survey by Kato et al. (1990), the types of the ideal female body listed by female university students include long legs, a thin body, a well-balanced body, a body without fat, a healthy body and a round body, in descending order of the number of responses. The meaning of “round” is vague, but if it is interpreted as plumpness, it will include the meaning of plumpness of the breast, too. In summary, the ideal female body in Japanese society today is a thin body with long legs and ample breasts.

As above-mentioned, about 71 % of the wrestlers who were interviewed for this study are considered obese according to the BMI. Moreover, as discussed in this chapter, many pro wrestlers experienced that their neck, arms and thighs grew after they joined their pro wrestling organizations. In short, the bodies of the girls are transformed by concentrated training after they join their pro wrestling organizations, like Sato who appears in the movie *GAEA Girls* (Longinotto and Williams, 2000), and their bodies are not transformed in the direction of the “thin” body that is idealized by many Japanese young women today.

The bodies of women pro wrestlers in general deviate from the “thin” body that is the ideal female body in Japanese society today. How do these women pro wrestlers who have such bodies perceive their bodies? If women pro wrestlers are evaluating their bodies positively after all, it may be possible for women in their teens and twenties to free themselves from the “thin” body as the ideal female body that has the dominant value.

Discussion was carried out as to how women pro wrestlers perceive their bodies when they were interviewed for this study. But before the discussion, the bodies of female bodybuilders will be studied because their bodies have similarities with bodies of women pro wrestlers in respect of transforming their bodies in a different direction from the ideal female body.

Female bodybuilders

Ethnographic studies on female bodybuilders have been conducted as to

whether female bodybuilders are given strength by doing bodybuilding and/or as to how they construct their own identities. According to Lowe (1998), building muscle by bodybuilding strengthens women. Female bodybuilders gain confidence and respect by developing their muscles and improving their physical constitution (Fisher, 1997). Fisher's female bodybuilders are strongly conscious of the fact that "they challenged existing notions about appropriate physical appearance for women" (1997, p.150). However, it does not mean that these women are completely confident about expressing themselves as women who deviate far from normative femininity. Wesely (2001) and Grogan et al. (2004) point out how female bodybuilders construct their own identities is complicated and full of contradictions. As a result, "their self-definitions included both traditional and non-traditional components of femininity" (Fisher, 1997, p.151). Bolin, in contrast, points out that competitive female bodybuilders argue that "I am a woman, therefore, I am feminine" (1992b, p.382) and she redefines and personalizes the general idea of femininity based on her identity.

Do women pro wrestlers also have confidence in their own bodies with which they perform pro wrestling? Furthermore, are they conscious about the fact that they are challenging to the image of the ideal female body, like the female bodybuilders who were studied by Fisher? Do they also have confidence in doing it, though this point is not as clear as with Fisher's female bodybuilders? Or do women pro wrestlers perceive their bodies as not feminine and, does this prevent them from having confidence in their bodies? These points will be analyzed in the next section.

Self-perception of the transformed body

The interviews for this study revealed five different views in terms of self-perception toward their bodies. In general, some wrestlers perceive their bodies as not attractive as women and as wrestlers, while some wrestlers have confidence in themselves as either women or wrestlers. The first aspect is thus divided into two views: "the accepted body" and "the body without confidence." The second aspect is divided into three views: "the body of a wrestler," "the body of an ordinary girl who can do pro wrestling" and "the new ideal female body."

(1) The accepted body

Wrestlers with this view perceive that their bodies are not attractive as wrestlers and as women, but they are not dissatisfied with their bodies and

rather accept their own bodies as they are.

Yoshie thinks her body is not attractive as a pro wrestler. This is because she thinks that “pro wrestlers are better to be big.” She wants to be much taller and wants to build more muscle and make it thicker. She also says that her body is not attractive as a woman. She says that it is because her hips are big. Even in her childhood her hips are big, thus, it is not because of pro wrestling. Her shoulders are too thick to wear small t-shirts, but that is not important. She thinks that if she has nice clothes she can wear to ceremonial functions, that is enough. At the same time, she thinks she has good points when she compares herself with women who do not perform pro wrestling. One of them is that she is strong with pain. Pains, such as the pains from being knocked or being hit, do not bother her easily. And she believes, she has an appropriate amount of muscle and more muscle than ordinary women. These characteristics are thought of by her as “not bad, it is quite OK.” She thinks it is OK because she believes that women with little muscle cannot react and deal with something bad happening to them. However, I cannot interpret that she is proud and has confidence in her characteristics of being strong with pain and having more muscle.

Sanae also thinks that her body is not attractive as a wrestler. It is because her build is not the shape easily perceived as a wrestler. She longs for Kazuko’s stocky and large body. Kazuko is another woman pro wrestler. Sanae saw Kazuko’s match when she was in the sixth grade of an elementary school and she decided to become a pro wrestler. Since then, she had made various kinds of efforts to have a body like Kazuko’s. However, no matter how much she did muscle training and how much she ate, her body did not develop like Kazuko’s.

Now she realizes and accepts the fact she will never have a body like Kazuko, thus she wears a “fluttering costume” and tries to appeal to her male fans. She believes that a wrestler like her “needs to have a feminine body, too.” A “feminine body” in her terms is a buxom body. This view matches with the image of the ideal female body. But her breasts are not big, thus she thinks that her body is not feminine enough. A certain amount of fat is necessary around the chest in order to make breasts bigger. As an evidence for this, female bodybuilders have a very low body fat percentage and thus they lose most of the development around their breasts (Lowe, 1997). Thus, I can interpret that Sanae associates a body with some fat as a “feminine body.” She believes that her body is not attractive as a wrestler and as a woman, but it does not mean that she does not have confidence or she is dissatisfied with

her body. Sanae accepts her body, and she tries to do pro wrestling by using some of the characteristics her body has. She had been absent from fighting for a long period of time, but she has made a comeback. She is satisfied with the fact that she can do pro wrestling now, and this is one of the factors that means she does not develop dissatisfaction about her body.

The wrestlers with this view tend to be satisfied with the benefits they have from being pro wrestlers, in spite of the fact that they do not have strong confidence about being wrestlers and being women. Unfortunately, it is not clear whether she was aware of the point that her body as a wrestler and her body as a woman are opposites.

(2) The body without confidence

The wrestlers with this view see their own bodies as not attractive as wrestlers and as women, like the wrestlers who have the view of “the accepted body.” However, unlike the wrestlers with that view, a complicated feeling of conflict and distress can be found among the wrestlers who have the view “the body without confidence.” Aiba (2007; 2011) analyzed only Akiko and called her view as “conflicts about one’s body.” This book analyzes not only Akiko but also Sayaka, who have no confidence in their bodies as wrestlers and as women, and also do not accept this fact. Therefore this view is termed “the body without confidence.”

Akiko describes her body as not like a wrestler’s, but like a “whippet tank.” This is because she is short and plump. People in general “tell me, you are smaller than I expected.” Akiko feels bad if everyone thinks all wrestlers are short like her. Her brown hair and big arms are the only features of her body that make her look like a wrestler, according to her. She says her body is not attractive enough as a wrestler. This is because she thinks she needs to further tone up certain parts of her body. She had an injury and was absent from some matches; then she made a comeback. When she resumed training, she felt like “some parts of my body were sagging and my body was heavy. Some parts of my body were moving up and down.” She thinks her body has plenty of fat.

People look at you as a pro wrestler, so you are observed as a pro wrestler and some people see you as some sort of idol. People have some sort of expectation as to how pro wrestlers look. So I think I am far from that. I think I am a hopeless case (laughs).

Akiko's thoughts as a woman and the thoughts of Dash Ichikawa as a wrestler often conflict. Akiko wants to tone up her body (meaning to lose weight) and to wear cute clothes. Dash Ichikawa is a wrestler whose sales point is her relaxed mood, and thus she prefers to stay being plump. Moreover, Akiko thinks that it is OK to "be plump" as a wrestler, but she also thinks it is better to tone up her own body a little more. This is why she says, "I have struggled with several body types." Her view shows that her conflict was the most profound among the five interviewees. Chapter 7 will examine how Akiko, who has this conflict, is attached to cute clothes and how she deals with it in her daily life.

Likewise, Sayaka is another pro wrestler who cannot have confidence in her own body as a wrestler and as a woman. Sayaka's reason for becoming a pro wrestler is related to her body size. She did not like her body being big since her childhood, and she thought becoming a pro wrestler would help her overcome this. It was because she thought then that, if she became a pro wrestler, her big body would become to her advantage. However, she says that she has not yet overcome the feeling of disliking her big body. When she entered the pro wrestling world, she was glad that her body was big. However, she thinks that she is not using her body effectively yet. That is why she still does not take pride in being big.

Since Sayaka was a young child, she did not like the size of her body, thus she tried to make her body smaller by a slouching posture. This posture "has become normal over the years, and even now [after becoming a pro wrestler], the posture cannot be changed." For example, when she walks from an anteroom into the ring before the match, she walks with a curved back, thus her senior wrestlers point out that her posture is not good. "Well, consciously I have been trying to show myself smaller and smaller," and thus her body keeps its posture during training and matches. She says, "During training, I am always told that I should make big actions, not small ones. But my consciousness tells me to make me look smaller, so that everything I do appears to be small." Because of this, her performance and actions are small during real matches. In contrast, wrestlers with small bodies want to make themselves look bigger, thus their reactions tend to be bigger even when they throw other wrestlers. If Sayaka exhibits large actions like them, it would make her look very big, but she cannot do so. The posture made as an attempt to make her body look smaller has clung to her body, and that has become an important issue for Sayaka. In order to describe the difficulty she is facing, she says, "It is hopeless unless my brain is switched with someone

else's brain." Sayaka's experience shows that it is almost impossible for her to change her deep-seated attitude to make her body look smaller, even though she is in a place where she can make her big body useful. Through her experience, we learn that Sayaka, as a woman who has a big body, has built a strong feeling of inferiority within her as well as that she has attempted to make her body look smaller by even keeping to a slouching posture for a long period of time.

Sayaka has been trying to make her body look smaller for a long time because the desirable body image is different depending on gender and also because she has been internalizing it. If she was not given the category "woman," or if a certain ideal female body was not related to the category "woman," she would never have tried to make her body look smaller and she would never have had her back curved. If she did not belong to the category, the size of her body would not be a shame for her and she would not feel inferiority about her body. Thus, she might not have considered becoming a pro wrestler at all. Or even if she chose to become a wrestler anyway, she would have done pro wrestling without being restricted by the idea of trying to appear small.

Sayaka says that she has never felt proud of her body since she became a pro wrestler. She says, "I never thought I have a good body." She does not like her body because it is hard for it to build muscle and it does not stand out in people's eyes as the body of a wrestler. However, a few wrestlers have big bodies in today's pro wrestling world, thus she is told she "has a good body" by her senior wrestlers. In contrast, she has weakness in her mentality "as a pro wrestler"; she is often told, "You have a good body but cannot make good use of it." The "mentality" probably means that she has low spirits when she fights and has weakness in expressing herself. Though she has a good body, as described earlier she tends to make small actions and cannot use her feature effectively. She knows it, which has been bothering her, according to her.

Sayaka does not think at all that her body is attractive as a woman. She says that when she was young, she never thought that she was pretty. The reason why her body is not attractive as a woman is not because she is big. A woman is still attractive if she is thin and well-balanced even though tall and big. In her case, not only is she tall but she is fat and ill-balanced, and that is why she is not attractive. She thinks that however hard she tries to make her body look attractive as a woman, it would never be so. However, even if her body is not attractive as a woman, it is not so important for her

now since she is performing pro wrestling, according to her. This is because, since she became a pro wrestler, “the goal has been to train my body or to become strong,” thus she has stopped being conscious about whether her body is attractive as a woman or not.

The three views related to having confidence in one’s own body as a wrestler or as a woman will be examined in the next section.

(3) The body of a wrestler

This view rests on the understanding that the body of a wrestler and the body of a woman are opposed. The view is that, in this relation, wrestlers have confidence in one’s body as a pro wrestler, while they admit to not having a feminine body and do not regard it as important.

Sawako is proud of her body as a pro wrestler. It is because she can express what a pro wrestler should be by using her body. When it was impossible to become a pro wrestler unless your height was 160 cm or more and your weight was 60 kg or more ⁽⁸⁾, the wrestlers who met this standard had power so strong that they could have killed the idol-like wrestlers of today (see Chapter 6) if they wished, according to Sawako. She named Aja Kong and Inoue Kyoko as the wrestlers with such powers. If this is true, Sawako also should have such power, the power to “kill” the idol-like wrestlers if she wants, since she became a pro wrestler at the time when the regulation was still in practice. She has confidence in her body because it has no defects as a wrestler and it has “a little fat but it is well-balanced.”

To the question of whether she thinks that her body is attractive as a woman, her response is that it will become attractive “if I lose a little weight.” Laughing, she only responds that if she loses a little weight and if she has good enough skin to wear a bikini, she would be attractive. Sawako does not talk clearly about her ideal image of an attractive body for a woman. However, she thinks that at least having fat on one’s body is attractive as a wrestler, but that the same body shape will not be considered attractive as a woman without losing fat and becoming thin. In short, her understanding of an attractive body as a wrestler and an attractive body as a woman are opposites.

Sawako is not bothered by the fact that her body is not attractive as a woman. It is because she believes that if her body also becomes attractive as a woman, she “probably would not be able to perform pro wrestling.” Sawako has confidence in her body as a pro wrestler, which minimizes her awkwardness about not having a feminine body. When she helps elderly people and the physically challenged, she thinks, “They seem to be com-

fortable with me because I am big” and “I am glad that I am powerful” and have a big body.

Sachi has confidence in her body being attractive as a pro wrestler. “Well, I am as tall as this, though as tall as this may not be the right choice of words. Well, yes, my body is also big, you know.” However, she thinks her body is not attractive as a woman. The reason is because her body is “not cute.” For Sachi, an attractive body means a cute body, generally speaking. A body she can be proud of as a pro wrestler would be subject to critique as a woman’s body if she is stripped of her title as a pro wrestler. “Let me see... if I judge my body in general, well, that’s a scary thought (laughs). I am glad I have the position and title of pro wrestler, after all.” Sachi’s understanding about an attractive body as a wrestler and an attractive body as a woman are opposed. However, she is proud of her body being attractive as a pro wrestler, and she wants other people to see her as a wrestler in daily life, too.

When I’m walking down the street or doing something, people think there’s something different about my physique, and I’m like, well, I’m a pro wrestler, and people are like, ‘oh, I thought so’.... It is better to be told that you look strong, isn’t it? Yep. So in that sense, I’m pretty happy with my body the way it is now. This probably shows how my sense about my body is different from other girls’ (laughs).

Moreover, Sachi is proud of being different from other women when she thinks about the type of body she wishes to have. At first, she had trouble gaining weight. But she says, “Once you gain weight, it becomes much easier to gain more weight.” Now, she is aiming to gain even more weight. “Especially, women hate” gaining weight, “but I have an occupation I can be proud of by being heavy.” Thus, she is thinking of gaining still more weight.

Many women are praised highly for “being thin” in Japanese society today, but at the same time they cannot be free from it. In contrast, Sachi is trying to gain more weight and tries to congratulate herself for that. Sachi perceives that many women, especially women outside the pro wrestling world, try to lose weight but never try to gain it. Acknowledging this, she feels wonderful about being different from the women who aim to make their body “thin,” and also about being admired since she is in the pro wrestling world.

Sachi does not perceive muscle and fat separately and uses the term “gain weight” in her talk. This is attributable to a body modification she succeeded in several years after she made her debut. Her body was transformed from a

thin and weak physique to strong and large one. She thought that not fat but muscle would help her body look bigger, and thus, developed her muscles by doing physical labor and muscle training, and at the same time she ate and drank plenty to gain more fat on her body. For her, an attractive body as a wrestler is a body that is developed by gaining plenty of muscle and fat.

Pro wrestlers who have the view of “the body of a wrestler” understand that an attractive body as a pro wrestler and an attractive body as a woman are opposites. Also, they have confidence in their own bodies as pro wrestlers. This confidence stops them from being bothered by the fact that they do not have an ideal body as a female.

(4) The body of an ordinary girl who can do pro wrestling

Pro wrestlers who have this view consider their bodies are attractive while they can perform pro wrestling with their bodies. In other words, they understand that their bodies or physiques appear similar to that of women of the same generation as them, but that they can do pro wrestling with their bodies and have some muscle suitable for pro wrestlers.

Mika does not dislike her body as a wrestler. She can find some parts that she dislikes as a woman but still that does not mean that she thinks it is a complete failure. She says that she is neither tall nor big as a wrestler, so she can blend in well if she walks in town. If she tells someone new that she is a pro wrestler, they are surprised about this in many cases. She is proud of this, which makes her happy. On the other hand, when she does something simple, like stretching her arms to grab a plastic bottle, her muscles appear and someone will notice this. Then others tell her that the muscles in her arm are noticeable. That also makes her happy. Even when she is doing pro wrestling, if she can show how wonderful her muscles are to her audience, though not intentionally, and make them think she is a pro wrestler after all, it satisfies her. She is not interested in putting a lot of muscle on her body and emphasizing it. Mika feels that she does not want to fall into the category of a certain image people have about pro wrestlers in general. She prefers to appear as an ordinary woman, and prefers others to find accidentally that she has muscles, then they notice that she is a wrestler.

Since she values appearing as an ordinary woman, she goes to a sports club as much as possible and has muscle training to prevent her body from appearing ugly. This is similar to women in general who engage in muscle training in order to tone up their bodies. In other words, this view perceives that an attractive body as a woman is a body with the right amount of mus-

cle and without extra fat.

(5) The new ideal female body

Pro wrestlers with this view know that the type of body attractive as a wrestler and the body attractive as a woman are in opposition. However, simultaneously, they redefine what an attractive body as a woman is and attempt to attune their bodies so that their bodies become attractive both as a wrestler and as a woman.

Rie thinks her body is “stocky.” This means that her muscles and skeleton are well developed. Rie is “proud of” this and thinks it is “cool” to have this “stocky” physique. She has come to have confidence in her body since she found something that makes a good use of her body. She began having pride in her body being large by doing *judo* and pro wrestling.

She thinks her body is not attractive as a wrestler yet. That is because “though gaining muscle, it is not especially visible.” Her body does not look muscular. Because of this, when someone touches her arm and feels her muscle, they tell her “It’s very hard” with surprise. Thus, she thinks, she wants to put on muscle in such a way that it shows. In contrast, she thinks her body is not attractive as a woman from “a general point of view.” This is because the image she has of femininity is “something, you know, soft, thin, and you know, cute,” and if she evaluates her body according to this criterion, it is not attractive as a woman. It is rather a “masculine” body. But she is not actually dissatisfied with her unfeminine body.

But, let me see. A strong woman has a different meaning. A strong woman, a cool woman means, well, it comes down to having a body you can believe in, and probably, that’s what I’m striving for.

In other words, Rie thinks that she can have a body she can trust as a wrestler, if she can “build up” her body physically and put on muscle that is easily noticed. At the same time, this will make her body closer to the body of a strong and cool woman, so she will be able to have pride in her body.

Rie talks about when a man attempted to pick her up on the street as an example. “When I am hit on by a man sometimes and try to get away, a guy tries to grab my arm. When it happens, he says, thick! about my arm (laughs).” Rie feels good about it when the man who tries to hit on her and grabs her arm is amazed about the size of it. When she is told by the man that her arm is big, she usually nods back to the man, thinking, “Like, do

you still want to chase me? I am stronger than you... I won't be easily defeated by an ordinary man." When the man who tried to hit on her is surprised about the size of her arm, Rie is full of confidence that, not only are her arms thick but also that she is stronger than an ordinary man. Moreover, she thinks of herself as cool with her arms that can make men surprised by their size. She still thinks that "thin and beautiful" women have different kinds of coolness from her, but when she thinks about her body, she prefers to be muscled and "stocky" to be cool.

Rie perceives that a feminine body means "soft, thin, and you know, cute" in general, but she also perceives that these are not the only features that make a female body attractive. She has the view that a strong and cool body is also attractive as a woman. She also believes that her body is close to the image of a strong and cool body, and has confidence in this fact. In contrast to Mika, who has the view that she aspires to perform pro wrestling while keeping her body attractive as a woman, Rie tries to discover attractiveness in being strong and cool while keeping her body attractive as a pro wrestler's body.

The body as a source of confidence

Even the pro wrestlers who are not required to be thin are not free from the idea of having a thin body completely. In the views above, except for the view of "the accepted body," four views perceive a "thin" body as a feminine body. Akiko, who takes the view of "the body without confidence" perceives that even pro wrestlers need to lose weight to a certain degree. Sachi, who takes the view of "the body of a wrestler" and Rie who holds the view of "the new ideal female body" point out that not only thinness but "cuteness" are necessary essences for the feminine body. Moreover, Sachi and Rie understand the body of a wrestler and the body of a woman is clearly opposed.

Many pro wrestlers describe that a thin body without fat is an attractive body for a woman. Yoshie says that one of the factors for composing an attractive body as a woman is to have small hips. According to Yamada, a woman's hips, alongside with a woman's breasts, have been considered "a symbol of abundance and fertility" (1998, p.58) since the hunting-and-gathering age. Ample hips and breasts were considered desirable for a long period of time until 1920 when the Garconne look became fashionable. The Garconne look is an androgynous style, looking like a boy, and for the first time in Western history, short hair, "small breasts" and "small hips" became provisions of feminine beauty. After this, a time when ample hips were de-

sirable resurged, but the tendency to have small hips being desirable was stronger over the long-run. In short, it is possible to see that Yoshie has internalized the value of small hips being desirable for the female body.

Among the five views above, the women pro wrestlers who have the view of “the body of a wrestler” and the view of “the new ideal female body” perceive that they have confidence in their bodies as pro wrestlers and challenge the idea of having an ideal female body, like the bodybuilders mentioned by Fisher (1997). However, the wrestlers who have clear confidence in this challenge are Sachi who holds the view of “the body of a wrestler” and Rie who holds the view of “the new ideal female body”. Simultaneously, there are pro wrestlers who do not necessarily have confidence in their bodies as wrestlers. Those wrestlers fall into the categories of the wrestlers who have the view of “the accepted body” and “the body without confidence.” In other words, women pro wrestlers have various views about their bodies in comparison to the female bodybuilders mentioned by Fisher (1997). This is because bodybuilders have a clear set of rules about what kind of body they need to attain, while women pro wrestlers do not have something like “the ideal body for pro wrestlers” as long as they may have a body with which they can perform pro wrestling. Pro wrestlers are expected to change their physical characteristics to one of their distinct personas (see Chapter 6), and thus, the women belonging to the world of women’s pro wrestling tend to have a huge variety of “ideal bodies for a pro wrestler.”

Sachi perceives, like the female bodybuilders mentioned by Fisher (1997), that her physical characteristics are different from those of the ideal female body. At the same time, she enhances her confidence in her body as a wrestler by gaining more weight and tries to trivialize the importance of not having the ideal female body. What is important here is that she is only trivializing its importance, not aiming to become someone who goes beyond this category of a woman. This point is found in Sachi’s description about herself. She says that since she became a pro wrestler, she has started thinking that she does not need to wear something feminine, and she also says, “Well, it only makes me look weird if I try to be feminine, anyway,” and she does away completely with the femininity in her appearance as long as she stays a wrestler. This can be interpreted that she perceives her appearance at the present will be evaluated as not feminine enough in the views of others, but she has not given up on the idea of being admitted as a “woman” completely. Because of this, Sachi minimizes her identity into a pro wrestler only, and in doing so, she tries to compensate for the feeling of wishing to

be approved of as a woman.

Do women pro wrestlers have a possibility of freeing ordinary women from the image of the “thin” body as the ideal female body? Rie asserts another type of body that is different from the normative ideal female body in her view. She perceives that a “thin” female body is idealized in the world outside of pro wrestling. Though she admits its value too, she believes that not only a “thin” body but also a “strong and cool” body is attractive as a woman. This is a transformed view of the normative ideal female body. Rie undermines the value of a “thin” female body by asserting that the ideal female body is composed not only of the “thin” body; but that a “strong and cool” body is also one of the components of the ideal female body.

Rie’s view suggests that there are body-images other than the ideal female body that has a dominant value, and that it is possible to have confidence in a body that is different from the ideal female body. This view provides the possibility for many women in Japanese society to be able to shake off the fetters of being caught up in a “thin” female body. However, her view is limited only to or near to the world of women’s pro wrestling, and it is unlikely that her view will spread outside of that world. If a view like Rie’s is shared by many women in Japanese society who exist outside the world of women’s pro wrestling, this may become one of the discourses that counter the normative ideal of the female body.

Why could the pro wrestlers who hold the view of “the body as a wrestler” and the view of “the ideal female body” have confidence in their own bodies? Presumably, they have gained a variety of things from their experiences as pro wrestlers and these have become the source of their confidence. Some women may have a sense of discomfort about the bodies with muscle and fat like those of some women pro wrestlers while having no sense of attraction to those bodies compared to a “thin” ideal female body. If those women can know what women pro wrestlers gain from pro wrestling by using their bodies, they can perform pro wrestling with, they may feel less discomfort about the bodies of women pro wrestlers. Then, what do women pro wrestlers perceive they gain and lose by performing pro wrestling? This point will be analyzed in Chapter 7.

Notes

⁽¹⁾ This is weight in kilograms divided by height in meters squared. According

- to the Japan Society for the Study of Obesity, under 18.5 of BMI is considered “thin,” between 18.5 and 25.0 is “normal,” and 25.0 and over is “obese.”
- (2) For example, making a posture of crawling on all fours and lowering your neck as low as possible. Then letting your partner press the back of your head while you are trying to lift your head upwards slowly (Hanaoka, 2004).
 - (3) One of the *sumo* wrestling techniques. Loop one of your arms around the neck of your opponent and throw the opponent using your hips and twisting your body as if spooling the opponent’s body towards you (Kanesashi, 2007, p.94).
 - (4) One of the throwing techniques of *judo*.
 - (5) This technique is used in *sumo* and wrestling. Wrestlers grip the arm of their opponent from above and throw the opponent’s body while twisting their own hips slightly (Yahoo! jisho).
 - (6) *Dragon Ball* is a comic magazine produced by Akira Toriyama. Songokū, the hero of the comic, and other male characters are drawn with clear lines of muscles on their bodies.
 - (7) This length of the silence shows how hesitant Sawako was when she was talking about this topic.
 - (8) Nagayo Chigusa, one of the members of Crush, saw an advertisement for recruiting new women pro wrestlers to Zenjo in the magazine *Heibon* (1980), and applied Zenjo (“Za ringu,” 2005c). The physical requirement advertised in this article was only “160 cm or more in height.” Thus, though Sawako said that applicants would not pass the test unless they had about 60 kg or more in body weight, this was probably only information shared among the applicants in those days. For example, there was a magazine called *Shinsei Curashu Gyaruzu* (which means, Sacred Crush Gals) published in 1985 when Crush was booming. This magazine introduced not only Crush but also other wrestlers of Zenjo and the everyday life of the trainees who joined the organization in 1985. At the end of the article, there is “a list of rookies for the year 1985.” The list includes the names, birthdays, heights and weights of all of the rookies who passed pro tests to become pro wrestlers. The heights and weights listed there are not the data collected when they passed tryouts, and the weight of the lightest wrestler is 62 kg. Presumably, this magazine was often read by Sawako and other girls whose dream was to become a woman pro wrestler. Thus, through such magazines, they created recognition that it required 60 kg or more weight in order to pass the tryouts.

CHAPTER FIVE

*Combat Skill and its Products:
Applications for Self-defense*

The relationship between “combat skill” (physical skills to counter violence against one’s body) ⁽¹⁾ and “physical vulnerability” ⁽²⁾ is focused on at first in this chapter. “Physical vulnerability” means the sense that in the process of their socialization women feel that their physical strength is weak and they are weaker than men physically. As a result, women become afraid of sexual assault, and this makes women easy targets for such an assault. First of all, discussion will be carried out as to what kinds of elements are the components of this physical vulnerability by referring to previous studies. What is important here is that physical vulnerability is something required solely for women not for men, and thus, it can be understood as the physicalized normative femininity.

Next discussion will be conducted on the possibility of this physicalized normative femininity being transformed by physical practices by using previous studies (McCaughey, 1997 etc.) related to women who are trained in how to defend themselves. Moreover, how socialization and sports, especially combative sports ⁽³⁾, can influence the way women embody physical vulnerability will be discussed. It is projected that women who participate in combative sports or something similar can learn to resist assaults conducted by men.

To examine such a possibility, I will focus on women pro wrestlers. Women pro wrestlers are chosen as the subjects because they master “combat skill” through “fighting.” Violence considered in this chapter is the kind of violence conducted by men on women. This is because it is more common today for women to receive assaults from men than vice versa. Some men are experiencing assaults from their spouses and there are certainly cases of women assaulting men (Gender Equality Bureau, 2006). However, many of

the victims of criminal offenses between spouses were women in 2006 (Gender Equality Bureau, 2007). The ratio of female victims who received indecent assaults was about 98 % of the total number of the victims of indecent assaults in 2006 (Research and Training Institute of the Ministry of Justice, 2007). In contrast, about 99 % of the total number of people who were convicted of carnal abuse were men in 2006 (Research and Training Institute of the Ministry of Justice, 2007). From this data it is clear that more women are receiving assaults from men than men are receiving assaults from women.

Therefore, in this chapter, analysis will be carried out as to whether women pro wrestlers are applying their combat skill when they encounter violence in their daily lives, and this analysis will be used to examine the possibility of women transforming their sense of physical vulnerability that is a physicalized normative femininity. As described below, many women in general do not have the psychological as well as physical strength to resist violence by men and they tend to be powerless when these happen. Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to discover the possibility that women, who have physical vulnerability, counter violence made by men while examining how women pro wrestlers, who have the combat skill, deal with violence conducted on them.

Physical vulnerability as normative femininity

The concept of physical vulnerability is defined by me based on arguments made in earlier studies. McCaughey (1997) argues that women become vulnerable through the practice of behaving femininely. Dowling (2000) also argues that most women make themselves vulnerable unnaturally. Women are keeping their body in an underdeveloped status and are actualizing their gender to become weaker than men. Furthermore, according to Hollander (2001), both men and women see women as vulnerable to violence by their nature. Thus, I defined “physical vulnerability” as the sense that in the process of gendered socialization, women feel their physical strength is weak and they are weaker than men physically.

Various kinds of elements relate to the process by which women come to feel that they are vulnerable physically. First, women learn how to consider others' emotion and how not to exercise their physical strength in the process of learning their gender as a woman. Furthermore, women are often illustrated as passive victims in the media, which encourages women to perceive themselves as vulnerable. Moreover, today's sports in general

construct and disseminate the ideology of superiority of the male body, and women are not encouraged to play sports (especially combative sports).

Considering others' emotion

According to Searles and Berger (1987), women learn the following factors in the process of obtaining their traditional gender role, and as a result, they become victims who are easily attacked. First, they learn to be passive and not to make self-assertions. Second, they learn to feel responsible for the emotions of others. And, third, they learn not to feel comfortable or not to feel sufficiently feminine about exercising their physical strength. Since Searles and Berger (1987) only point out these factors, I will verify its efficiency by using other studies.

First of all, I assume that being passive, not asserting oneself and feeling responsible for the emotions of others are related each other. Heywood describes being passive as: "traditional femininity is passive and open" (1988, p.151). Heywood suggests that being passive means physically passive. Suggesting that she received some kind of physical abuse before, she mentions that she can build a perfect world for herself by attaining her sense of strength and the boundary with others through bodybuilding. However, Heywood (1998) does not clarify whether being passive does not (or cannot) prevent women from countering violence and abuse directed at them.

The study by Martin (1998) verifies that women are socialized not to be assertive about oneself. Martin (1998) points out that some teachers in pre-schools and kindergartens make girls not shout loudly as a way to resist others who were mean to or bully them. In other words, girls are told already at this stage that feminine behavior means not being assertive. This is because, as Cline and Spender (1988) point out, women are, unlike men, required to consider the needs of others and to be nice to others.

According to Cline and Spender (1988), women are socialized to consider the needs of others (especially men) and to be nice to men. They witnessed the following situation in a restaurant in London. Two women were chatting. Two men interrupted their conversation and asked, "If you are alone, would you like to have a meal with us?" The women did not want to have a meal with the men, but they did not wish to hurt their feelings, and thus, they declined their offer politely and even smiled back to them. Cline and Spender (1988) argue that the situation shows how often women work hard in order to relieve emotions of men who do embarrassing things or being impolite or being stupid. In other words, it shows how often women

consider the feelings of men and make them feel good. In this way, as women take more consideration of the needs of others than they do of their own feelings and desires, they come to feel it difficult to express what their needs are and they become passive about physical aggression toward them. Bart and O'Brien (1985) describe that since lesbians are not afraid of hurting the emotions of men, they can escape from being raped as they can take action immediately when they feel they are in danger. Conversely, I assume that women who have a tendency to consider the emotions of men may misinterpret malicious activity as well-intentioned. As a result, they fail to take action immediately to counter the malicious activity of others. In short, it is considering the emotions of others that generates being passive and being not self-assertive.

Not exercising physical strength

Women are directed to feel uncomfortable or unfeminine about exercising their physical strength in the process of socialization. The reason why women do not feel comfortable about exercising physical strength is attributed to the fact that they do not want to draw attention from other people (Sanford & Fetter, 1979). This is because exercising physical strength and shouting loudly would draw such attention from other people.

Why have women begun feeling that exercising physical strength is unfeminine? Men use their bodies positively and try to become involved with the outside world in the process of the socialization of their bodies, while women do not use their bodies positively and try to confine themselves into a small space in the process of the socialization of their bodies. Young describes how boys are encouraged to develop certain physical skills, while "girls and women are not given the opportunity to use their full physical capacities in free and open engagement with the world" (2005, p.43). Theberge (2003) points out that Young's suggestion, which is based on her observations made in the latter half of the 1970's, still fits today's situation. According to the studies on boys' and girls' experiences of sports today, boys try to use their bodies actively and have confidence and motivation in using their bodies, while girls try to minimize the space in which they use their bodies and they believe in the physical superiority of boys.

The female body and physical activity

Young (2005) also points out that girls do not perceive their own bodies

as a subject and they do not use the potential capacity of their bodies fully. It is because a specific female body is formed in the process of socialization. Martin (1998) points out that the bodies of children are gendered by parents and teachers of children at pre-schools. For example, when teachers restrict girls from shouting or screaming, the girls are actually restricted from activities such as jumping or kidding around. As a result, the girls learn that they should not do anything over-active and that their bodies are quiet, small and constrained physically (Martin, 1998).

The body is gendered in physical education in Japanese schools, too. First of all, the distance of a marathon is set up as 12 kilometers for male students and 10 kilometers for female students. Such performance goals by gender are set as hard for men and easy for women. They decrease female students' capability and torture male students (Itani, 2004b). Moreover, teachers of physical education tend to teach male students with high expectancy and enthusiasm, while they tend to teach female students with low expectancy and without enthusiasm. As a result, girls are not given an equal level of opportunity for obtaining skills, and this presumably becomes a trigger for girls to dislike physical education (Ariki & Iida, 2004). It is expected that, as girls come to dislike physical education, their motivation for getting involved with physical activities such as club activities in school will become weaker.

Representation by the media: women as passive victims

In the process of women acquiring their own sense of physical vulnerability, this recognition is strengthened by specific female representation in the media (Saltzman, 1978; Searles & Follansbee, 1984). Mulvey (1989) describes how women are represented in movies as sexual objectives for male viewers, and this has become a central theme that appears repeatedly in sexual spectacle. McCaughey (1997) points out that the bodies of males and females are represented differently. In other words, men overpower others, are strong and have a body that nobody can do violence to, while female bodies are represented as not as active as men, and are also represented as something violence is done to and that can be taken over. This means that even though women try to resist violence, women freeze with fear and are incapable of protecting themselves. In short, women are represented as passive victims. As a result of being exposed to such media, women are likely to perceive their bodies as vulnerable and also are likely to perceive that they are weaker than men (Sanford & Fetter, 1979).

Impact of modern sports

In addition to the factors described above, modern sports as a “gendered system” (Messner, 1992, p.16) have an impact on the construction of male and female bodies individually. Especially, the encouragement for men to acquire aggression and for women being excluded from aggression is physicalized through modern sports.

(1) Construction of aggression in the male body

Modern sports have developed as a domain for men to construct masculinity (Raita, 2004a). Since the establishment of civic society, public and private spheres had been separated, and men created a monopoly over the public sphere while women were trapped in the private sphere. By this, men established the foundation of their own power and privilege (Hartmann, 1976). However, many men lost their proprietary rights over business and farmland that were the basis for patriarchal privilege, and they became paid workers (Tolson, 1977). The tendency that men became proletariats, urbanization, modernization and (especially in the US) the disappearance of the Western frontier has weakened the configuration of patriarchal masculinity (Messner, 1990). Moreover, feminism, especially at the beginning of the 20th century, has become a threat to male superiority (Kimmel, 1987).

Under this situation of the so-called “crisis of masculinity” (Kimmel, 1987, p.262), organized sports have become important as “masculinity-validating experience” (Dubbert, 1979, p.164). Sports became “a male-created homosocial cultural sphere... while also providing dramatic symbolic proof of the ‘natural superiority’ of men over women” (Messner, 1988, p.200).

For example, according to Dunning (1986), along with industrialization and modernization, social life was “civilized” and control over the use of violence was systematized, and as a result, the balance of power between men and women shifted to women in England. Men felt this situation as a threat to themselves and started to establish rugby and other “combat sports” in order to display their superiority to women. In other words, modern sports are a “gendered institution” (Messner, 1992, p.16) that was constructed as a response mainly from men to the crisis of masculinity from the latter half of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century (Kimmel, 1987).

Today, sports also construct the superiority of men by connecting “males and maleness with valued skills and the sanctioned use of aggression/force/violence” (Bryson, 1987, p.349). One of the grounds of this lies in American football where male bodies with huge muscles are equipped with protection

and using power aggressively and their bodies display the superiority of men, while women are sexual subjects who support the men as cheerleaders and have vulnerable bodies (Messner, 1990). This suggests that aggression and violence in sports support to construct the superiority of men against women.

Moreover, it is pointed out that men learn and practice the use of aggression and violence through specific sports (Messner, 1990). For example, the combination of the role models of violent adult-sports-players and the rewards given by coaches, team mates and other people for using violence willingly and well, has created a situation such that, among some athletes of ice hockey, one of the combative sports, using violence becomes a normative behavior (Smith, 1974; Vaz, 1982). In American football, too, some of the linemen tend to learn to use violence against others for the purpose of victory (Messner, 1990).

(2) Exclusion of aggression from the female body

How have modern sports constructed the female body? From the start, it was difficult for women to participate in sports on even ground with men (Raita, 2004b). This was because a “science of sex differences” (Raita, 2004b) to justify the physical inferiority of women was accumulated in the 19th century. Moreover, women were not encouraged to play any competitive sports even in the 20th century (Raita, 2004b).

Women are not given opportunities to play sports as equally as men do in Japan today, and women have learned to give up playing sports (Itani, 2004a). Therefore, it is possible to say that men are still encouraged to play sports more than women. Meanwhile, according to a study conducted on women in the US by Bart and O’Brien (1985), those women who participated in sports in adulthood are more likely to avoid being raped than women who did not participate. This suggests that participation in sports does not let women perceive their own bodies as vulnerable.

In today’s Japan, women are still not encouraged to participate especially in combative sports that have elements of attacking the bodies of others by using one’s own body. For example, gender differences in participation are found in sports clubs at schools, which are important spaces for school-age children to experience sports. Among the number of participants in special divisions of All Japan High School Athletic Federation in 1999, the number of male members is higher than that of the female members in *judo* and the difference is more than three times (Itani & Kitada, 2001). Moreover,

in 1997, seven divisions in All Japan High School Athletic Federation had only male members, and these sports included combative sports such as rugby and boxing (Itani & Kitada, 2001). This information lets us infer that pro wrestling, which is similar to combative sports, is not encouraged for women, since women pro wrestlers exercise aggression.

As described earlier, even participating in sports other than combative sports is effective for avoiding being raped. Moreover, women are excluded from experiencing physical contact and exercising aggression since they do not participate in combat sports. It is assumed that many women without the experience of combative sports are not familiar with having contact with the body of others and do not have the skills to attack others and protect themselves. Thus, it is difficult for them to develop their skills and consciousness for resisting violence when they suffer violence. Furthermore, because the physical superiority of men is emphasized and diffused by the impact of the media and modern sports that were described earlier, women come to accept the physical superiority of men. It is assumed that the acceptance of this ideology leads to women's consciousness that women cannot resist men's physical violence when women suffer it.

As a result, many women come to fear that they may be sexually assaulted by men, and thus, women become careful and begin to conduct chaste behaviors (McCaughy, 1997). Presumably, this is because many women learn to be physically vulnerable. Moreover, the fear of violence by men stops women from acting and behaving freely. As an attempt to avoid the chance of suffering violence by men, women inhibit themselves from walking alone at night or in places where not many people are around. Consequently, the fear of violence from men limits women's activities and requires women to behave "femininely," which is one kind of social control (Reynolds, 1974).

Transformation of physical vulnerability by self-defense training

Is it possible to transform the sense of physical vulnerability of women? Previous studies on participants in self-defense training in the US have examined whether physical practices could change physicalized normative femininity.

According to McDaniel (1993), women describe that their fears of being victims of crimes were reduced dramatically and their confidence in their ability to protect themselves increased dramatically since they participated

in self-defense training. Similarly, in a study by Hollander (2004), it was found that through the training women began to perceive the strength and capability of their bodies, which increased their confidence in their abilities of defending themselves. In addition, they had more confidence in their own strength in comparison to the average man. McCaughey (1997) emphasized the importance of self-defense as a factor in transforming physicalized normative femininity. The women who have learned self-defense abandon feminine physical behaviors that often limit their movement, and resist others who attack them by using their bodies and without considering emotions of the attackers. According to a study by Matsuo on self-defenders in Japan, women who have done self-defense training have more “confidence in themselves and women’s physical ability in comparison to the average man” (2010, p.92) and more “confidence in their own capability of defending themselves by using physical skills when attacked by men of average height” (2010, p.92).

Combat skill and physical vulnerability

As discussed in the first section, many women who have physical vulnerability come to fear that they may suffer sexual violence by physically superior men. Meanwhile, studies of women who have received self-defense training suggest that if women can have confidence in their capability of defending themselves, they tend to feel less that they are weaker than men. Like self-defense training, sports may possibly increase the confidence of women in their bodies. Sports, especially combative sports, not only may give women confidence towards their bodies, but also may teach women the means (for instance, the skills to attack or defend) to resist any violence they may encounter. Therefore, if women participate in combative sports, they may be able to transform their sense of physical vulnerability by themselves.

Women pro wrestlers and combat skill

Are there women who participate in combative sports or something similar in Japan who transformed their sense of physical vulnerability in a way similar to the women who have received self-defense training? This chapter focuses not on those women who participate in combative sports but on women pro wrestlers, who participate in activities similar to combative sports. This is because the skills women pro wrestlers attain from their “fights” in pro wrestling are more powerful than the skills attained from

many other combative sports. Pro wrestling has a variety of offensive techniques that include throwing, choking, grappling, kicking and batting techniques. These techniques are basically permitted for use as long as they are not a threat to the life of wrestlers. In contrast, in amateur wrestling, which appears to be like pro wrestling, batting, choking and grappling techniques that are used to make opponents give up are not allowed (Japan Wrestling Federation).

Moreover, pro wrestlers have to receive a great variety of techniques while they are fighting. Unlike self-defense and combative sports, pro wrestling exists as wrestlers receive the techniques of their opponents (Kamei, 2000). For instance, athletes in boxing, one of the combative sports, focus on avoiding attacks from opponents and winning each match as soon as possible, while in pro wrestling, unless wrestlers receive the techniques of their opponents, the opponents will not receive their own techniques. In order to receive the techniques of their opponents, women pro wrestlers practice the break fall, but if they fail to do a proper break fall, it may cause major injury to themselves and their opponents⁽⁴⁾. In other words, wrestlers execute and receive a variety of techniques that have great destructive power (see the pictures below). Thus, it can be said that women pro wrestlers are people who are engaged in activities that are similar to combative sports.

These constitute the “fights” of pro wrestling. Thus, it is assumed that women wrestlers may use such training and learned skills when they counter violence by men as some women conduct self-defense. In other words, women pro wrestlers attain the combat skill through their fights in pro wrestling.

However, the final purpose of sports is usually to decide the winners and losers, but that of women’s pro wrestling is to entertain the audience. Women pro wrestlers try to show their physical and psychological strength and the offense and defense of their techniques, and also try to surprise or get a laugh from the audience by showing costumes and performances of their various personas.

Four assumptions

I had the following four assumptions about combat skill and physical vulnerability. The first assumption is (a) girls and women in their teens and 20’s were physically vulnerable before they joined their pro wrestling organizations, and thus feared to walk on a street at night. However, (b) by doing pro wrestling, they changed from being physically vulnerable to hav-



Picture 8 Hyūga Azumi attacks Leon by using a knee attack to her medulla. (© JWP)



Picture 9 Haruyama Kayoko attacks Yoneyama Kaori by using a technique called the *nadare-shiki* (meaning avalanche-style) guillotine drop. (© JWP)



Picture 10 Command Bolshoi executes a technique called the *nadare-shiki* back throw on Kuragaki Tsubasa. (© JWP)



Picture 11 Yoneyama Kaori pulls a technique called a double wrist suplex on Leon (© JWP)

ing physical confidence (physical vulnerability and physical confidence are two opposites and, presumably, what is between the two is sequential), and attained combat skill. Then, (c) they came to realize that they can defend themselves by physical confidence and their combat skill, and eventually



Picture 12 Kana uses a high kick on Shirai Mio (© Office Kana)

did not fear walking on a street at night. Moreover, (d) they use their combat skill when they encounter violence from men in their daily lives.

As a result of analyses of interviews, it was found that none of the wrestlers had had the same experiences that consist of the assumptions above. As to (a), many of the girls had not had physical vulnerability before they joined their organizations. Among these girls, there were people like Maki, whose physical confidence weakened after joining her pro wrestling organization. Moreover, there were girls like Mika and Nana who had physical confidence before they joined their organizations but had not thought that they could resist violence from men. There were other girls, like Sayaka, who were physically vulnerable but did not admit their own physical vulnerability.

As to (b), there were wrestlers who could be described as having attained their physical confidence by doing pro wrestling. However, in contrast, there were wrestlers, like Sayaka, who had attained her combat skill but had not necessarily attained physical confidence.

As to (c), some wrestlers have come to realize that they could defend themselves by means of having physical confidence and combat skill, and they do not fear walking on a street at night, but others have a different perception from assumption (c). For example, Mika cannot perceive that she can apply her combat skill to defend herself, and still fears walking on

a street at night. As a result, Sanae, for instance, could not use her combat skill even when she encountered violence. Moreover, Sawako and other wrestlers fear their own combat skill rather than someone doing violence to them.

As to (d), only Rie used her combat skill when encountering violence from men. In contrast, some wrestlers like Akiko verbally helped others who were being abused by men.

Others have come to be mistaken as men since their bodies have been transformed by pro wrestling, and thus, they have come not to encounter violence by men.

Physical vulnerability and fear of a street at night

(1) Deficiency in physical vulnerability

It was supposed, based on earlier studies, that women achieve physical vulnerability in the process of socialization. However, it has been clear that many women pro wrestlers did not achieve physical vulnerability before they joined their pro wrestling organizations, according to the analysis of the interviews with women pro wrestlers. Because many women pro wrestlers said that they felt confident about their own bodies. Based on the definition of physical vulnerability at the beginning, if narratives of women pro wrestlers can be interpreted to have confidence in their own bodies, it is interpreted that they do not feel that they are not physically vulnerable than men, even if they did not compare their bodies than men's in their interviews.

Yumiko used to have fights when she was a junior high school student. She used to fight not because she wanted to but because she was involved in fights picked by others, who claimed that she had a menacing look. She did not like fighting, and even if she won, she did not have a sense of pride from winning fights.

Furthermore, before she joined her pro wrestling organization, she once caught a male groper. One day, she was on a train and saw a female student next to her trembling. Yumiko asked her, "What's happening?" The student passed her a memo. It was written in shaky letters on the memo that she was being groped. Then, Yumiko told the female student to get off the train at the next station together. Yumiko looked at the back of the student and saw a man touching her body with his hand. The train arrived at the next station, and as soon as its door opened, Yumiko grabbed the hand of the groper and pulled him out from the train. She also pulled the hand of the female student and asked her, "Is this the hand? From which station were you being

touched from?” Then she twisted the wrist of the groper and dragged him to a station attendant and told him, “He is a groper so take him to the police.” The student was still trembling and only could say, “Sorry, thank you.” In this way, she was holding out against a man who was sexually molesting someone else. This incident shows that Yumiko was not physically vulnerable even before she became a pro wrestler.

Other women pro wrestlers seem to obtain physical confidence by engaging in a variety of sports, including combative sports. Mami did *shorinji kenpo*, one of the Japanese martial arts, a little when she was a elementary school student, and she played badminton and did *kendo* at junior high school. Mami says that she does not fear walking on a street at night, and did not fear that even before she became a pro wrestler.

Yoshie had confidence in her body even before she became a pro wrestler. At the age of around 12, she already had a dream of becoming a pro wrestler, thus she started doing sit ups and pushups, and increased the numbers of these exercises by one every day. Before she graduated from elementary school, she was capable of doing both exercises 50 times, and had confidence in her physical strength. She was performing *judo* and *karate* when she was a junior high school student. She says that when she was a junior high school student, she did not fear walking on a street at night.

I had a dream of becoming a pro wrestler since my childhood, so while I was walking, I used to imagine exercising techniques on the people I saw. I was that kind of child. So even when I used to go to a *karate dojo*, though I had to come home at night, I did not feel fear much.

(2) Weakening of physical confidence

Like Yoshie, Maki also did not feel physical vulnerability even before she became a pro wrestler. She was conscious that her physical strength was greater than that of male students. This consciousness stemmed from her experiences of playing combative sports, as well as her experience in the physical education classes at school. She did *kendo* by the second year in junior high school and *karate* at high school. During a physical education class at junior high school, students had their grasping power measured, and it was discovered that she had the second strongest grasp in her class. In short, her grasping power was stronger than that of most of her male classmates. So she became aware that, “I am strong.” Maki’s high school had a very small number of female students, so male and female students used to have classes

in physical education together. Maki says, “I didn’t want to be defeated by the boys, so I tried really hard, well, even for short-distance running too.” Once when she was playing softball, she ran into the boy in her opponent team and shoved him away. She also swam and did *judo* together with male students. She says, even for that, she did not feel much difference in physical strength from the male students. In this way, Maki had confidence in her physical strength and she also did not fear walking on a street at night. She was scared of almost nothing before she joined her pro wrestling organization. She said “if someone attacked me, I would not mind fighting against the person and even being in the newspapers.” She had confidence in her physical strength and did not feel that her physical strength was different from men. However, when she entered the pro wrestling world, she realized that there were people stronger than her.

Maki is in an organization for both men and women pro wrestlers, thus she must feel a difference in strength from men pro wrestlers. Because of this, she has come to admit the difference in physical strength between men and women. She says, “When I have fights with a man who has, like me, done *judo* a little, I cannot defeat him, you know. After all, that is one of the inherent differences between men and women.” She believes that she cannot defeat men who have had experience at combative sports. She also does not even think to apply her pro wrestling techniques immediately to fights on a street at night. She thinks that if someone with a knife or gun attacks her, she will not be able to do anything about it. However, she also says that if she is really in danger, she will fight anyway.

One of the factors that has weakened Maki’s confidence is the discourse made by her senior male pro wrestler. He told her that though women pro wrestlers believe they are strong, it was dangerous to believe so. She says, “If I do something calmly, it will probably be OK.” This can be interpreted as her not thinking that she is weak, although she is conscious about the differences in strength between men and women. However, if she is told by male pro wrestlers that she cannot defeat men because she is a woman, she believes it and this weakens her confidence when she needs to defend herself. This indicates that although Maki joined her pro wrestling organization without having physical vulnerability, her physical confidence was weakened after she joined.

- (3) Coexistence of physical confidence and fear of walking on a street at night
 There are girls who had physical confidence but feared walking on a

street at night before they became pro wrestlers. Mika describes herself as a child who loved moving about and had a strong willingness to do practical exercises in her physical education classes. She also loved mat exercises and vaulting boxes, thus she believed that she had good reflexes. Moreover, she was doing *kendo* from the first year of elementary school to that of high school, and also playing badminton at her club activities in junior high school. She says that she had physical confidence but she still feared walking on a street at night. Nana, too, liked playing sports since she was an elementary school student, and she used to do track and field in the summer and basketball in winter. She played badminton for three years at her junior high school. She says that she was a fast runner and good at playing sports and that she believed that she had more physical strength than girls in general. This may be interpreted as her having physical confidence before she became a pro wrestler. However, she also says that she feared walking on the street alone before she became a pro wrestler. These narratives of Mika and Nana suggest that there are some girls who have physical confidence but believe that they cannot resist violence by men. This suggests the possibility that whether women feel their physical strength is weak or not, and whether they feel they are physically weaker than men or not, are not necessarily the same.

(4) Women pro wrestlers who seem to have physical vulnerability

In contrast to many women pro wrestlers who had achieved physical confidence before they joined their pro wrestling organizations, it appears that Sayaka had physical vulnerability. As described in Chapter 3, Sayaka “disliked” playing sports or doing something active, and still dislikes them. Moreover, Sayaka is neither good at playing sports nor has physical strength. Actually she did pushups even more than a few times when she took her tryout. Although at this moment she finally realized that she did not have much physical strength, it seems that she did not think that she was physically weak. Because she responded as follows, when I asked her a question as to whether she has become strong since she became a pro wrestler:

Have I become stronger? I can't tell. I don't know because I did not move my body much anyway (laughs). If I was doing something active before, I could tell the difference, but I did not do anything active. Everything, everything reached a peak after I entered the pro wrestling

world, so I can't tell (laughs).

This suggests that she did not necessarily have any perception that she was physically weak. Thus, though Sayaka seems to have had physical vulnerability, she did not necessarily perceive that she was physically weak. Therefore, I cannot judge clearly whether she had physical vulnerability.

Pro wrestling and physical confidence

Some women pro wrestlers told of how they have attained physical strength or both physical and mental strength by performing pro wrestling. Thus, it is possible to interpret their physical confidence as something achieved (see Chapter 7 for more details). For example, when Rei was a rookie, she used to carry the luggage of many senior wrestlers on her shoulders. Because of this, she has confidence that she can carry anything heavy on her shoulders. Many of the women pro wrestlers who say that their physical strength was attained through pro wrestling did not have physical vulnerability before they joined their organizations. Thus, it is possible that they had physical confidence attained before they joined their organizations, which was reinforced by doing pro wrestling.

Combat skill, self-defense, fear of walking on the street at night

(1) Women pro wrestlers who realized the possibility of applying their combat skill for self-defense

Masumi, Maho and Sayaka have come to have more confidence in countering violence through pro wrestling. Masumi says that if she was attacked unawares on the street at night, "I would be surprised, and probably panic." She would be too scared to fight. Thus, she walks a little faster on the street at night. However, if she is calm and fights as in a match, she has more confidence than before. Maho says that she was scared of gropers before she became a pro wrestler, but now she is scared of ghosts, for example, but not scared of gropers. Moreover, if women pick fights with her, she says she will never be defeated, and even with men, if they are ordinary men, she thinks she will not be defeated easily. This is because "I don't have much power but I have technique, as you know. I know how to lock their arms and legs (laughs) and how to avoid the attack."

Sayaka says that it would be "scary" and she might "panic" ⁽⁵⁾ if someone tried to attack her because she or he might have a knife, for instance.

However, she thinks that if a fight is picked with her, she will probably fight. She thinks so because of her working experience overseas.

When she appeared in a comedy show overseas, she was asked to do some sparring with a comedian. It was a comedy show, thus she was imagining a light sparring. However, the comedian “suddenly tried to hold me down.” In that moment, “I thought I never want to be defeated by such a novice... so, I felt a sudden rage, and I held down the guy and threw him off.” She had her arm broken and her arm was in a cast, but she could exert her strength. From this experience, she thought “I’m good enough (laughs), good enough to defeat men,” because she could exert her power in an instant. If a man approaches her, she gets scared. However, if the man not only touches her shoulder but grabs it, she says that she would “fight back for sure.” This suggests that combat skill is physicalized, and if Sayaka is in a situation that is similar to pro wrestling, her body begins taking on the actions of pro wrestling. Therefore, it is to be expected that if she suffers violence in her daily life, she will react in the same way as in pro wrestling.

(2) Women pro wrestlers who are still afraid of walking on the street at night even after they have attained combat skill: they are too scared to do anything

Mika and Nana have attained physical confidence and combat skill by performing pro wrestling. However, they say that they are still afraid of walking on the street at night even though they are pro wrestlers now. This is because, according to Mika, “anyone with even a little strength can lift someone the same size as me” and because the fight will not be conducted by “using a set of rules.” Also it is “impossible to know what kind of weapons a person has” these days.

Sanae is the only person who talked about her experience of failing to resist violence. Sanae has not been groped or fought off gropers since she became a pro wrestler, but she used to be groped often before that. She used to be groped most often when she commuted to a *dojo* where she could learn *judo*, *karate* and other combat sports, when she was a high school student. This experience did not happen after becoming a pro wrestler, but Sanae was doing pro wrestling-like combat sports as well as *judo* and *karate*. Thus, it can be interpreted that she had combat skill at that time. Moreover, since she says that she is scared of walking on the street at night even now, though she is a pro wrestler, it is assumed that her reaction to any violence she comes across in her daily life today is the same as the reaction she had

before she became a pro wrestler. Thus, Sanae's experience below was added to the analysis.

When she was walking on the way to her *dojo*, someone on a motor scooter chased her, and she was "grabbed, like this, by the guy on the scooter." She called the police, and then the police asked her where she was going.

I answered that I was going to a *dojo* for combat sports. The police then told me that I should be strong enough to attack the guy back since I was doing combat sports, and told me what was the point of doing them. In reality, I was too scared to do anything in such a situation (laughs). Well... I should have knocked the groper down, that I thought later, but nothing can be done in such a sudden situation.

Sanae's story tells us clearly that even if you are doing activities such as combat sports, you can still be too scared to do anything if you are attacked. This indicates that the experiences of combat sports do not lead automatically to ability at self-defense.

(3) Fears of one's own combat skill: I cannot hit, even when prodded

Ryoko and Sawako tell about their fears of their own combat skill. Ryoko understands how much power she should exert in a match depending on her opponents, but she does not know how much power others have if they try to attack her. Thus, she says that she fears hurting them if she has to have an actual fight with them. Such fights are different from fights in pro wrestling, as fights based on conflict stem from anger. Thus, she is afraid that she "might hurt them seriously because of the difficulty of controlling" herself. She says, after all, "pro wrestlers should never attack or injure people in general," and thus she cannot fight. Because she fears the destructive capability of her own combat skill, she does not want to use those skills in her everyday life.

Sawako tells of her experience of not hitting someone back after being hit by a person. When she was having drinks with her friends, she was advising her male friend about what he asked her. Then, something annoyed him and he slapped her. To tell the truth, he wanted Sawako to hit him, but she did not hit him back. Then, the friend kept slapping, hitting her hard and knocking her off her feet several times. At last, Sawako grabbed him by the collar and pressed him hard against the wall. She told him, "Because I am

a professional, I cannot hit you. If something happens, I will be in trouble even if you are my friend, so I cannot hit you. Even if you hit me, I cannot hit you. So, cut it out.” Nobody in her pro wrestling organization told her not to hit back if they are hit by people in general, but she has become aware that she should not do so, according to her. In this way, even if they suffer violence from someone, women pro wrestlers seal off their combat skill if they are aware of the destructive capability of their own skills. Therefore, it becomes difficult for them to know whether they are capable of resisting violence if they encounter it in their everyday lives.

Use of combat skill

Only Rie is applying her combat skill for self-defense. Meanwhile, there are pro wrestlers who help verbally others who are suffering violence.

(1) Retaliating double

When Rie is groped or something similar, she usually retaliates double for what the perpetrators did to her. She says that, because she is a pro wrestler, she never assaults someone in general, but if a perpetrator tries to run away, she definitely catches him. Once, she was attacked by a groper right in front of her. She grabbed the groper by the collar, and the groper fell down to the ground accidentally. “I couldn’t be bothered making him stand, so I dragged him (laughs). He was saying to me that you could kill me... so I was saying, so what.” She dragged him to a police station. Then, one of the policemen said to Rie, “I saw a girl dragging something so I thought she was dragging luggage. But, wow you are dragging a man!!”

She is often groped on trains, but she fights gropers off effectively by using pro wrestling techniques. When she is groped as a man touches her hips, she pretends she is stretching her body and hits the man’s jaw with her head.

It’s a chin crusher, one kind of technique. I can’t be bothered grabbing hands like this and so on. It’s a pain to tell people this is a groper and so on. So, it is quicker to give him a blow... if I stretch my body like this, usually someone’s jaw will come around here (pointing the top of her head), when the person is standing very near me (laughs).

This usually makes gropers quiet immediately.

On crowded trains, gropers often touch the side of her body, and in that case she cannot use her head to attack them. Thus, usually she grabs the tips

of their fingers tight. “My forearm strength is over 40 kilograms, so it is painful for them apparently.”

She has also helped many women who were groped. Women pro wrestlers can run fast, and thus they can usually catch up with gropers who try to run away as long as it is a short distance. When she hears someone screaming “He is a groper,” she immediately thinks, “Thanks for giving me an opportunity to gain credit.” She has caught gropers several times and been appreciated on each occasion. General people seem to be “afraid of” gropers, she says. On trains, if she sees a groper touching someone, she catches him immediately and takes him to the police. When she was using one line of the Japan Railways service, she used to see gropers every time she was on the train. Sometimes she was groped and sometimes she saw someone else being groped. According to Rie, it is not necessary to be afraid of gropers. Because gropers usually do not have any knives, it is possible to deal with them with bare hands, thus it is not difficult to defeat them.

Rie is using her physical strength and her combat skill in order to resist the violence she encounters in her daily life. While she is conscious that her physical power is stronger than other people’s in general, she is using the power to fight off gropers effectively. Moreover, she is helping not only herself but other women by using physical strength and combat skill she attained from pro wrestling.

(2) Verbal resistance to violence

Midori and Akiko are other wrestlers who have had experiences of helping other women who were being groped. When Midori was 18 years old and a rookie, she saw an “old guy” touching the hip of her friend with his umbrella. She kept telling the old guy to apologize to her friend, but he got off the train immediately once the train stopped at a station.

Like Midori, Akiko also does not use her combat skill when she helps other women from gropers. She often sees other women being groped in trains. When she sees this, she quietly walks toward the woman who is being groped and suggests that she should change her train car. Many women cannot do anything in such a situation because they fear gropers, even though they know they are being groped. Akiko tries to help such women psychologically in many cases. She says that she began doing so after she became a pro wrestler.

However, the action she is taking is not to fight off gropers. What she is doing is to support women who are being groped. She is not helping the

women by trying to catch the gropers, but she suggests they can change their train car and she does not do anything more. She is not holding out against gropers but trying to help the victims escape from gropers. Akiko is not trying to use her physical strength and combat skill to catch gropers. That is because she thinks that “pro wrestling is not a sport to give damage to people.” What Akiko says stems from the fact that pro wrestlers fight to decide winners and losers, because their fights are conducted in a style of match, but the purpose of the fight is not to hurt their opponents. Akiko perceives that resisting violence she encounters in everyday life is to “harm people.” Thus, since pro wrestling is not something that aims to “harm people,” she does not think of applying combat skill from pro wrestling against the violence she encounters in daily life. Moreover, her perception that resisting violence means “harming people” implies that Akiko does not perceive the legitimacy of self-defense—we have a right to fight against pre-emptive violence in order to avoid being harmed (McCaughy, 1997). These factors show that she does not think of using her combat skill in her daily life.

No one attacks us because we look like men

Although I had thought that attaining combat skill would make wrestlers able to defend themselves, some women pro wrestlers point out that developing bodies that enable them to do pro wrestling functions to protect themselves on the street at night.

Sachi says that people usually mistake her for a man, thus she cannot be the subject of violence in daily life. There are many women pro wrestlers who are mistaken for men in their everyday lives (see Chapter 7 for discussion). Sachi says that she would never fear walking on the street at night. It is because “I look like this... nobody attacks me walking on the street at night.” When she was interviewed, she looked big and tall, and had broad shoulders. She had short dyed gold hair and was wearing a pair of bluish pants. Sachi believes that she looks like a man and as if she has no money. Thus, muggers will not attack her.

New questions arose from women pro wrestlers’ narratives

The following questions arose as a result of the study in the previous section: (a) why are there girls who have physical confidence before becoming pro wrestlers but who feel scared of walking on the street at night?; (b)

why are there girls who do not have much physical strength objectively but who do not think that their bodies are weak?; (c) why do only a few pro wrestlers apply their combat skill to self-defense?; (d) why are there women pro wrestlers who do not actually apply their combat skill for self-defense but still have confidence in their own capability of fighting if they are ever attacked?

The first question suggests that whether these women feel that they are physically vulnerable, and whether they feel that they are more physically vulnerable than men, may not be necessarily the same. According to women pro wrestlers' narratives, it is possible to assume that even though they have confidence in their own physical strength, they think that their strength is not sufficient to use against men. Therefore, their fears of men's violence are not dispelled. Previous studies conducted by McCaughey (1997) and Dowling (2000) assume that the sense of feeling physically vulnerable is connected to the women's sense of feeling that they are more physically vulnerable than men. Therefore, I also have assumed the same view and defined physical vulnerability as it was described at the beginning of this chapter. However, it has been clear that there are complicated relations between the two points of whether the women feel they are physically vulnerable or not and whether they feel that they are more physically vulnerable or not than men. Therefore, it is necessary to elaborate the concept of physical vulnerability further.

The second question suggests that we are required to clarify multi-directionally how girls and women perceive their own physical strength. It is possible that even though their bodies are shaped as objectively vulnerable, if they do not find it inconvenient in their daily lives, they might not perceive their bodies as weak. This point will be clarified by studying the process of gendered physical socialization of girls and women in more detail.

To find answers to the third and fourth questions, it is necessary to consider the particularity of pro wrestling. One of the significant features of pro wrestling is to receive the opponent's technique, which is different from combative sports (Kamei, 2000). Thus, a study will be conducted in the following way, by dividing combat skill into "offensive skill" (skills for executing techniques) and "break fall skill" (skills for receiving techniques).

The particularity of pro wrestling fights and self-defense

Offensive skill and self-defense

Only a few pro wrestlers are applying their offensive skill they have at-

tained from pro wrestling to self-defense. This is because pro wrestlers only execute techniques on people who are capable of a break fall; so that even if they are attacked in daily life, they see the attackers as people who are not capable of a break fall, and thus, it is difficult for them to counter-attack. Moreover, as Sawako explains, pro wrestlers fear their own strength generally, thus they put restraints on themselves not to use their strength in order to counter-attack against the people who attack them in daily life. However, if they restrain themselves from using their own offensive skill, they will lose the opportunity to know whether they are actually physically strong or not. Because of this, pro wrestlers like Maki, who had physical confidence before they became pro wrestlers, have their confidence weakened by the discourse of male pro wrestlers, and they never have the opportunity to deny it. Women pro wrestlers are prevented from applying their offensive skill, which are attained from pro wrestling, directly to self-defense.

Furthermore, unless the women are conscious of their own capability of resisting violence, even though they have experience at combat sports, they cannot apply it to resist violence, such as the case of Sanae. In addition, like Akiko, unless they are conscious of legitimacy of resisting violence, that is legitimacy of self-defense, they do not even think about applying their offensive skill in their daily lives.

In spite of these factors, why has Rie come to use her skills to counter violence in daily life? One day, Rie was touched by one of the audience in a hall where an exhibition was held. When this incident occurred, one of her senior wrestlers named Akari happened to see this and told Rie as follows:

I was told that I should do something about it without being obvious. She said that it was OK to do so as long as I didn't injure the guy. I was told that unless I did something about it, the guy would do the same again. She said that I should protect my body by myself.

In other words, it seems to be permitted, among women pro wrestlers, to get revenge for what a male audience does to demean the bodies of women pro wrestlers as a mere sexual object, as long as they do not injure the men. For example, even Ryoko and Sawako, who are fearful of their own strength sometimes, use their strength against some male audiences who sexually harass them in halls where exhibitions are held. For instance, Ryoko says that she made a point of remembering the face of the man who touched her breast when she walked on the *hanamichi* to the ring, "I went to the ringside

intentionally and like this I attacked... kicked him.”

Ryoko, Sawako and Rie confront the male audience who conduct sexual harassment in pro wrestling halls, but then why did only Rie begin using her skills to resist the violence she encounters in daily life? As described earlier, Ryoko and Sawako fear their own strength and they restrict themselves from using that strength severely. Meanwhile, Rie is conscious that her physical strength is different from that of people in general (for example, differences in forearm strength or running speed), but she does not fear her own strength as much as Ryoko is. It is assumed that while Rie is confronting the male audiences who touch her body, she has come to realize that a little strength can produce a profound effect toward them. After realizing this, she probably began resisting gropers outside such halls by using techniques with a small impact.

Break fall skill and self-defense

Then, are break fall skill made use of as part of an ability at self-defense? In pro wrestling, pro wrestlers have taken for granted to receive the techniques of their opponents in the ring, but if they try to receive any attacks they may encounter in their daily lives as they do in pro wrestling, they are likely to injure themselves. Therefore, in such a situation, they need to avoid attacks, not to receive them. In other words, when they want to resist the violence they encounter in their daily lives, break fall skill will probably not be useful directly.

In fact, some women pro wrestlers say that they find their break fall skill useful as a way to protect themselves from sudden accidents, but not as a way to resist violence in their daily lives. Maki says that when she slipped on a snowy road, she used a break fall and managed to avoid her head being injured. Mika says, “When I fell down the stairs, I used a break fall (laughs). Because of the break fall... I didn’t hit my head, also I didn’t break my bones.”

On the other hand, women pro wrestlers not only execute techniques that have destructive power, but they also have experiences of receiving techniques. This gives them the confidence to fight rather than doing nothing when they are attacked. Women pro wrestlers who experienced matches against men pro wrestlers felt the strength of the men pro wrestlers. “The power is utterly different, it was like I was an insect, being thrown away” (Mika). “Especially, there is no comparison in terms of hitting techniques between women and men pro wrestlers, and men can gain superiority

through that” (Rie). However, women pro wrestlers do not believe that they are physically powerless, as they say that having more flexible bodies than men, even if grappling techniques are used, they do not cause much damage (Masumi), and if they succeed in deceiving male pro wrestlers somehow, they can win (Rie, Masumi). Since they accept the superiority of male bodies only partially, they are not easily led to feeling completely powerless if they are attacked by men.

Transformation of physical vulnerability by attaining combat skill

Are women pro wrestlers having physical vulnerability as physicalized normative femininity transformed by attaining combat skill? Most of the women pro wrestlers who were interviewed did not have physical vulnerability before they became pro wrestlers, and thus, this question could not be studied rigorously.

However, some experiences of the women pro wrestlers that was not coincident with my supposition raised another question. The fact that some women did not have physical vulnerability before they joined their pro wrestling organizations suggests that there were factors in their experiences that might have prevented them from having physical vulnerability. One of the factors is the experience of playing a variety of sports, including combative sports. Another factor is that girls obtain physical confidence in the physical education classes they have together with male students. These points suggest that there is a possibility that if women who have physical vulnerability as well as women who do not think they are vulnerable but do not have physical confidence either (for example, Sayaka) have such experiences, they may have physical confidence.

Moreover, the necessity of elaborating the concept of physical vulnerability has merged from the fact that there are girls who have physical confidence but fear violence from men. Furthermore, the girls who seem to have no physical strength objectively do not perceive themselves as being physically vulnerable. It has become clear that it is necessary to study the process of the gendered physical socialization of girls and women in more detail.

Because of the particularity of pro wrestling that wrestlers execute techniques only on people who are capable of a break fall, pro wrestlers restrain themselves extremely from using their offensive skill against people in general. Thus, though pro wrestlers have offensive skill, only Rie applies them

to self-defense directly.

Meanwhile, the experiences of pro wrestling have given physical as well as mental strength and confidence to some women pro wrestlers. Some women pro wrestlers have little fear of people who may attack them and they have confidence that they are capable of fighting rather than doing nothing. This can be interpreted that they have reinforced their physical confidence through performing pro wrestling, although they already had it before they joined their pro wrestling organizations. In addition, they have attained their combat skill through pro wrestling, they have realized that they can apply those skills to self-defense and they have more confidence to resist violence committed by men. Moreover, having a chance to experience the strength of men by attaining combat skill (especially, break fall skills), some women pro wrestlers accept superiority of male bodies only partially. Because of this, they tend not to have a belief that they will be powerless if they are attacked by men. This result suggests the possibility that women who have physical vulnerability and those who do not think they are physically vulnerable but do not have physical confidence can build confidence that they can resist violence from men through experiencing combative sports or similar sports activities that let them to use their own bodies to attack others.

As described earlier, women are not encouraged to try combative sports, and it is believed that this situation is depriving women of having the opportunity to attain physical as well as mental strength ⁽⁶⁾. Women's participation in combative sports or something similar is not only an issue related to sports and relevant topics, but also an issue in related to violence against women. This chapter has clarified that this point should be explored.

However, even if women participate in combative sports or something similar, unless they know that they can apply such experiences to resist violence, they will not find them useful, like Sanae. In addition, like Akiko, unless they perceive the legitimacy of self-defense, they cannot use their skills and confidence from combative sports effectively. Legitimacy of self-defense needs to be perceived and shared by more women. The focus related to violence against women has been placed heavily on the extensiveness of this violence and the impact of violence on women (Hollander, 2002). I do not deny their importance, but the importance of self-defense needs to be focused on more so that women can avoid being the victims of violence ⁽⁷⁾. This is because female university students who have received self-defense training are much less likely to suffer sexual violence in comparison to fe-

male university students who have no experience of self-defense training (e.g., Hollander, 2014). Of course, this does not mean that violence against women can be eliminated only by self-defense training. However, though people can be able to walk on public streets anytime they like, if women are attacked by men when they are walking on the street at night, these women will be criticized in Japanese society. This suggests that Japanese society tolerates men's violence against women as it cannot be helped to some extent. In this kind of society, self-defense is still important for women so that they can live while protecting their bodies by themselves.

Notes

- (1) In Aiba (2008a), combat skill was defined as women's physical skills with which they resist violence conducted on their bodies by men. However, the physical skills attained by women pro wrestlers through doing pro wrestling can be applied to the agents of violence regardless of gender, and thus, combat skill is defined in this chapter as physical skills for resisting violence conducted on the body.
- (2) Physical characteristics that women acquire in the process of socialization were analyzed as physical passivity by Aiba (2008a). However, later, it has been revealed that physical passivity is a part of the physical characteristics women acquire. Thus, in this chapter, the concept of physical vulnerability as including physical passivity is studied in relation to having combat skill. Furthermore, although analysis was conducted concerning whether pro wrestlers were using their combat skill or not by Aiba (2008a), this chapter considers whether physical vulnerability of the pro wrestlers has been transformed by focusing whether pro wrestlers are going through the four processes described earlier.
- (3) According to Dunning (1986), soccer, rugby and hockey belong to combative sports, but I exclude soccer and hockey from my definition of combative sports. This is because attacking opponent players is not considered allowable in soccer and hockey. Combative sports include rugby, American football and ice hockey, in which attacking opponents is allowed within a team, as well as *judo*, amateur wrestling, *kendo* and boxing, in which one-to-one attacks are a part of the sport from the beginning.
- (4) Quite a number of women pro wrestlers have had their cervical spine in-

jured. As well-known examples, Hokuto Akira broke her cervical spine in 1987, and Yamada Toshiyo was diagnosed with cervical disc herniation in 1990.

- (5) On one hand, she says that because her hair is not long and her body is quite big, and because no “other women have such a broad back as me,” other people probably think she is a man. Therefore she thinks that she is unlikely to be groped while walking on the street at night. On the other hand, when she talks about what kinds of reaction she would have if groped on the street at night, she says with conviction that if her body is grabbed strongly, she will counter-attack. I classified her based on the latter point.
- (6) In pro wrestling too, aggression takes the form of violence and there are problems related to violence in combative sports, as Messner (1990; 1992) points out. Therefore, I argue that women can be encouraged to engage more in combative sports, but they should not accept acts of violence in combative sports.
- (7) Although I describe the effectiveness of self-defense here, it does not mean that I assert that women are responsible for protecting their own bodies by using self-defense when they are suffering violence from men. Even if female victims who receive violence from men do not use self-defense as a way to protect themselves, or if, in spite of using self-defense, they still have some damage, it is not the fault of the victims at all. Men who commit violence are the ones who should be blamed from the very beginning. Today, many strategies have been developed in order to prevent violence by laying focus on the perpetrators. However, until these strategies are conducted effectively and broadly, women should be supplied with every possible method of protection, including the techniques of self-defense (Hollander, 2014).

CHAPTER SIX

Women's Pro Wrestling as a Performance and the Transformation of Gender

I have already discussed that women's pro wrestling has an aspect of fighting and an aspect of performance. This is because women's pro wrestling is a kind of stage performance that is centered on expressions derived from sports games and acrobatics in addition to expression derived from dancing and theatrical play, while having values of entertainment and commerciality. The term "performance" here includes not only direct and visual expressions using their body functions without using musical instruments or other types of devices (Moriya, 1992), but also expressions using the configuration and movements of the body. In this chapter I will examine how the performances of women pro wrestlers that have various kinds of aspects transform the norms constructed by gender⁽¹⁾.

The sex/gender system and gender order

In Japan, one's gender category (man and woman) is socially constructed as a correspondent to the sex category (male and female) that is constructed based on physical characteristics. Moreover, it is assumed that an individual sex category (male or female) decides not only the gender category (man or woman) of an individual, but also the individual's sexual orientation (whether one is attracted to men or women) (Butler, 1999; Crawley et al., 2008). Therefore, when one's sex category is female, one's gender category is assumed to be a woman, who is assumed to be attracted to a man. Moreover, it is assumed that each sex, gender and sexual orientation has only two categories (Butler, 1999; Crawley et al., 2008; Rubin, 1975), and each has a dichotomous structure. This ideological connection of sex category, gender

category and sexual orientation is called the sex/gender system. This term was already used by Rubin (1975) in the 1970's.

Because this dualistic structure obligates individuals to have an appearance based on their sex category, it directs each individual to acquire a body image (male figure or female figure) that corresponds to the sex category each individual belongs to (Ehara, 2001). The models for these physical images are the ideal female or male body, but it is considered that an individual can fulfill her (his) obligation without displaying the ideal female (male) body as long as others can recognize whether the individual is a man or a woman in everyday life. The ideal female (male) body is included in the body that is perceived as female (male) (this will be called the normative female body and the normative male body in what follows).

Humans, who are categorized as women or men according to the sex/gender system, conduct "diverse social practices based on the structural traits attributed to" (Ehara, 2001, p.116) each sex category. Furthermore, humans gain each "gender habitus" of male or female from social practices. This "gender habitus" is defined as "an assessment standard based on 'beautiful', 'ugly' and other aesthetic senses related to the appearance, action or behavior of humans" (Ehara, 2001, p.331). Ehara also conceptualizes "the structural traits attributed to sex category," the "regularity of social practices" based on these traits, and the "gender-related 'habitus' of those members of society generated by the structural traits and the regularity" as a "gender order" (2001, p.120).

Ehara (2001) points out that gender division of labor and heterosexuality are constructed as gender order. The gendered labor positions are "men" as "subjects of activity" and "women" as "supporters of the activity of others." Heterosexuality positions "men" as "subjects of sexual desire" and women as "objects of sexual desire."

The gender order of heterosexuality and the ideal body

Moreover, Ehara argues that the heterosexual gender order induces "a sensory assessment schema to evaluate a 'woman's worth' based on 'sexual attractiveness,' and encourages women to adapt to this sensory assessment schema in daily practice that regulates women's outer appearance and demeanor" (2001, p.147). In other words, women obtain a gender habitus that is a "psychological tendency to perceive and evaluate themselves as 'objects of sexual desire'" (Ehara, 2001, p.151-152). This gender habitus is shaped

while making reference to the two ideal images of men and women that are prevailing all around us (Ehara, 2001, p.330).

The issue here is that, as Kanemoto et al. (1999) and Kato et al. (1990) point out, the female body image women idealize and the image that men idealize are completely different. For example, female university students list the conditions for the ideal female body as being thin for the first and being healthy and round second (Kato et al., 1990). In contrast, male university students list the conditions for the ideal female body as a feminine body with big breasts first and having long legs and being thin second (Kato et al., 1990). It has also been pointed out that the ideal male body is different for men and women (Kanemoto et al., 1999; Kato et al., 1990). Since this study focuses on how women pro wrestlers perceive their own bodies and how they transform their bodies, I will analyze them by using the female body image women idealize and the male body image men idealize.

As described in Chapter 4, the ideal female body is a thin body, with long, thin legs and big breasts. In contrast, the ideal male body desired by male university students is muscular and has a V-shaped torso (that is, having broad shoulders and a narrow waist), according to Kato et al. (1990) and Sugawara (1991). Thus, the ideal male body that is desired by men is set to be a muscular, V-shaped body in this chapter.

The normative bodies in sports

In studying the gendered body in sports, I have noticed that distinctive normative bodies of men and women are being constructed in competitive sports today, while the ideal female and male bodies overlap these, as described earlier. Since few studies have been conducted into this aspect as related to Japanese society, studies in Anglophone countries will be used here for discussion. Connell (1987) argues that ideal muscularity is constructed by playing sports in Western countries. The social definition of the male as a power holder is “translated not only into mental body-images and fantasies, but into muscle tensions, posture, the feel and texture of the body” (Connell, 1987, p.85). Moreover, the physical sensation of muscularity relates to the superiority of men over women and male dominance over women (Connell, 1987). In other words, an ideal masculinity is constructed by men acquiring a certain type of body by playing sports. Hargreaves (1986) also argues that the male body has sharp lines, strong muscles and is firm, and the muscles indicate that the body has physical strength and aggression. In contrast, as

the female body does not have such muscle, it is assumed that the female body does not have physical strength and aggression (Hargreaves, 1986). As discussed in Chapter 5, in today's sports men are encouraged to acquire aggression, while women were encouraged not to acquire aggression. Therefore, it is specified that the normative male body in sports is muscular, thus the body displays aggression and is strong. Meanwhile, it is specified that the normative female body in sports is not muscular, thus it does not have power and aggression and is weak ⁽²⁾.

Reproduction and transformation of gender norms

How gender norms are reproduced and transformed, which is discussed from 1 to 3, is summarized in the following.

Gender division of labor as gender order and transformation

If men are positioned as “subjects of activity” and women as “supporters of the activity of others” in a performance of women's pro wrestling, gender division of labor as gender order is being reproduced. If women are positioned as “subjects of activity” and men “supporters of the activity of others” in a performance of women's pro wrestling, gender division of labor as gender order is being transformed.

The gender order of heterosexuality and transformation

If women pro wrestlers have a gender habitus with which they evaluate themselves as an object of sexual desire or if they conduct daily practices to construct their appearance and demeanor based on a gender habitus, they are regarded to reproduce the gender order of heterosexuality. This means that women pro wrestlers are regarded to reproduce the gender order of heterosexuality if they construct the ideal female body.

This also means that women pro wrestlers transform the gender order of heterosexuality if they have a gender habitus with which they assess themselves as a “subject” of sexual desire or if they conduct daily practices to construct their own appearance and demeanors based on the gender habitus. Meanwhile, the gender order of heterosexuality is transformed as women pro wrestlers have both elements of the ideal female body and the ideal male body. This is because their bodies challenge the ideal female body.

Moreover, a body with both elements of the ideal female body and the

ideal male coexist in themselves effectively destabilizes, and thus transforms, the dichotomous “sex/gender system” that defines the ideal female/male bodies as separate constructs and prohibits these traits from coexisting in a single body. Relations between the sex/gender system and the body of women pro wrestlers will be examined in detail in Chapter 7.

The normative female body and male body in sports

If the performance of women pro wrestlers does not exhibit strong muscles, power and aggression but rather exhibits weakness, it is interpreted as reproducing the normative female body in sports. On the other hand, if the bodies and performances of women pro wrestlers exhibit strength by showing strong muscles, which is one of the features of the normative male body in sports, and if they exhibit power and aggression, it is interpreted as transforming the normative female body in sports.

Using the paradigm above, this chapter will analyze as to whether the performance of women pro wrestlers reproduce or transform the gender order and whether they reproduce or transform the dichotomous structure of the sex/gender system. Furthermore, this chapter will also analyze whether the bodies of women pro wrestlers reproduce or transform the normative female body in sports. First, the performance of pro wrestling will be described in the following section, based on interviews with women pro wrestlers and observations of women's pro wrestling matches.

Performance in pro wrestling

Once women pro wrestlers attain the break fall and significant moves, they are usually required to learn how to express their own personas and how to entertain their audience. In other words, they are required to learn how to create their pro wrestling as a performance. The readers of this book may imagine from the term “performance” a theatrical performance based on script. In fact, there was a case that revealed in court that women's pro wrestling may have a script. In February, 2001, a woman pro wrestler named Aja Kong suddenly defaulted on her match and later left ARSION, which she belonged to. In 2003, the Tokyo District Court certified that the incident meant: “Her default was directed and ordered by Hiroshi Ogawa, the owner of ARSION” (“*Shiai houki*,” 2003). This is not necessary the case for all organizations or all matches, however it is possible to assume that the developments and results of matches are roughly decided in advance

in women's pro wrestling. For example, I once saw a wrestler, who is usually tough in showing offense and defense with techniques, even if she can hardly stand, get defeated very easily⁽³⁾. It was possible that she suffered a technique that gave her a great deal of damage in a short period of time, but I was not convinced with the result. It is, however, assumed that even in those matches where victory or defeat is fixed in advance, the details during the matches are left up to the pro wrestlers. Okamura makes an assertion that pro wrestlers do not need to have meetings for these details, but "they can communicate with each other by using their own bodies as jazz players do by using their musical instruments" (Okamura & Inoue, 1990, p.169).

In pro wrestling, though it is dependent on the style of the wrestlers, wrestlers tend to interact with the audience during matches. Even if wrestlers have a meeting to discuss the details, they cannot predict the reactions of their audience completely. Regardless of whether meetings are held, pro wrestlers are required to take the right actions at the right time during matches in accordance with the reactions of the audience and the situation with their opponents.

As wrestlers, everything is to be distinguished

It is not enough for pro wrestlers to train their bodies, do a break fall and attain significant moves. Pro wrestlers are also expected to express their own personas and to entertain their audience. That is, they are in need of creating their own pro wrestling as performance.

For example, Yoshie says that there are failed wrestlers even though they are capable of doing a break fall, a drop kick (see Picture 7) and throwing techniques very well. This suggests that even if their techniques reach a certain level, if they do not have a persona, they will be perceived as failed wrestlers. Rookies are allowed to make their debuts as nothing more than that their techniques reach a certain level. Once they make their debuts, they are expected to develop their own personas so that they can entertain their audience. However, Yoshie says that "nobody... teaches" them how to express themselves. Yoshie was one of the pro wrestlers who had difficulty in establishing her own persona. One of reasons for this was because she did not know much about the difference between combat sports and pro wrestling. Yoshie says that she tends to observe the movements of her opponents with a calm mind, and this may be because she used to play *judo*. In *judo*, players are expected to pay more attention towards their matches; while in pro wrestling, wrestlers are expected to pay more attention towards the out-

side of the ring. In pro wrestling, wrestlers have to look up and show their faces to their audience while they are fighting.

Pro wrestlers have to make an “appeal” by looking at their audience in order to make an impression. The reason why Yoshie realized the importance of this is related to the time when she made her debut. Yoshie made her debut as a pro wrestler during the period when Crush at Zenjo created the boom in women’s pro wrestling. Many young girls wished to be like Crush and joined pro wrestling organizations during this period, and thus, there were many new trainees when Yoshie joined her organization. Under these circumstances, it was necessary for rookies to establish a “strong persona,” so that they could make an “appeal” that was distinguished enough to give a strong impression to their audience. Unless they had strong personas, they did not stand out. Consequently they were not given the opportunity to perform in matches.

Then, what kind of “persona” is expected from pro wrestlers? I had thought at the beginning that the persona required from pro wrestlers was to be strong, after all. In fact, the pro wrestlers whose persona is their strength insist that what pro wrestlers need in their personas is strength. Rei says that some of the audience comes to see the wrestlers’ faces, but there are not many in the audience like that. She says that if there is a pro wrestler whose attraction is only her face, then she should not be a pro wrestler but rather be an idol on such as a TV show. She does not need to do pro wrestling. Rei says that if pro wrestlers want to be popular as pro wrestlers, they need to have something with which they can attract their audience by wrestling.

However, Mika declares that strength is not important in pro wrestling. She says, “It is more fun if there are different types of pro wrestlers with different types of characters,” and “It is OK to have some very strong wrestlers and some very weak wrestlers.” Thus, “It is unnecessary for everyone to seek strength.” Just after the time when she became a pro wrestler, she wanted to win every match. However, now she thinks that it is not important for all wrestlers to become strong. She says that, for example, “like Harurara [a racehorse that kept renewing her losing streak record in 2004, when the interview was conducted] (laughs), it will be more fun if there is a pro wrestler who has a record of a 100 losing streak.” It is more fun because “such a wrestler will stand out, since she has been losing for a long time.” In other words, what is important as pro wrestlers is to develop their own personas and to be distinct. Strong wrestlers should show their strength, and even weak wrestlers are OK “if they have something to attract other people,

even if they keep losing.” “Of course, it is better if we are strong, and if we win matches, that makes us happy. We hope to win each match, but the ultimate purpose for us is not only strength.” Masumi shares the same opinion. Masumi says that what is important in pro wrestling is “to show” their character. If you are strong, you show your strength, and if you are weak, you show your weakness. For her, it is important to show how well she receives opponents’ attack and she is to show beautiful jumping techniques. She thinks that strength is important to a certain degree, but what is important for her is “to show how sympathetic I am... when I am being attacked.”

Establishing a character

To establish a distinct persona, pro wrestlers often try hard to develop a character (or portrait). Pro wrestlers call this character *kyara* (chara). Traditionally, a character showing “good wrestlers as ‘baby face’” and a character showing “bad wrestler as a ‘heel’” have been well established in pro wrestling. In the latter half of the 1980’s when Crush was booming, Crush was known as “baby faces” and Gokuaku Domei (which means devilish alliance) led by Dump Matusmoto, was known as a “heel” group. Moreover, they performed matches based on moral plays in which Gokuaku Domei as a “heel” gave a hard time to Crush as a “baby face” and Crush endured and helped each other to their victory.

To establish a character, a “heel” needs to act more consciously than a “baby face.” A “heel” is expected to use weapons such as a wooden sword, a pipe-chair, a chain or an 18-liter square can (an aluminium container for soy-source), and a “heel” is also expected to play dirty. Of course, outside of the ring, the “heel” does not act in a deviant way, like using weapons to attack people. Thus, she has to play such a character while consciously acting in a deviant way within the ring.

Actually when a “heel” plays her role, her second also plays a very important role. Maho told of the difficulties she had when she was a second for a “heel corps” for a while. She had to fix her eyes on senior wrestlers of the “heel corps” during a watch. It was because they sent signs by using their eyes for what kind of weapons they needed. She had to throw them a weapon when a sign was sent and it would be disaster if she made mistakes. For example, if there were two kinds of weapons, a chain and a bat, she had to judge which immediately when she received the sign for a weapon. When her senior wrestler showed a gesture of lowering and waving her hand to

her right and left, it meant she had to give her a chain. If the wrestler put her hand up, it was a sign for a bat. Maho had to use her intuition. She also used to remember what kinds of weapons her senior wrestler liked to use. When she received the sign, she threw the wrestler's favorite based on what she remembered. One day in a match, she received the sign for a weapon so she threw a weapon to her senior wrestler, but she threw so hard that it flew over the head of the wrestler. The wrestler looked shocked and speechless.

Maho did not get in serious trouble since she went and apologized to the wrestler immediately. But usually, if she made mistakes, she used to be scolded by her senior wrestlers in their anterooms after each match. Thus, she used to "hate returning to the anterooms with my senior wrestlers. I used to think that I would be scolded, surely scolded." In one incident, Maho made a mistake while she was acting as a second in a match, and "my senior wrestler told me during a match, you know, she told me to quit pro wrestling (laughs). It was during the match, in the ring." And she was "surprised. But I thought I wanted to quit (laughs)." Before she made her debut, she never thought of quitting pro wrestling. However, after she began acting as a second to a "heel," she began thinking that she wanted to quit. This shows how hard it was mentally for her to work as a second for a "heel." In addition, Maho's experience indicates how important the cooperation from a second is when a "heel" tries to express her "badness" without restraint.

The pro wrestlers who joined their pro wrestling organizations during the boom of Crush decided to be a pro wrestler because they were attracted to Crush (see Chapter 3). Therefore, they became pro wrestlers not because they wanted to be "heels" like Dump Matsumoto, but because they hoped to become wrestlers like Crush. However, as described earlier, because the variety of characters among pro wrestlers made pro wrestling entertaining, it would be boring if all of pro wrestlers became "baby faces" like Crush. Someone had to be a "heel."

According to Yuko, when she was still performing as a pro wrestler, wrestlers with a big body became "heels" and thin and cute ones became "baby faces," so she was made to be a "heel" since she was big. This supposes that since tall and large wrestlers give an image of being strong, they will not appear sympathetic even if they are bullied in the ring. Women pro wrestlers who look strong are likely to be thought of as being suited to play the role of bullying others, that is, a "heel." Maki is small among women pro wrestlers, but she became a "heel." The reason was, according to her, because none of her senior members felt "sorry" for her even if she was being attacked.

When women pro wrestlers want to change themselves or when they want their existence to appeal after a long disappearance from the scene because of illness or injury, they often establish their own “chara” or change from a “baby face” to a “heel.” After Yuka and Maho disappeared from the pro wrestling scene due to injury, they found that they lagged behind the other wrestlers who had joined the pro wrestling organization in the same year. Thus, they changed their ring names and restarted as “heels.”

It is Rei who succeeded in establishing a character in the ring that is different from her everyday life. Among the 22 interviewees of active pro wrestlers, Rei shows the greatest difference in her attitude and way of talking between when she is performing in the ring and when she is interviewed. During interviews, her “face looked relaxed, unlike the provocative expressions she shows in matches” (interview journal May 31, 2004), and she talks unemphatically with a shy smile. Rei becomes a completely different person in the ring and she expresses herself openly. It is an admirable change. The reason why Rei can play a character completely different in the ring is attributed to the fact that she became a pro wrestler finding that she always had such a disposition and using it.

As described in Chapter 3, Rei also had a dream of being a children’s nurse, yet she chose to become a pro wrestler. The reason for the choice was that she thought, “The occupation I can expose my disposition through is pro wrestling.” She thought that she could only disclose the quiet part of her disposition by becoming a children’s nurse, but if she became a pro wrestler she thought she could expose a “different self.” Fortunately, she had confidence in her body. She says, “It’s better for me to move my body than using my brain.” Now she says that she is enjoying showing a “different self” in pro wrestling.

While Rei performs a strong character that is different from ordinary her, Kiriko has established several characters and uses them differently depending on the organizations that stage exhibitions and the types of face masks she wears for different matches. Kiriko belongs to a pro wrestling organization now, but she used to be a freelance wrestler and performed in several different rings staged by different organizations. She also used to try to change her pro wrestling movements and styles depending on the characters of the various masks and the atmospheres of the various organizations. For example, when she used to play the role of a “heel” with a mask suited to the role, she used to “think for example, if I hold my opponent like this or to hold the hair of my opponent like this, it would be more annoying for the audience.” These attempts are described by her as “to increase the number

of drawers containing ideas about pro wrestling.” She says that the experiences she had when she was a freelance pro wrestler taught her, “I have to do pro wrestling by using my brain.”

Though pro wrestlers establish their own characters due to various reasons, it does not mean that the characters they play and what they are is always harmonized. Because Sanae’s secret idol was Kazuko, a “heel” wrestler, Sanae also wanted to be a “heel.” Her pro wrestling organization, however, told her, “If you gain 30 kg, we will make you a ‘heel’. So I tried to eat a lot but I couldn’t gain weight.” So, she could not become a “heel.” In contrast, one of wrestlers who joined the organization in the same year as Sanae wanted to be like Nagayo Chigusa, but she was a little boyish, so she was made a “heel.” Since then Sanae has established her character as a “baby face,” not as a “heel,” and what is more, she has tried to establish herself as a weak “baby face.”

Masumi says that as she is a “baby face,” her senior wrestlers expect her to play the role of an “idol wrestler.” However, she does not like her position as an “idol wrestler.” She wants to be “a type of pro wrestler who can use all kinds of techniques, including jumping techniques and techniques using strength.” Another reason why she does not want to be an “idol wrestler” is that she has to wear clothes and costumes suited for idol wrestlers. She says that she does not care how she looks, but “other wrestlers travel to an exhibition hall, for example, in plain clothes, change them to sweatsuits and then change again to their costume for their matches. I don’t like dragging a lot of bags, so I get on the train in a sweatsuit.” However, “my senior wrestlers tell me that I should not travel in a sweatsuit but in nice clothes.” In short, playing the role of an “idol wrestler” also means wearing nice clothes, and Masumi is not comfortable with it. But it does not mean that she wants to change who she is. For example, she does not think that she wants to be a “heel.” It is because “people who play the role of ‘heel’ are not really... mean people” but “they often pull mean techniques during matches... it seems to be very difficult until you get used to it.”

While many pro wrestlers tried to establish distinct characters, some did not try it at all. One of them is Aya. She did not do anything special when she was in the ring. She says, “I was not interested in establishing a role or in becoming a pro wrestler.” “Really, it was really like, I was kidding around in my anteroom, and then, I suddenly went off to fight.” According to her, she was like this because she was a “baby face” not a “heel.” However, Ryoko, who is another “baby face,” says that she often kids around outside

the ring, but she tries to be looked on as cool in matches. Because of this, she tries to make her body look “cool and muscular, though I am thin,” and she is also careful about her costume. Thus, Aya’s explanation that she does not establish a character because she is a “baby face” cannot be applied to every “baby face” wrestler.

Establishment of styles

What is closely related to the establishment of character in the previous section is the establishment of a style. Midori expresses her persona through her pro wrestling style, in addition to her character. Her thoughts on pro wrestling have changed as she has more experiences as a pro wrestler. Just after she made a debut as a pro wrestler, she thought that it was good enough as far as she fought seriously in each match. Her thoughts about pro wrestling changed when she saw male pro wrestling, especially the pro wrestling of an organization called WWE. She found it very interesting. She began “thinking, I want to do something like them” and began structuring the development of each match.

According to the field notes, there was a championship match of Sachi versus Sayaka in 2004, and Sachi won the match. Sachi had a massive body and her sales point was her strength. After the match, Sachi boasted in the ring, “Well, I don’t think anybody will challenge me, but if someone challenges me, I will crush her.” I thought that Sachi was so strong that no one would challenge her. While I thought so, Midori announced her challenge against Sachi while her senior wrestler pushed at her back. Some of the audience was laughing. It was because there was no chance for Midori to win the belt if she fought against Sachi, since what Midori has usually performed was fun, not strength, while Sachi had fought for the championship many times. Actually, this was a performance directed by Midori. Midori says, “It is more fun to introduce the next challenger in that way than just introducing who is next.” With an attitude of “how about doing this?” she thinks of all, including techniques to be used and structure of a match. She also thinks of how to appeal to the audience by using a microphone in the ring before and after each match as a kind of performance aimed at entertaining her audience. When she wonders what she can do next, she was stressed out, according to her. It is not clear whether she discusses the matches with her opponents in advance, but it is clear that she structures her pro wrestling matches very carefully. She has always struggled to find ways to show how much fun pro wrestling provide to her audience. Her efforts show clearly

that pro wrestling is a kind of entertainment.

Maki thinks that she should target something different from the pro wrestling after the era of Crush. According to her, the style of women's pro wrestling was developed by Zenjo. The style created by Zenjo aims to concentrate on fighting and not on having fun. Maki also used to be obsessed only with winning. When she was obsessed with winning, she had a slump. She says, "I thought I could not win. Then, I thought I might lose again in the next matches, which stopped me from doing pro wrestling." What led her step out of such thinking was the experiences she had in the US. Pro wrestlers in the US did not seem to worry about either winning or losing, and they seemed to be having fun wrestling. Seeing the American wrestlers performing joyfully without concerning about winning or losing, she came to think that winning matches was not connected to winning more money, then became happy about doing pro wrestling.

Actually, the style created by Zenjo did not provide the pro wrestling that aimed to show hard fighting at the beginning. Before Crush appeared in the latter half of the 1980's, the wrestlers in Zenjo used to pull and receive techniques slowly, as wrestlers were more concerned about each other (Kamei, 2000). However, when Crush appeared, the style of pro wrestling changed and wrestlers started to show hard fighting by blending some elements of combat sports into their style. Nagayo Chigusa, one member of Crush, said, "I wanted to 'crush' the flow of the existing women's pro wrestling and I wanted to aim at combat sports by women." ("Za ringu," 2005d)

Another reason why Maki appreciates the fun pro wrestling of the US is that she wants neither to have more injuries nor to put a further burden on her body, as she wants to have babies in the future. Japanese women's pro wrestling repeatedly uses high level techniques, on the other hand these carry a risk. According to Maki, in Japanese women's pro wrestling, for example, "anger is expressed by crushing each other. You drop the opponent to the floor from her head. But in America, wrestlers express their anger by showing an angry face." Maki believes that, since the matches of American women pro wrestling are not as hard as Zenjo, the burden on American wrestlers is less than on Japanese wrestlers, and thus, American wrestlers can continue wrestling longer than Japanese wrestlers.

Maki, who appreciates the pro wrestling in the US, also accepts the different roles by gender. She accepts the roles of men "being strong and muscular, and women being sexy." Moreover, the main body of pro wrestling is male pro wrestlers, and women pro wrestlers act as backseat players who

jazz up the matches performed by male pro wrestlers. The reason why Maki accepts the gendered roles of pro wrestling stems from one incident in the US. When she was fighting in a match held in the US, her opponent pulled her costume. It ripped the cloth around her breast and her left breast was exposed to the audience. She hid her breast with her hand immediately, but this incident excited the audience very much. This incident made her think that “ero” (meaning being erotic) may be OK as long as it is well received by the audience.

Moreover, she thinks that since women have “ero” as one of their charms, it is OK to do pro wrestling by using “ero” and it is better than the sort of hard fighting that hurts the body. This is a fascinating view. This is because, when women’s pro wrestling was established in Japan, it was thought of as an erotic sideshow and evaluated low (Kamei, 2000). Later, Fuji TV began broadcasting women’s pro wrestling on TV in 1975, and efforts were made to give an impression to people in general that women’s pro wrestling was a healthy entertainment, by making the wrestlers wear colorful costumes and singing songs. This resulted in dispelling the image of an erotic sideshow that had been carried since the beginning of women’s pro wrestling (Kamei, 2000). The erotic charm of women’s pro wrestling, which is longed for by Maki, is the image that women’s pro wrestling had tried to dispel for a long period of time.

Today, women’s pro wrestling in Japan shows not only hard fights but also comical fights. However, a match meant to show a hard fight or a match to fight for a champion belt is still scheduled as “the main event” at the end of each exhibition in Japan. As Maki mentions, hard fighting has been well received by their audiences since the era of Crush, but damage has also accumulated on the body of each wrestler because hard fighting requires high-level techniques and hard movements. Then, how can women pro wrestlers protect their bodies from injuries and after-effects? One way is to change the style of women’s pro wrestling as Maki described. However, this change may lead to women’s pro wrestling becoming an erotic sideshow. Here, we see a serious conflict in current women’s pro wrestling.

Elements that compose characters and styles

(1) How to use the body

Some women pro wrestlers said that they wanted to show facial expressions in the performance of pro wrestling. Maho says, “When I am in pain, I want to show that pain on my face to the audience... when I am happy after

winning, I want to show the happiness on my face.” The reason why she wants to do so is “because I want to share how I feel with my audience.” Sanae says that she tries to show more expressions on her face, though she cannot do it well yet. When she feels pain, she does not try to be patient, but she tries “to say that it is really painful (laughs), and I try to make the audience be sympathetic.” But when she is in a great pain, “I can’t be bothered thinking about the audience. Yes, really (laughs). I look down to withstand pains.” Then, she gets scolded by her senior wrestlers. They tell her, “Since you show pain on your face, you should show it to your audience. Otherwise, the pain... becomes pointless.”

Rie also points out the importance of expressions on her face. She says that some wrestlers “fight by their expressions on their faces.” One of them is Juri. According to Rie, Juri “has a warm heart, but when it comes to matches,” the expression on her face changes so much that it becomes hard for her opponents to look at her face directly. Rie thinks, “It would be great for me if such an intimidation could be expressed.” Juri has a long career as a pro wrestler and once she was known as a “heel” wrestler. When I made an observation of her in 2004, she was playing as a “heel-like” wrestler who neither uses weapons nor conducts despicable acts. In every match, she walked slowly on the *hanamichi* flaunting her gown and climbed up into the ring. Then she stared hard at every person around her. Therefore, I agree with Rie, who described Juri as a “person who fights through facial expressions.” When Rie had short hair, her front hair used to hang down over her forehead and eyes. She says that the hair style used to make her facial expression dark. She thinks, “It is a poor deal if the sense of pain can’t be conveyed to the audience, in spite of the effort of showing pain on my face,” so she is careful about showing her face to the audience as much as possible. She thinks that “even if my face is just being distorted in pain, the expression should be shown to the audience, since they paid money to see.” Like Sanae, Rie tends to look down when she is in pain, but she had been trying to show her face by “voicing how extremely painful it is by doing this (gesture to look up).” She acquired such a gesture and can do it naturally now. Thus, she is not self-conscious about showing the expressions on her face too much.

Sachi says that she is trying to take actions that are likely to make the audience think her funny by using her big body. For example, after her opponent kicks her “Bam!” she acts as if she is shaking off dust from her shoulder as a way of expressing that, though something seemed to happen, nothing in it affected her. Also, “On being hit on my hip, I make the sound

'Tch!' (making the sound of clicking her tongue) and express myself as if itchy," and then she scratches her hips. By taking such reactions, she tries to make an appeal of showing her strength to the audience. Many pro wrestlers make similar actions but each wrestler has her own unique version. Tamura Yoshiko, who was mentioned in Chapter 2, used to put her right hand with her thumb and index finger stick out on her chest as she shouted "it's decided" and then put her right arm upright. She used to use this gesture and pose when she took it on herself, even though it was very unreasonable.

During my observations, a pro wrestler who was expressing sexiness a lot was Kazama Rumi of LLPW. Apart from the match in May 16, 2003, which is mentioned in Chapter 2, she made "a sexy pose" in another match held at Korakuen Hall in Tokyo on November 19, 2002, and received cheers from the male audience who shouted, "Kazama, you are great!" (field note) This pose seemed to be welcomed by Kazama's fans, especially by Kazama's male fans.

Rie and Tomiko say that they are careful about the loudness of their voices. Tomiko uses a loud voice so that "the audience sitting far away can still hear me, and I am also careful so that the audience can see my techniques clearly, and so on." In the case of Maho, not only does she shout but also talks during matches, when she feels, "If I say something right depending on the mood of the audience, the audience will enjoy it." In contrast, Masumi says that unlike other wrestlers, she does not have room to talk to excite the audience.

Hirota Sakura of GAEA Japan is a woman pro wrestler whose type is contrary to Masumi's. Her speeches during matches are funny and constantly make the audience explode. She cosplays and does comical pro wrestling. She is made up for matches to resemble, for example, her opponents, people in the news, and "characters with a strong impact" (Onohara, 2005, p.166), in order to confuse her opponents. In the fourth match at the exhibition by GAEA Japan held at Korakuen Hall in Tokyo on January 11, 2004, she appeared in a costume made up as *Doraemon*, a popular Japanese cartoon character. She was introduced to the audience as "Hirota Sakuraemon" (field note). Hirota designs and makes each costume for each match by herself (Onohara, 2005). The *Doraemon* costume had a pocket in the stomach area. The pocket was bulging out and looked like it was filled up with many objects. Before each match, a referee checks each wrestler in the ring by touching her arms and legs to see if they have any weapons. In this match, too, a referee checked the bodies of the two wrestlers. After the check,

Ozaki Mayumi, the opponent wrestler for Hirota for the day, demanded that the referee “check (inside the pocket) carefully.” Ozaki Mayumi is a “heel” wrestler who usually brings a weapon into the ring secretly. The referee looked in the pocket slightly and said, “It is probably OK,” and left it as it was. It was interesting to see Ozaki looking worried, because usually Ozaki is the one who uses weapons. In this match, Hirota took out the well-known secret gadgets of *Doraemon* one after another from the bulging pocket. For example, she shouted “The Take-copter!” and then took out the “Take-copter,” one of *Doraemon*’s secret gadgets, from the pocket. She put it on the top of her head and acted as if she was flying, as *Doraemon* usually does in the cartoon. Hirota stumbled toward Ozaki Mayumi as if she was flying over to her and executed a technique on Ozaki. She took out a bottle of spray from the pocket and sprayed it on Ozaki Mayumi, and she took out a lighter from the pocket and lit it up, and then she approached Ozaki Mayumi with it. When Hirota shouted “Anywhere Door,” announcing another well-known gadgets of *Doraemon*, Ozaki Mayumi stopped moving for a second to see if the door would really appear from somewhere. Then Hirota shouted “Of course there’s no door, you idiot!” and she beat Ozaki Mayumi. In contrast, when Hirota was beaten up by Ozaki Mayumi, Hirota shouted at Ozaki “You, *Noby!*” (*Noby* is one of the characters in *Doraemon*) In this way, Hirota keeps on talking to appeal to the audience, while playing different characters depending on the type of costume she wears.

(2) Observing the audience

Women pro wrestlers show a variety of performances to their audience. Some wrestlers, like Midori in the previous section, plan their performances in detail, some have a set of actions, and some improvise performance. During the interviews for this study, a small number of wrestlers mentioned what they showed to their audience and whether they know that they are watched by the audience or how they see their audience. Mika says that just after she became a wrestler, she could not catch the reactions of the audience. But, little by little, she began observing the faces and the voices of the audience. She was “too busy performing matches to see and hear the reactions of the audience” in the past. However, “I can see their faces and hear their voices now,” so while keeping her eyes on their reactions, “I do things that make the audience happy.”

Akiko talks about the interactive glances between the audience and herself in detail. She was also not paying much attention to the audience at the

beginning. She began paying more attention to the audience consciously when she “was cheered by the audience” in the first match, just after she started a new style of pro wrestling. She had changed her hair style, her ring name and her style of pro wrestling prior to the match. When she heard the cheers of the audience, she had the consciousness that she was being watched, and her conscious mind changed and thought, “Then I shall show myself to the audience.”

Akiko begins observing the audience before matches begin. Some tournaments have an opening ceremony prior to matches and everyone who is involved with the tournament appears in the ring and greets their audience. During each ceremony, Akiko checks the whereabouts of her friends and regular customers (the people who come to watch pro wrestling often). When there is no ceremony, she takes a look around as soon as she gets in the ring, and she checks and gets a picture like, “There are elderly people here and small children here, and press people are here.” “Perhaps, if you ask whether other wrestlers are doing the same thing or not, only some are doing it. But I am often told by other wrestlers that I am watching the audience very well.” The reason why she checks on the type of audience, as well as where they are seated, is because she wants her new customers to know her character from the communication she makes with the regular customers. If she finds the regular customers who are likely to speak, she asks them, “Are you going to support me?” even if she knows that he/she is a fan of other wrestlers. In this way, she can let other customers know that she is a character who talks during matches. Another example is, when she uses a certain technique, she shouts “Don, Don.” In such a case, she demands that the audience shout “Don, Don” together. For this, she looks at the regular customers and shouts, because the regular customers know what to do. This exchange helps the new customers to know that they are allowed to shout during matches, and this helps them to be accustomed to the atmosphere.

Akiko’s efforts at making the audience become familiarized with her character and style began after she had bad experiences with some audiences. Today, her character and style as Dash Ichikawa is well perceived by a wide range of pro wrestling fans. However, before that she used to “be jeered a lot” and shouted at by the audience because they wondered what on the earth she was doing. It is imaginable that some of the audience could not understand her style of comical pro wrestling, since women’s pro wrestling had been showing serious fighting for a long time. Such jeering was powerful enough for Akiko with her comical character to lose her momentum

immediately. She says that when she was asked what on the earth she was doing, she “felt the blues and sometimes ended fights immediately.” She used to get overwhelmed by the jeers from the audience at the beginning, but she overcame it and succeeded in establishing her own “chara.” She says that when someone in the audience jeers and calls what you are doing, she tends to start a conversation, saying “I am going to begin soon, so wait.” Pro wrestlers show themselves to their audience, they observe the reactions of the audience, and then they think about their next performance. Exchanges between the audience and wrestlers continue in this way.

Elements that compose characters and styles—decorating the body

As elements for expressing character and style in pro wrestling, costumes, gowns, hair styles and cosmetics are focused on in this section.

(1) A history of costumes

Costumes of great individuality, sometimes outrageous ones are one of the attractions in the matches at women's pro wrestling. The following is a simple overview of the history of costumes in women's pro wrestling.

In the world of women's pro wrestling, a costume is often called a “mizugi,” a bathing suit. This is related to the first exhibition of women's pro wrestling held in Japan. When the Igari brothers saw a picture of a women pro wrestler in the US in a magazine, she was wearing a bathing suit (“Za ringu,” 2005b). A picture of Igari Sadako, the first woman pro wrestler in Japan, shows that she was wearing a bathing suit, though the color is not clear (Hara, 2002, p.20) Since then, bathing suits have been used even among the wrestlers of Zenjo, which was the mainstream of women's pro wrestling in Japan. In the tournament that started on an enterprise of Zenjo in 1968, the pro wrestlers were all wearing bathing suits (Hara et al., 2003).

Even marquee wrestlers like Crush used to wear commercial bathing swimsuits before a new organization called Japan Women's Pro-Wrestling was established. Around this time, Sawako was in a swimming club at her junior high school. When she saw Crush appearing in the ring in the same bathing suit as she had, she felt good and she thought, “What! They are copying me (laughs).” Aya, who was doing pro wrestling in the same era as Crush, said she used to have from 50 to 100 commercial bathing suits because they could be bought at around 5,000 to 6,000 yen per suit. However, if they used bathing suits as they are, the cloth around their crotch could move and their underwear could be seen. Thus, they used to sew shoe

strings into the suit so that they could tie up the ends of the strings and make the suit fit tighter to their body. Commercial bathing suits often come with pads in the breast area, but the pads become hardened if they are put in a dryer, so it was necessary for the pads to be removed. However, if wrestlers wore suits without pads, their nipples would be apparent from the outside. Aya says that she used to wear bathing suits with “band-aids” on her nipples.

Japan Women’s Pro-wrestling, established in 1986 has made the term “mizugi,” a bathing suit mean the costumes only for rookies⁽⁴⁾. In this organization, the costumes of wrestlers were designed by professional designers, and each pro wrestler used to appear in a one-of-a-kind costume (Suyama & Yasuda, 1996). This was because this organization joined up with a talent agency and emphasized the elements of entertainment, according to Onohara (2002). It is assumed that diverseness and uniqueness were included in the costumes of the wrestlers as a way to support the element of entertainment.

Pro wrestlers began creating their own unique costumes and the popularity of the trend accelerated as the group competitions of pro wrestling began in 1993 (Onohara, 2002). Group competitions used to be held in Tokyo Dome, Yokohama Arena and other huge halls, where it is hard even to imagine such popularity now. As pro wrestlers faced the issue of how to be distinct in such huge halls as well as in the crowd of wrestlers who gathered together from various organizations, they began “attaching importance to their costume as a way to express themselves” and attract the audience (Onohara, 2002, p.147).

Even after professional designers began designing the costumes for women pro wrestlers, the style of the one-piece suit that did not show the stomach was the mainstream for costumes, but later separate-type costumes appeared. It is said that Mita Etsuko was the first woman pro wrestler to wear a separate-type costume (“Hokuto Akira,” 2003). Actually, Hokuto Akira, a woman wrestler, designed the separate-type costume for Mita, and Hokuto Akira also used to wear costumes with designs based on the separate-type (“Hokuto Akira,” 2003). According to the designer for Hokuto Akira at that time, her costume was designed to express “simple and gorgeous images,” and they were usually less colorful and came with some gold stitch work, fringe patterns and tassels (“Hokuto Akira,” 2003). Hokuto Akira appeared on the cover of the magazine *Sports Graphic Number* in 1994 and an example of her costumes can be seen in the picture (see Picture 5). With this, separate-type costumes became widespread in the world of women’s pro wrestling. The costumes worn by women pro wrestlers gradu-

ally changed from the bathing suit to a variety of costumes.

What we should pay attention to here is that basically women pro wrestlers can choose their own costume freely. Many of the women pro wrestlers who were interviewed for this study said that they usually do not receive particular instructions about their costumes from their organizations. However, Sayaka says that she was asked by her organization to design a costume to emphasize her strength so that she could have a change of image. This indicates that sometimes organizations tell their wrestlers what to do with their costumes, although it is very rare. This is in contrast to the case of US's bodybuilding in which expressing "femininity" is encouraged through screening criteria (Lowe, 1998). What is important in women's pro wrestling is to be distinct, thus femininity is not always required in the costume. Even if the costumes are feminine, if their personas and styles are not outstanding, they are considered meaningless. This is why women pro wrestlers are allowed to dress free from cuteness as well as sexiness, when they create and wear their costumes. However, there is no system in pro wrestling whereby pro wrestling organizations create their pro wrestlers in their own style, unlike a music producer who creates a singer in a certain style. Therefore, when women pro wrestlers fail to create their own performance style and to come to a deadlock, they face a severe situation as they need to find a way out by themselves.

(2) How pro wrestlers think about their costumes

Sachi made her debut during the boom in group competitions. She was wearing commercial competition swimsuits when she was a rookie, and began wearing order-made costumes later. She says that, as to designing a costume, "I have no sense... so I leave it to designers." Sachi does not make many demands about her costumes when they are designed. In 2004 she was wearing a blue one-piece-type costume that looked like armor from the European Middle Ages⁽⁵⁾, and it cost about 90,000 yen. She thinks that if the costumes are suited to her, fans will like it too. Thus, she chooses costumes that suit her and make her look cool and strong.

Masumi, Mika and Mami say the reason why they wear a separate-type bathing suit is because it makes it easy for them to go to the toilet. If it is a one-piece-type, they have to take off everything and this takes time. In contrast to this, Aki wears separate-type bathing suits in order to maintain her body shape. "I like sweets and I like eating. So if I start wearing one-piece-type bathing suits, I eat a lot without thinking about the shape of my body.

That's why I try to expose the skin of my body as much as possible, so that I will be careful about what and how much I eat." Moreover, she wants to tighten her abdominal muscles more and wants to make an appeal to her audience by showing her tighter muscles. She was the only one who talked about the effect of a separate-type bathing suit as prevention from eating too much.

As described in the previous history of the costumes of wrestlers, though costumes became an important way for women pro wrestlers to express themselves, especially after the era of group competitions, there were many pro wrestlers who were not interested in what kinds of costumes they wore at the time around 2004. This is probably related to the number of big tournaments held. That was much less in 2004 in comparison to the era of group competitions.

On the other hand, some women pro wrestlers wear costumes with clear meanings and images. Mika says, "As to my character, I am not boyish (laughs), so the atmosphere I'd like to create with my costumes is femininity." She is conscious that she is a feminine wrestler. As of 2004, Mika was often wearing separate-type costumes. The lower parts of the costumes were often in the shape of a short wrap skirt. She wore frills and lace on her arms and wrists, and both upper and lower parts of the costumes had flares (which were made with several pieces of cloth to create a wave-like design (Onuma et al., 1999)). Femininity is expressed by using frills, lace and flares. The costume Sanae wore in a tournament was designed by one of her friends who had never seen pro wrestling before. The reason why she asked the friend to design her costume was that she thought if someone who had watched pro wrestling designed a costume, then the costume would be similar to the other wrestlers'. Sanae wanted to avoid that situation and seemed to let her friend design a unique costume for her. The costume designed by the friend was not well received by other wrestlers and they teased her: "How old are you?" However, she really liked it. It is because, as described in Chapter 4, she is not usually thought of as a wrestler because of the shape of her body, and thus she is trying to make herself appealing, especially to her male fans. She thinks it is important to stand out in the memory of her audience, and thus, even if a costume is regarded unfavorably, as long as it is not like the costumes of other wrestlers, the costume let her distinguish from other wrestlers.

Among the interviewees, Sawako talked about costumes in detail the most. Sawako says her opponents are not the wrestlers she fights in matches, but rather her audience is her opponent. She says that she makes her costume gorgeous in order to fight against her audience. Her expression "fighting

against the audience” means probably that making her existence appealing to her audience is also a kind of fight in the ring for her. This reflects her belief that wrestlers cannot attract their audience without making an effort.

Once she was told by a senior wrestler named Shouko that all of the money paid by their customers had to be “used in exhibiting oneself.” Sawako used to receive many instructions from Shouko, and this was one of her instructions so Sawako spent a lot of money on her costumes. Appearing in front of the audience in the countryside made her feel embarrassed because she maybe looked like *chindon-ya* (a street musicians hired for advertising purposes). She wears a gown and “appears flashily, and takes it off flashily.” She also believes that it is “the privilege of a pro wrestler” to be able to wear such costumes, and she says that she was “making costumes... look gorgeous, every time.” Sawako has made flashy and outstanding costumes. She also says that she wears costumes that show her breast cleavage in order to emphasize that she is a woman. This is because she wants her audience “to see me as a woman when I am doing pro wrestling, and to let them know I am a woman but I can do wrestling this hard.”

Ryoko is also conscious about expressing sexiness as a woman with her costumes. She has a clear concept about her costumes and about making a unity among costumes. One of the characteristics of her costumes in 2004 was a separate-type costume in two colors that were her image colors. The costume was designed to expose her back a lot and to show the shape of her breasts clearly. She says that she wants to be looked on as a cool pro wrestler, and thus she wants her costumes to be seen as cool and stylish by her audience. A portion of the lower part of her costume is open and shows her body. I asked her if it is so designed as a way of expressing sexiness, and she answered yes. She also says that the costumes she was wearing when she was a member of her organization were not sexy, but her costumes became sexy after she became a freelance pro wrestler.

(3) Gowns

The middle- or higher-ranking wrestlers usually appear in a gown on the *hanamichi*. They climb up into the ring, and then their names are called. They take off their gowns briskly, and their second receives their gown carefully. The gown is also one of the elements that express the persona of each wrestler. During the observations of matches for this study, the gown worn by Dynamite Kansai was the most eye-opening. The gown she was wearing was decorated gorgeously and it looked like armor. It had high-necked that

covered her mouth. Green and shiny materials used for the part between her breast and her mouth, the parts of her upper arms and the flanks of her costume. The shoulder parts were round and swollen up like bowls, and the blue bowl-like shoulder parts were decorated with round silver spangles. The cuffs gradually widened. The parts covering her hips and breasts were lined with shiny beige cloth, and a gold chain was hung between the pit of her stomach and the area of her left shoulder. It was exactly like the gown of a warrior (GAEA Japan pamphlet 2002).

Apparently, there is an unwritten rule about wearing gowns. According to this rule, rookies who have just made their debut are not allowed to wear a gown without permission from their senior wrestlers. In the organization that Maki was a member of, wrestlers begin wearing gowns only after being given permission from their senior wrestlers. The gown Maki wore for the first time was the one given by her senior wrestler. She dyed it with her image colors, and made adjustments so that it fitted her body shape. In the case of Masumi, she formed a tag team with her senior wrestler several years after she became a wrestler. Before their match began, a total of four wrestlers for the match stood in the ring, and only Masumi was not in a gown. Her senior wrestler was very surprised and told Masumi, "You are not in a gown... you should ask someone to make it for you." Thus, she is thinking of making one. When wrestlers make gowns, they need money to do so, but rookies need permission from their senior wrestlers as well as money.

Mika talked about the function of a gown. She says that she can show two different types of herself when she appears in her gown before the match and when she shows her costume during the match. On the other hand, Aki chose not to wear a gown. This is because Aki holds the view that a gown should be worn by wrestlers with real strength. She does not wear a gown because, if she wears a gown and appears to be strong, and if the audience "thinks the match was not good [even though I look strong], then it will make me sad (laughs)." "But in contrast, if everyone except me is in a gown and my body develops bigger so that I don't look too bad against them, then not wearing a gown is acceptable," she says. Aki is actually aiming to have a muscular body.

(4) Hairstyle

There was a woman pro wrestler who mentioned her hairstyle as an element that makes her distinct. Many women pro wrestlers dye their hair blonde as a way of making them stand out. However, Aki used a method

other than dying her hair blonde. Her hairstyle and costume were nothing special when she made her debut. She then realized that she had to change them in order to give a strong impression to the audience, and thus she changed her hairstyle. She says that even if the audience does not know her name but they can remember her hairstyle and that will make her satisfied. I saw her hairstyle ⁽⁶⁾ in a match in the past, and it was unusual enough to give me a strong impression. I think that her strategy to be distinct by having an unusual hair style was effective.

One of the most famous hairstyles in women's pro wrestling is that of Bull Nakano when she was the leader of a group of "heels" called "Gokumonto." Her hair at the front and sides was standing up almost vertically. Bull Nakano got a hint for this from the hairstyle worn by Atsushi Sakurai of BUCK-TICK, a rock band, and she "made the hairstyle before each match by using strong hair spray and a dryer, and it took about 20 minutes each time" (1991, p.360). The hairstyle was unusual enough to attract the audience, and Nakano used to describe her hairstyle as "a part of my life as a wrestler known as Bull Nakano" (1991, p.361).

(5) Cosmetics

Only a few wrestlers answered that they do not wear makeup. Many of the interviewees answered that they put cosmetics on for matches as well as when they appear in front of their audience. Many women pro wrestlers point out that they need to wear makeup since pro wrestling is an occupation that involves "being looked at" by people.

Mika says, "It is more polite to wear makeup for an audience" than not wearing it. Yuko says that even for rookies, "they need to wear makeup," since pro wrestling is a job that means being looked at. Some pro wrestlers say that they wear makeup using a little more flashy color than women in general in order to show their faces clearly to their audience. Rie says that she does not wear makeup usually, but when she goes out in front of people, she now wears makeup even when she is acting only as a second or as a sales lady at a shop related to pro wrestling tournaments. This is because she is being watched by others. Similarly to Rie, many pro wrestlers wear makeup when they are watched by their "customers" but they do not wear makeup when they are not being seen. Aki says that this is because the cosmetics will be wasted since they are washed off by sweat when they are in training anyway.

Some wrestlers feel that they need to wear makeup when they go out in front of people, but they appear in matches without wearing makeup be-

cause they are busy or because they cannot be bothered. Mami points out that makeup and hairstyles are the ways of showing themselves to their audiences. She says, "I think that I have to pay more attention to my makeup and hairstyle, but if I run out of time before matches, I don't spend enough time on makeup and my hair is shaggy (laughs)." Her mother "says to me (laughs) that I should do up my hair properly, since I am in the business of being watched, but I am not doing it right." Certainly, rookies are very busy during exhibitions, as they have to set up the ring prior to each match, prepare shops and anterooms, prepare for their own matches and act as second for their senior wrestlers. Because of this, as Sanae suggests, they do not have enough time to wear makeup.

In contrast, some women pro wrestlers perform pro wrestling without makeup although they are told to do so by their senior pro wrestlers. Midori was told by her senior wrestlers that she should wear makeup since she is going to be in front of an audience, thus she needed to do so. But she did not do it because she did not have enough time and also she felt that she could not be bothered. Sachi also says that when she was a rookie, she "was told to wear makeup but did not do it because it was too much trouble (laughs)." She says that it was because, like Midori, "since I am not really a girlie wrestler," wearing makeup makes her "look sickening anyway." Sachi is tall and has a large body. What she says suggests her belief that a big body cannot co-exist with beauty. She is in her 30's now, and she wears foundation on her face but she says, "with or without makeup, there is no difference actually."

According to Midori and Sachi, girlie pro wrestlers put on cosmetics properly in order to show their femininity. However, Masumi, whose position in her organization is similar to that of idol pro wrestlers, does not place much importance on makeup. She said "I sometimes wear makeup and sometimes not (laughs). Recently, I am feeling it is too much trouble," and she thinks "it doesn't make much difference with or without makeup, and the customers do not notice it much anyway, so it is OK." In this way, some wrestlers wear makeup because they are told to do so by their seniors, while some do not do it as long as their senior wrestlers and the audience do not notice that they are without it.

On the other hand, some women pro wrestlers wear unusual makeup in order to create their own character. Among women pro wrestlers, Rei is the pro wrestler whose facial expression and manner of talking are the most different between when she is being interviewed and when she is in a match. She says that she needs to go through the process of changing from

Rei in everyday life to Mighty Nishimura, a pro wrestler. Unless she wears a gown, makeup and a mask, she feels embarrassed. She appears in front of the audience and takes up a set pose, and this “switches on [the change] completely.” She used to paint a part of her face with dark color because she wanted to maintain her image of being a strong wrestler even after she took off her mask. It was also because she felt that, if she wore ordinary makeup, she would be back to being an ordinary person, and she felt embarrassed about it. However, she was told by another wrestler that she looked horrible with the paint on. For Rei, wearing unusual makeup is an important process for her in becoming Mighty Nishimura.

Maki also used poster paint to color her face in the past. She used poster paint because it did not come off easily during matches but it came off completely if it was washed properly. She says that wearing a mask and putting paint on her face helps “another me to be born.” At the same time, the mask and paint “help to erase such embarrassment” in becoming another self.

Women pro wrestlers' performance examined by gender norms

Based on the study in the previous section, I will analyze women pro wrestlers' performance by the following points: whether the performances of women pro wrestlers reproduce or transform gender order; whether the bodies of women pro wrestlers reproduce or transform the dichotomous structure of the sex/gender system; and, whether the bodies of women pro wrestlers reproduce or transform the normative female body in sports.

How to use a sexy body

Kazama Rumi was showing off sexy poses by shaking her hips to her right and left and putting her hair up with both hands during matches. She does these actions in order to show herself as a sexual and attractive object to the audience, and thus, it can be considered that these actions reproduce the gender order of heterosexuality. However, Kazama does not make such sexy poses constantly during matches. Before and after such actions, she performs hard exchanges of technique like other wrestlers. When Kazama shows off such hard exchanges, she exerts an aggressiveness that is not encouraged for the normative female body in sports. Thus, on one hand, by showing aggressiveness in pro wrestling, she transforms the normative female body in sports. On the other hand, by making sexy poses, she lets the audience realize that she has a sexual and attractive body, then she repro-

duces the gender order of heterosexuality.

Kawaii and women pro wrestlers

Masumi was expected to play the role of an idol pro wrestler. According to Ichikawa (2002), idols (pop-icon) are defined as popular persons who make others feel friendly, and Ichikawa suggests “a person with a friendly and ordinary face and appearance” (2002, p.8) as an example. This is *kawaii* in other words. Women idols in Japan have always been highly expected to be *kawaii*, though the details of this changed depending on the times (Miyadai et al., 2007). Therefore, since Masumi is thought of as an idol wrestler among some fans, she is considered to be a *kawaii* wrestler.

How is *kawaii* defined? Yamane defines a *kawaii* person as “someone who is childish, weak and beautiful in appearance” (1990, p.144). Yamane’s definition does not distinguish *kawaii* from beauty, but Yomota finds the essential quality of *kawaii* by comparing with beauty. Yomota states that *kawaii* and beauty are opposed, and defines *kawaii* as “opposite to holiness, perfection and eternity, and it is something that is fragile and changes often on the surface, superficial, incomplete and immature” (2006, p.76), while “viewing from the other direction,” he defines *kawaii* as “familiarity, easiness of understanding and psychological closeness that makes it highly accessible are structured” (2006, p.76). Thus, something small, childish, long-forgotten has a “psychological closeness that makes it highly accessible,” and thus, it is perceived as *kawaii*. Moreover, Yomota argues that “psychological closeness that makes it highly accessible” “is synonymous with the desire to dominate someone and connected to perceive him/her as a lower or inferior existence” (2006, p.76). Masumi is short and small compared to other women pro wrestlers, and thus, she is perceived as “someone small.” Moreover, when she was interviewed for this study, her career as a pro wrestler had lasted less than five years, which regarded her as “immature yet.” This is why Masumi was perceived as a *kawaii* wrestler, or an idol wrestler.

Can *kawaii* wrestlers be considered as sexual objects? Miyadai et al. argue that the concept of *kawaii* became an “adaptive possibility to the ‘matured sexual body’” (2007, p.392) among women idols who made appearances in the latter half of the 1960’s. The *kawaii* idols during the period appeared in bathing suits in male magazines (Miyadai et al., 2007). Therefore, idol wrestlers can become sexual objects. Masumi does not accept becoming an idol wrestler. She does not wear “beautiful clothes” that are suitable for idols, but she rather wears a sweatsuit, which is her favorite. Thus, Masumi’s be-

havior of not accepting a role as an idol wrestler can be interpreted as transforming the gender order of heterosexuality that demands a woman to create her looks by the means of “psychological tendency to perceive and evaluate themselves as ‘objects of sexual desire’” (Ehara, 2001, p.151-152).

Yuko says, “even if someone is *kawaii*, if she cannot express herself, it is not good.” In other words, this person will not be successful in the pro wrestling world. In the popular culture of Japan, many *kawaii* idols appeared between the 1960’s and 70’s (Miyadai et al., 2007), and female magazines, of which the buyers are mainly women, trumpet the view that women have to be *kawaii* (Yomota, 2006). Furthermore, some women point out that *kawaii* behaviors give an advantage to women in society (Yomota, 2006). Thus, many women accept being called *kawaii* positively, though there are differences depending on age. However, Yuko pointed out that just being *kawaii* was not good enough to win popularity in the world of women’s pro wrestling. Through performances, a strong persona has to be established to the extent that a wrestler graves their existence on the memory of audiences. This implies, in other words, that there is a possibility for wrestlers to be successful without being *kawaii* in the world of women’s pro wrestling, in spite of the fact that being *kawaii* provides Japanese women today with huge value. Generally, strong female bodies and costumes that cannot be regarded as *kawaii* are accepted positively, if they are considered to be fun for the audience. Being *kawaii* has become a mere one element of various personas, this is interpreted as transforming the gender order of heterosexuality.

Feeling sorry for “baby” (“baby face”) wrestlers

Masumi says that she shows the audience how pitiful she is when she is being attacked. Sanae is a “baby face” wrestler, and says that it is important for her to show the audience her face in pain and to be given sympathy by the audience. On the other hand, based on what Yuko and Maki said, wrestlers with big bodies and wrestlers who look strong are likely to become “heel” wrestlers who bully “baby face” wrestlers.

Masumi and Sanae, who are “baby face” wrestlers, seldom win matches and they are not strong. In contrast, Yuko is tall and heavy, and thus, probably Yuko was always bigger than Masumi and Sanae ⁽⁷⁾. In addition, Yuko was a wrestler who used to make an appeal through her strength more often than Masumi and Sanae. As described earlier, the normative male body in sports is aggressive and strong, while the normative female body in sports is weak and without aggression. Therefore, Masumi and Sanae reproduce the

normative female body in sports, and Yuko transforms the normative female body in sports.

It is possible to analyze the bodies of Masumi, Sanae and Yuko in terms of the concept of being *kawaii*. Since one of the elements that structures being *kawaii* is to be small, Masumi and Sanae, whose bodies are small, are perceived as having *kawaii* bodies. Moreover, being *kawaii* generates the perception that he/she can dominate a *kawaii* person (Yomota, 2006), and thus, a *kawaii* body is perceived as a weak body. In addition, since a *kawaii* body is perceived as a sexually preferable body, small and weak bodies like the bodies of Masumi and Sanae are perceived as sexually preferable bodies that reproduce the gender order of heterosexuality. In contrast, big bodies are not *kawaii* bodies, and thus, they are not sexually preferable bodies. Therefore, they do not become the objects of men's desires. As big female bodies like Yuko's are perceived as "ugly" or "un-welcomed" bodies in the gender habitus of men and women under the gender order of heterosexuality (Ehara 2001, p.331), wrestlers with big bodies end up playing the roles of hateful "heel" wrestlers who bully "baby face" wrestlers, who are the sexually preferred objects.

This indicates clearly that Masumi's body and her performance have a complex relation to the gender order of heterosexuality. On the other hand, Masumi's behavior such as not accepting the role of an idol wrestler transforms the gender order of heterosexuality that expects women to express themselves as "sexual objects." Meanwhile, her small and weak body presented during pro wrestling is treated as a sexually preferable body and then reproduces the gender order of heterosexuality.

"Ero" (meaning eroticism) as an attraction

Maki was saying before that each woman has "ero" as her attraction, and thus, she was quite OK with doing American women's pro wrestling, of which the sales point is eroticism. Women's pro wrestling after the era of Crush in Japan succeeded in dispelling the perception that women's pro wrestling was an erotic sideshow. This view had been dominant in the early days of women's pro wrestling in Japan. The perception was dispelled by introducing the sort of hard fights that is one of the elements of combative sports. However, since Maki had questions about the style of women's pro wrestling in Japan after the era of Crush, she supported the style in which women pro wrestlers acted as the supporting cast for men pro wrestlers by showing not hard fights but sexual attractiveness. This recognition reproduces the gender order of heterosexuality as this treats women pro wrestlers

as “sexual objects,” while it also reproduces gender division of labor as the gender order as men pro wrestlers become the center of pro wrestling exhibitions and women pro wrestlers become their foils. This view indicates that the women's pro wrestling constructed by Crush transform both heterosexuality and gender division of labor as gender order.

Costumes and the body

Mika realizes that she is a feminine wrestler, and thus, her costume is feminine. In the match I also saw the costume that Sanae was talking about. Her costume was decorated with many ribbons and *kawaii* elements were emphasized (from field notes in 2004). Mika and Sanae reproduce the gender order of heterosexuality by expressing femininity and *kawaii* elements in their costumes. Sawako also says that she wears costumes “that show my breasts' cleavage” in order to emphasize that she is a woman. A body with big breasts is one of the characteristics of the ideal female body. She tries to emphasize her breasts by using her costume and this indicates her intention to show herself as a preferable object of sexual desire. Thus, she reproduces the gender order of heterosexuality.

Sachi is a wrestler whose sales point is her strength, and her costume is designed to “look cool and strong” in accordance with her image. Presenting her own body as strong by her costume is a constituent element of the normative male body in sports. Therefore, Sachi transforms the normative female body in sports. Aki was wearing a separate-type bathing suit to prevent her from eating too much, and she was also saying that she wants to tighten her abdominal muscles by training and wants to make an appeal to her audience by showing her tighter muscles in bathing suits. The notion that the parts of the body exposed should be tight is equivalent to the ideal female body that is dominant in Japanese society. On the other hand, the abdominal muscles shown by Aki meet one of the characteristics, called muscular, that constitutes the ideal male body. In short, because an element of the ideal female body and an element of the ideal male body coexist in Aki's body, her body transforms the gender order of heterosexuality.

Ryoko chooses costumes that are designed largely to expose her back and emphasize the size of her breasts. Moreover, one portion of the lower part of her costume is open to express sexiness. As these parts of her costume help her to express herself as a preferable object of sexual desire, she transforms the gender order of heterosexuality. On the other hand, Ryoko's back is big and thick, and her waist is tight. In Japan, too, such a V-shaped

body constitutes a part of the ideal male body. Therefore, Ryoko's costume and big breasts express the ideal female body, but her V-shaped body expresses a part of the ideal male body. Therefore, as an element of the ideal female body and an element of the ideal male body coexist in Ryoko's body, her body transforms the gender order of heterosexuality.

Moreover, because the bodies of Aki and Ryoko have both an element of the ideal female body and that of the ideal male body, their bodies destabilize and thus transform the dichotomous structure of the sex/gender system that keep normative male/female elements separate and does not allow them to coexist in one body.

Cosmetics and the gender order of heterosexuality

Many women pro wrestlers pointed out that they needed to wear makeup because pro wrestling was an occupation that involved being watched. The number of the women pro wrestlers who wear makeup including those who said they were too busy to wear makeup was larger than the number of the wrestlers who did not. How are their behaviors related to gender order and the sex/gender system?

Some documents will be examined in order to demonstrate Japanese social norms regarding women wearing makeup. I choose a study conducted by the POLA Research Institute of Beauty & Culture in 2007 because its survey year is close to 2004 when I conducted interviews. The study shows that 61 % of the total number of 1,500 women who were involved with the study wore makeup almost every day in their daily lives. The percentage increased to 80 % of the total when the women who wore makeup sometimes were also included in the count. This indicates that wearing makeup is one of the behaviors carried out by many women in Japan.

Then, why do some women who are not wrestlers wear or do not wear makeup? The frequency of wearing makeup is measured by an index called "the degree of makeup" of which the criteria are the number of items of cosmetics for makeup each individual uses every day (Sugawara, 2001). The more the items of cosmetic for makeup used, the higher the degree becomes. Sasayama and Nagamatsu (1999) analyzed the makeup behaviors of a total of 281 Japanese university students aged between 19 and 24 and demonstrated the various factors that define the degree of makeup. This index is determined by three kinds of attitudes: "interest in makeup," "habit of makeup" and "trial and error (beginners)," and by two attributions: "the amount of money that can be used freely each month" and "enrollment in

women's university." The attitude called "interest in makeup" indicates that women who have a high interest in makeup approve of the psychological utility of makeup and then, wear makeup to use such utility (Sasayama & Nagamatsu, 1999). The psychological utility of makeup means fun in creation, sufficiency in the desire to transform oneself, releasing stress, and other forms of satisfaction obtained by wearing makeup.

The "habit of makeup" relates to the consciousness including makeup as a basic need, makeup as grooming and appearance, makeup to show oneself to others and being extreme self-conscious. Makeup as a basic need means two things: a) women with a high self-esteem feel that makeup is necessary because they do not want to show their ugly parts; b) women who accept their gender as a woman feel that makeup is necessary because they have to be feminine as far as they are women (Sasayama & Nagamatsu, 1999). Makeup as grooming and appearance means that women with an outgoing personality have the attitude that they try to wear makeup appropriately to be looked on as grown-up women because they feel that no makeup is impolite. Moreover, women who were raised seeing their mothers wearing makeup regularly tend to wear makeup, since they feel that wearing makeup is a minimum requirement as women (Sasayama & Nagamatsu, 1999). Makeup to show oneself to others means that women wear makeup not to be appearing mannish. Being extremely self-conscious means that both women who become extremely self-conscious unnecessarily when they wear makeup, and women who sense a psychological cost in makeup, do not wear makeup because they do not want to make wearing makeup a habit (Sasayama & Nagamatsu, 1999). This result can now be compared to how women pro wrestlers perceive makeup. However, the wrestlers' makeup that create their own characters are excluded since it is a theatrical behavior.

Mika says, "It is more polite to 'the customers' to appear with makeup" than without when they perform in the ring. This can be interpreted as her arguing that for women, wearing makeup is a manner. This is the same as makeup as grooming and appearance within the attitude "habit of makeup" mentioned by Sasayama and Nagamatsu (1999). According to Ishida (2009), the fundamental purpose of makeup was related to grown-up women's grooming and appearance, and manner in Japanese society between the Meiji period and the latter half of the 1990's. This idea has carried on from senior to younger women pro wrestlers. I cannot conclude that the behavior of wearing makeup as grooming and appearance that was described by Sasayama and Nagamatsu (1999) was related clearly to expressing oneself as a desir-

able sexual object. Therefore, makeup as grooming and appearance is not considered as a behavior reproducing the gender order of heterosexuality⁽⁸⁾.

Mami and Masumi were too lazy to wear makeup sometimes. Their behavior falls into the attitude found among women who feel that there is a psychological cost in makeup, and therefore they do not wear makeup, as Sasayama and Nagamatsu (1990) pointed out.

Midori and Sachi say that pro wrestlers who are “girlie” have to wear makeup, but it is no problem for the wrestlers who are not the girlie type, like them, not to wear makeup. In other words, even though they understand that the behavior of wearing makeup is to make them “looked at” as preferable objects of sexual desire, they dare not to do it. They also suggest that such an idea is allowed in the world of women’s pro wrestling. In contrast, none of the “girlie” wrestlers who are expected to express being *kawaii* mention that the reason why they wear makeup is because they want to be looked as preferable objects of sexual desire.

Thus, it is assumed that wrestlers like Sachi and Midori who do not try to show themselves as preferable objects of sexual desire, and wrestlers like Masumi who are expected to express themselves as an idol and as preferable objects of sexual desire but do not wear makeup, transform the gender order of heterosexuality.

Women’s pro wrestling as a concoction generated by gender order

Women pro wrestlers are struggling with how to establish distinct persona and how to give a strong impression to their audience. The persona demanded from women pro wrestlers are diverse, and women’s pro wrestling is not a world where only *kawaii* quality and strength predominate. Women pro wrestlers understand their world as a place where various kinds of persona have cast strong lights. As a way of establishing a distinct persona, women pro wrestlers create unusual characters and develop their own pro wrestling styles. As elements for expressing their own characters and pro wrestling styles, there are such methods as the use of their bodies and decorating their bodies through costumes and makeup. Also it has become clear that costumes are important to self-expression for some women pro wrestlers. I found various responses of women pro wrestlers toward wearing makeup. Some women pro wrestlers accept the concept that women should wear makeup when they appear in front of people so that they wear makeup, while some reject it. On the other hand, there were women pro wrestlers

who wear special makeup to establish their own characters.

Because Chapter 5 mainly analyzed whether combat skill could be used against the violence women pro wrestlers encounter in their daily lives, the aggressiveness exemplified by women pro wrestlers was not examined. Considering aggressiveness in terms of the normative body in sports in this chapter made it clear that the body moves in women's pro wrestling show aggressiveness and transform the normative female body in sports. On one hand, the small and weak bodies of some women pro wrestlers reproduce the normative female body in sports, on the other hand the performances of women pro wrestlers that express aggressiveness and the bodies of women pro wrestlers expressing strength transform the normative female body in sports.

Pro wrestling, as a performance conducted by women pro wrestlers, has a complicated relationship with gender order, especially with the gender order of heterosexuality. Also some women pro wrestlers reproduce and transform the gender order of heterosexuality at the same time. The poor "baby face" and hateful "heel" reproduce the gender order of heterosexuality. However, in the world of women's pro wrestling, being *kawaii* is not the only and absolute value, and coexists with other persona along the same lines. This value system in the world of pro wrestling transforms the gender order of heterosexuality. In the relationship between costumes and bodies, women pro wrestlers who try to express *kawaii* and sexy qualities by using costumes reproduce the gender order of heterosexuality. Meanwhile, the women pro wrestlers who make an element of the ideal female body and an element of the ideal male body coexist transform the gender order of heterosexuality. Their bodies destabilize and transform the dichotomous structure of the sex/gender system that separate the ideal female body from the ideal male body and prohibits them from coexisting in one single body. In the entire world of women's pro wrestling, these reproductions and transformations coexist as a concoction of various personas under glittering light.

Notes

- (1) The concept of the grotesque body proposed by Bakhtin (1980) was used for analysis in Aiba (2008b). This was because Bakhtin's concept of the grotesque body contains an aspect that makes any kind of dichotomous structure unbalanced by integrating or blending elements that should not usually be compatible (Stallybrass & White, 1986). However, I found

out that the grotesque body “has lost the definition of the individual and is an aggregation at the super-individual level” (Jefferson, 2005, p.288). Thus, this concept was considered as not applicable to this study since this study adheres with the paradigm of the body of individual. Thus, I decided not to use the concept of grotesque body in this chapter.

- (2) You may notice some women athletes developing muscles and conducting aggressive performances. Those features, however, are not celebrated by Japanese media. For example, as I argue in Chapter 1, when the all-Japan women’s soccer team won the World Cup in 2011, Japanese media focused on several remarkable players on the team. Few media reports, however, celebrated their muscles or physical strength. Therefore, the normative female body in sports in Japan is considered to be non-aggressive and without rugged muscles.
- (3) Here is an example. On January 11, 2004, the second match at GAEA Japan was the match of Nagayo Chigusa and Yamada Toshiyo versus Aja Kong and Toyota Manami. In this match, Nagayo and Aja had almost no chance to appear. Several minutes after the match began, Yamada Toshiyo executed a technique on Toyota Manami and won by a “three-count.” Toyota was well-known for her variety of technique, and her stamina usually lasted till the end of each match and achieved her the nickname “zombie.” However, Toyota was defeated by Yamada within several minutes.
- (4) Even in 2004, the costume for rookies was in the shape of a “mizugi”, swimsuit. Hayashi Hitomi, a rookie at GAEA Japan who made her debut in that year, was wearing a mazarine swimsuit. Mizumura Ayana, who made her debut after Hayashi, was wearing an aqua competition swimsuit (“Hyaku dai,” 2005).
- (5) It is possible to describe her costume in more detail, but in order to prevent her being identified, only a simple description of the costume is made here. The characteristics of the costumes of other wrestlers are also described similarly.
- (6) Her hairstyle has a specific name, but the name is not mentioned in this study in order to prevent her from being identified.
- (7) Yuko had already retired from wrestling as of 2004, and thus, this is only a guess based on the magazines when she was performing.
- (8) The reason why the relation was not concluded clearly is that, as Matsui et al. (1983) point out, though the action of putting on makeup is perceived as having a strong relation to being conscious of opposite gender’s gaze, Japanese women tend to hesitate about admitting this clearly in surveys.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Empowered Bodies and Challenged Bodies

This chapter will examine what kind of benefits and challenges women pro wrestlers perceive in their daily lives by doing pro wrestling. Why is such a study necessary? Because it has been demonstrated how beneficial it is for women to participate in sports and other physical activities, and the literature of Anglophone countries has begun indicating how certain sports have an influence on women beyond physical activities. However, the study of how the things women obtain from physical activities influence their everyday lives has just begun, even in Anglophone countries. In Japanese society, what kinds of the benefits female athletes gain from playing sports and how they influence their daily lives have not yet been examined. Women in Japan are encouraged less to be involved in physical activities compared to men, and thus, it is possible that women have not yet obtained the benefits they are supposed to obtain from physical activities. Therefore, it is necessary to study the benefits women obtain from physical activities and those influences to their everyday lives by using women pro wrestlers as the objects of a study, since women pro wrestlers are engaged in physical activities similar to combative sports.

The influence of physical activities on women shown by previous studies

This section will examine what women perceive that they obtain from physical activities and how the things they obtain bring benefits and challenges in their everyday lives.

What women obtain from physical activities

Two kinds of previous studies will be examined in this section. One is a study about what women perceive they obtain by participating not only in competitive sports but also in a wide range of physical activities, including muscle training. The other is a study about what kind of benefits in their daily lives women receive from physical activities.

The previous studies demonstrate that, by engaging in a variety of physical activities, women recognize their bodies are strong and capable, perceive themselves as competent and obtain the sense of feeling to connect to their own bodies (Blinde et al., 1993; Granskog, 2003; McDermott, 2000; Scott-Dixon, 2008; Theberge, 1987; Wedgewood, 2004; Wright & Dewar, 1997; Yarnal et al., 2006). The studies also show that those women who participated in physical activities obtained a positive attitude towards their lives (Blinde et al., 1993), overcame the dichotomy between mind and body (Liimkka, 2012), and obtained a sense that the border between the body and the outer world disappeared so that they became unified with the outer world (Liimkka, 2012).

What kinds of influence in their daily lives do women receive from what they have obtained through physical activities? The positive influences in their everyday lives include practical benefits and psychological benefits. Practical benefits are, for example, the benefit that means women can take heavy baggage down from a truck without difficulties (Scott-Dixon, 2008), or that they can carry heavy things without receiving any help from others (Dworkin, 2003).

The psychological benefits vary. The female athletes in the study conducted by Blinde et al. (1993) point out that what they obtain from sports has an influence on matters outside of sports. The female athletes perceive that their bodies are strong and capable, and thus, they think about their health more, and understand better how they have to take care of their bodies (Blinde et al., 1993). The elements that let female athletes perceive themselves as competent include the realization that they can overcome difficult situations outside of sports (Blinde et al., 1993). Moreover, the elements that let them take a positive attitude towards life include the ability to narrow down goals (Blinde et al., 1993). Female athletes perceive that they can apply their abilities to their studies, job and private life, and also perceive that participating in sports helps them when they think of strategies for achieving goals outside the sphere of sports such as achieving good grades or deciding something (Blinde et al., 1993). The female athletes studied by Scott-Dixon (2008) also point out that they came to try something new when they

participated in physical activities. Moreover, they obtained the confidence that they could escape if they were forced to be involved in violence on the street (Dworkin, 2003), and they also obtained a positive attitude towards their lives (McCaughey, 1997) such as “getting divorced, starting their own businesses, going back to school, confronting an abuser, and getting over an eating disorder” (McCaughey, 1997, p.122).

Challenges faced by engaging in physical activities⁽¹⁾

Female athletes do not receive only benefits from physical activities. They also face challenges from society when they are engaged in physical activities. When women with bigger, heavier and taller bodies than the normative body play sports using strength-power⁽²⁾, they receive negative comments about the shape and size of their bodies and their physical talents as well as about the sports they engage in (Scott-Dixon, 2008). Those women who play American football and Australian football often receive negative comments, since these sports have historically embodied masculinity (Migliaccio & Berg, 2007; Wedgwood, 2004).

Moreover, there is a prejudice that women who play sports are lesbians, and thus, if women play sports at university, others regard them as lesbians (Blinde & Taub, 1992). Because of such a prejudice, some athletes are careful about not being seen with other women in public places or especially about not being seen hugging or touching other women (Blinde & Taub, 1992).

Physical activities and the physical empowerment of women

It is understood that a part of what women obtain from physical activities is empowerment (Liimakka, 2012; McDermott, 2000; Yarnal et al., 2006). However, what is “empowerment”? The concept of empowerment is still in progress, and the definitions of the term differ depending on the field. It is also pointed out that the varied definitions are not consistent (Kukita, 1998; Sato, 2005; Gutierrez, 1990). Kubota (2005), however, argues that there are at least three different characteristics to the concept of “empowerment” in previous studies. The first characteristic is that those who have empowerment come under “the condition of lacking power” possessed by humans in nature (Kubota, 2005, p.28). Thus, “‘empowerment’ is about the process of ‘obtaining power’ to those who cannot exert their power due to some reason, although they potentially have that power” (Kubota, 2005, p.27). The second characteristic is that what is obtained by empowerment is not power,

but rather “something within people, which is extracted from interrelationships with others” (Kubota, 2005, p.29) and “the power that people can exert their own abilities such as confidence” (Kubota, 2005, p.27). The third characteristic is that the process of empowerment contains not only psychological elements but also social, political and economic elements, and in the end it is oriented towards social change. In other words, empowerment is the process in which individuals become conscious of their own power, and develop their ability to influence others as well as the ability to work with others in order to change social systems; and thus, it takes place at the levels of individuals, groups and systems respectively (Gutierrez, 1990).

Then, what sort of empowerment is realized by engaging in physical activities? The previous studies examined in an earlier section “*What women obtain from physical activities*” will be reconsidered from the viewpoint of “the power that people can exert their own abilities such as confidence,” (Kubota, 2005, p.27) that is thought of as being obtained in the process of empowerment.

The women studied by Wright and Dewar (1997), who participated in various kinds of sports and physical activities, felt that they had a physical strength that was something opposed to vulnerability. Physical strength does not mean having good abilities or being muscular. It means the physical strength with which people can try something new or achieve their own goals, and this becomes a source of confidence for people. According to McDermott (2000), those women, who succeed in traveling a long distance in a canoe, by choosing to put themselves under physically hard conditions, came to realize that they have true physical abilities, especially physical strength. They said that they realized that they actually have greater physical strength than they had believed beforehand. This experience gave them physical confidence. According to a study by Yarnel et al. (2006), the women participated in Camp Blaze, which provides women with career development opportunities in a fire service, felt that they became more conscious of their self-control and abilities in relation to their own bodies. This consciousness turned to broaden their understanding of their physical potential. They succeeded in achieving something they thought impossible and scary, which helped them re-realize their physical potential and gave them more encouragement. Hollander (2004) studied women who participated in self-defense training and pointed out that they had more confidence in their ability to defend their bodies as they realized that they were physically strong and competent. According to Wedgewood (2002), many girls had come to consider themselves as strong, defensive, masterful and assertive after they

had the experience of playing Australian football. Blinde et al. (1993) show that personal empowerment from playing sports is about obtaining physical abilities, finding him/herself as being competent and working on his/her life positively. They also point out that physical ability is about people considering themselves physically strong and capable. As a conclusion to these findings, women and girls obtain various kinds of physical strength (power and masterfulness) when they participate in sports and physical activities. What we have to be careful of here is that the physical strength obtained is not only muscle force. Furthermore, even when a high degree of physical strength is obtained, the strength is not only about the strength of muscle but includes the meaning that a person is not vulnerable. When people perceive that they have physical strength, it leads them to consider that they have physical potential. In other words, it leads them to consider their bodies as something with the potential of realizing something and not as an object to be watched (McDermott, 2000). When they regard their bodies having potential, they come to have confidence in their bodies.

As will be described later, many girls and women of today's Japan cannot exert and perceive their physical strength fully although they potentially have this. Thus, physical empowerment means the process whereby women in Japanese society today—women who cannot exert their physical strength fully though they potentially have this—obtain physical strength and perceive their bodies as having potential.

On the other hand, Liimakka (2012) argues that physical empowerment is the social and physical process that promotes: (a) the power that women have for physical activities or through physical activities; (b) redefinition of body. The part labeled (a) is consistent with the definition of empowerment described earlier. The redefinition of body labeled (b) includes obtaining a sense of being connected to their own bodies (McDermott, 2000; Wright & Dewar, 1997), overcoming the dichotomy between mind and body (Liimakka, 2012) and obtaining a sense that the border between the body and the outer world disappeared so that they became unified with the outer world (Liimakka, 2012). It is important especially to overcome the dichotomy between mind and body in the redefinition of the body, because this dichotomy has been contributing to the justification of women being inferior to men. In the dichotomy between mind and body institutionalized since Descartes, mind and body are two separated things; they are exclusive from each other, and mind is considered to be superior to body (Grosz, 1994). This dichotomy is applied to the relation between men and women, and constructed the notion

that the female body was more biological, physical and natural, therefore women were inferior to men. The women studied by Liimakka (2012) overcame the dichotomy between mind and body by approving of their embodied selves by engaging in physical activities, not by monitoring their own bodies by their selves or by having a view that their selves use their bodies.

However, such an overcoming of the dichotomy between mind and body cannot be understood as the empowerment defined in the process of “obtaining power” by people who cannot exert their strength fully though they potentially have it. Thus, although this chapter admits the importance of the redefinition of the body pointed out by Liimakka (2012), this does not examine it as empowerment. In accord with the previous studies above, this chapter will consider what women pro wrestlers perceive to obtain by doing pro wrestling and whether women pro wrestlers perceive the things they obtain as benefits or challenges in their everyday lives.

Things what women pro wrestlers obtained

The interviews with the women pro wrestlers demonstrate that they obtain benefits from doing pro wrestling and that they face challenges from gender norms to the bodies they have obtained by doing pro wrestling. The benefits the women pro wrestlers obtained by doing pro wrestling will be described first.

Politeness and appreciation of others

Women pro wrestlers have to survive a severe hierarchical relationship between seniors and juniors, as described in Chapter 4, and through this hierarchy some of the wrestlers have learned about politeness. Ryoko says, “I am told I am polite, and I think... this is because of pro wrestling.” Maki mentions when she was told off sometimes because her choice of words was bad when she was a rookie. Recalling the incidents, she wonders why she was told off for such a thing and now believes that she does not deserve it. On the other hand, she appreciates those incidents as they have been useful for her when she deals with people outside the world of pro wrestling. She says that she learned how to be polite from the world of pro wrestling, so now she thinks, “It was good.” When I met some wrestlers I interviewed at the pro wrestling venue, they always greeted me cheerfully. Almost all wrestlers also greeted me politely before and after each interview.

Maho learned to “appreciate others” as well as being polite to others.

She had to show some respect to her seniors all the time and they trained her severely, so she sometimes hated all of that. However, there were senior pro wrestlers who listened to her and gave her advice when she needed it, and they also cheered her up when she faced difficulties. Sachi, who has a long pro wrestling career, also mentioned that she had such a senior pro wrestler. After a match in 2004, Sachi told the audience that she “thought of quitting pro wrestling only once. Akira-san helped me at that time.” By saying this, she spoke of her gratitude to Akira, who was her senior pro wrestler (field notes).

Maho also learned to be kind to others after one of her senior pro wrestlers showed her kindness, as Akira did to Sachi. She began thinking, “My senior did so for me, so I want to do the same for my juniors.”

Physical strength and mental strength

Women pro wrestlers obtain strength from pro wrestling. Their strength can be categorized in three types: physical strength, mental strength, and both. Most narratives of wrestlers regarding strength is categorized into one of these types, but only in the case of Sawako does her strength cover all three.

(1) Anything heavy is welcome

As a part of their physical strength, the women pro wrestlers mentioned that they can now carry something heavy, which turns to be useful to other people.

When Rei was a member of a pro wrestling organization as a rookie, she had to carry a lot of baggage on her shoulders as was described in Chapter 4. Now she has confidence that she can walk with anything heavy on her shoulders. She feels, “Anything is OK on my shoulders. It is like, I can walk easily with them.” Midori also says that she has been able to carry baggage quickly since she became a wrestler. For example, when it is necessary to unload heavy baggage from a car quickly, only one or two wrestlers can unload and carry the bags quickly. She thinks that this is exactly what she “got from being trained in pro wrestling. I can carry more baggage than other girls in general.” Because of this, in her family, instead of her father, it is she who carries heavy objects. She thinks that she is glad to be a wrestler then.

Sanae says that when she goes shopping or has a barbecue with her friends, something heavy will be put in front of her anyway and she carries it for her friends. Her female friends “tell me often that they feel like they are doing shopping with a man.” Mami thinks that she has gained more strength than girls in general since she became a pro wrestler, and can now carry heavy things. One day she saw a foreign woman trying to walk down some stairs

with many bags in her hands at a subway entrance. The bags “looked heavy and troublesome, so I helped her by carrying them to the bottom of the stairs. The woman was surprised and... she said something like ‘unbelievable’.”

When Sawako received training in a hospital to be qualified as a second grade home care worker, she was made to take care of an elderly person alone. The friend she was together with as a trainee at the hospital had a nurse to help her, but Sawako was made to take care of the elderly person alone, since the nurse said, “Sawako-san, could you do it alone?” as if it was taken for granted. She thinks, “If I am relied on, I am motivated. And for elderly people, my big body will make them worry less.” She is glad that she has had her body trained in pro wrestling for this reason.

Maki says that she is glad she is strong. When she goes shopping and buys a lot of things, she can carry the heavy objects without any help from other people. If she was an average woman, she would not be able to do so, and thus, she is glad she has power. After she was playing *pachinko*, Japanese pinball, she had to carry four baskets filled with pinball. She was carrying them inside the *pachinko* parlor, and a shop attendant saw her and rushed to her saying “If you’d told me, I would have carried them for you.” She was glad she had power at that time, too.

Women wrestlers can carry heavy things easily, which is the result of the training they had when they were rookies, as Rei describes. Rookies gain their basic physical fitness through their muscle training for a long period of time each day. In addition, they carry, load and unload the heavy luggage of their senior wrestlers during pro wrestling exhibitions. They also carry heavy iron pillars and boards many times while they are setting up and dismantling the ring for exhibitions. This gives women pro wrestlers confidence that they can carry heavy objects.

(2) More mental strength

Some women pro wrestlers point out that they now have more mental strength than before. Sawako thinks that she was mentally weak before she became a pro wrestler, but that she has become tougher mentally since she went through the world of pro wrestling. What is more, she found herself being mentally tougher than the wrestlers who joined the wrestling organization in the same year and were considered to be tough mentally. It surprised her. Sayaka thinks that she has got along with people since she became a pro wrestler. She used to be shy with people. Before she became a pro wrestler, when something she hated happened, she used to show it on her face and in

her attitude. However, since she joined her organization and was locked into a hierarchical relationship with her senior pro wrestlers as shown in Chapter 4, she has learned to show respect to her seniors, even if something she hates happens in that relationship. As a result, she has become more patient with anything she hates, and she has “become more patient with many other things.” She thinks “it is good.” Masumi also says that though her training during years while she was a rookie was hard, as described in Chapter 4, the hierarchical relationship with her senior wrestlers was harder. She managed to endure such a severe hierarchical relationship with them and that reminds her that “it was harder before,” when she faces something hard now.

Unlike other wrestlers, Tomiko points out her mental changes rather than her mental strength. She says that she might be more emotional than before. Since she started pro wrestling, she began having strong emotions when she loses and happiness when she wins in matches. She says that she was never very happy or strongly frustrated before she became a pro wrestler.

(3) Physical strength and mental strength

There were wrestlers who talked about the strength they obtained by distinguishing physical strength from mental strength.

Sawako connects physical strength and mental strength together, but she did not express them as her strength. However, as described earlier, since she has obtained these two kinds of strength by doing pro wrestling, she is also categorized in this section.

Mika thinks that she has become strong because she has become mentally stronger, and in addition that she has become physically strong as she has learned to be able to break fall. If it was before she became a pro wrestler, she thinks that she “would not be able to stand up after just being thrown down on the ground.” Now she can manage to reduce the strength put on her body by the other wrestlers, and as the result of mastering a break fall, even when she fell down on some stairs, she neither hit her head nor broke her bones. In addition to such physical strength, she says that she has become mentally strong, which makes her endure any pain given to her body. This mental strength was achieved because she had to learn not to give up easily as a result of getting through the various kinds of hard jobs and hierarchical relationships with her senior pro wrestlers during her rookie years as described in Chapter 4. Mika says that she has become strong by gaining both mental and physical strengths.

Yumiko also talks about both strengths. She thinks she was mentally

strong at first. She thinks so because she never gives up if she wants to do something. It is interpreted that she has realized her dream such as becoming a pro wrestler after she went through many twists and turns. She thinks that she is physically stronger than people in general, too. She says “I choose walking up stairs... rather than using escalators... hopping up the stairs. Looking at... myself like this, I think I am doing OK still.” Rie says that she has gained confidence because she has come to do pro wrestling. She has become strong physically as well as mentally, and has gained confidence from both. She was a child who withdrew to her room if she made mistakes or she failed to do something. However, since she became a pro wrestler, she has stopped giving things up easily. She has come to think that if she tries hard enough, the results will always be good.

In this way, the women pro wrestlers perceived that they had learned politeness and appreciation of others, and obtained physical and/or mental strength. The next section will examine the challenges pro wrestlers face on their bodies obtained by doing pro wrestling from gender norms.

Challenges from gender norms

Giving up wearing kawaii clothes

“*Kawaii* clothes” here means the type of clothes with which being *kawaii* is embodied. Being *kawaii* is “familiarity, easiness of understanding and psychological closeness that makes it highly accessible are structured” (Yomota, 2006, p.76) as described in Chapter 6, and something small, childish and nostalgic is perceived as *kawaii* (Yomota, 2006). In this chapter, therefore, *kawaii* clothes are the type of clothes that are small in size and have elements of childishness and something long forgotten. The smallness in size is the most important among these characteristics.

In Japan, the social category known as “young women” tends to be expressed by means of small-sized fashionable clothes (Asano, 1996). The standard size of such fashionable clothes in Japan is the size labeled no. 9. When the size of clothes is 9 AR, the clothes are designed for women with sizes around: 83 cm-breasts, 64cm-waist and 91 cm-hip⁽³⁾. Many women try to reduce their weight so that they can fit their body into this size (Inoue, 2011). *Kawaii* clothes are the type of fashionable clothes that indicate “young women,” so they are mostly made in size no. 9.

Some women pro wrestlers mentioned the changes in their clothes during interviews. Among them, some were not clear about what kinds of

clothes they liked before becoming a pro wrestler, and some were interested in *kawaii* clothes and some were not. Being interested in *kawaii* clothes includes the tendency not only to wear *kawaii* clothes all the time but also to become interested in wearing *kawaii* clothes sometimes although they usually wear casual clothes.

Among those whose tastes in clothes before becoming pro wrestlers were identified, none of the wrestlers said that their taste in clothes changed either from *kawaii* to not *kawaii* or from not *kawaii* to *kawaii*. Many *kawaii* clothes are manufactured for women, and thus, the bodies of many wrestlers are too big to wear them. As described in Chapter 4, women pro wrestlers try to put more muscle and fat on their bodies and their goal is not having a “thin” body in any case. Therefore, many wrestlers say that though their tastes in clothes have not changed, the types of clothes they wear have changed because their bodies have changed as they have obtained the bodies of wrestlers, and it has become physically impossible for the wrestlers to wear *kawaii* clothes.

(1) My body does not fit *kawaii* clothes

Ryoko was always interested in wearing *kawaii* clothes. However, because her body grew bigger after she became a pro wrestler, she cannot wear, for example, *kawaii* T-shirts anymore that are worn by women in general. If she tries to wear such T-shirts, they are too tight for her body and it looks as if the cloth is pulled in every direction. When she was interviewed, she was wearing casual clothes of a gray cotton parka-jacket, green pants and black sneakers.

Rei also says that she has stopped wearing *kawaii* clothes since she became a pro wrestler. She likes casual clothes, but she sometimes becomes interested in *kawaii* clothes.

When I put the clothes over my body to see how they look if I put them on properly... some parts of my body are not covered. It's sad, I think (laughs). I think... wonder like, why do they only make such small clothes? (laughs) I get irritated.

Rei laughs while saying that she thinks “it's sad” about *kawaii* clothes being too small for her. It seems that she is saying this with a bitter laugh, as if she took for granted that she cannot wear such clothes because she is a pro wrestler, and also because women do not try to enlarge the size of their bod-

ies generally, unlike pro wrestlers. She does not take this situation seriously, but rather she understands this as “it can’t be helped,” as far as she is a pro wrestler. During two interviews, her fashion style was the same. She wore a tank-top over a blouse and a pair of pants. She wore something casual, not something *kawaii*.

For Mika, too, the choice of the clothes she can wear has been limited since she became a pro wrestler. She can manage to wear the biggest size of clothes sold in normal clothing shops, but some clothes are too small for her body anyway. When she tries to buy a pair of jeans, they get caught around her thighs. If she tries to buy pants that fit her thighs, they are too big for her waist and it looks bad. Mika also takes this situation as something that cannot be helped, though she hates it because it is a “pro wrestler-like” situation. However, she believes that she will be able to choose clothes freely when she quits pro wrestling. Mika also thinks it is good enough to choose something that she can fit into, since some clothes in the shops fit her body.

During her interview, Mika wore a blue tank-top with a V-neck cardigan and a pair of jeans. They were not something to be called *kawaii*. However, she is short as a pro wrestler and it did not appear that there was a lot of muscle and fat on her body. She seemed to be pursuing being *kawaii* besides her clothes. For example, her hair was dyed a bright brown, long, and had a point-cut. She wore a silver necklace with a dolphin-shaped pendant-headpiece and carried a shoulder bag of a well-known brand. She wore makeup and a big ring on a finger on her right hand. The nails of her hands and feet were manicured in a mauve color.

Most of the wrestlers who have always been interested in wearing *kawaii* clothes were not obsessed too much about not being able to wear *kawaii* clothes anymore. However, Akiko was the most persistent about *kawaii* clothes. She says clearly, “I have a desire to at least wear *kawaii* clothes.” However, there are no *kawaii* clothes that are big enough to fit the shape of her body. When she tries to put on *kawaii* clothes, her body is too big, and thus the clothes get stuck at her elbows sometimes. She describes this as “sad,” as Rei did. Since *kawaii* clothes are too small for her body, when she tries to find clothes in her size, she ends up choosing something big enough for her arms and some rough style, like jeans, short pants and T-shirts. Since she is a pro wrestler, she needs to put on more muscle and fat, and thus, she cannot wear *kawaii* clothes. However, she thinks that she “should wear something proper up to a certain degree,” even if the clothes are not necessarily *kawaii*. It is possible to see what she is thinking about her appearance

through the conversation she has with other wrestlers.

I say to other wrestlers that when I try a boot on I cannot zip it up (laughs). Other wrestlers say it is wrong for me to try to wear boots anyway. But don't they want to wear them too?... Pro wrestling is an occupation that involves being watched by other people, so I think it is necessary to appear proper.

She actually says, "In spite of saying this, I go everywhere in rough clothes." In the first interview she wore a T-shirt, a pair of black and rough short-pants. In the second interview she wore a sweatsuit and looked comfortable. However, in both interviews her hair was slick, her eyebrows were made up properly and she wore shiny light-pink-colored lipstick. She appeared proper, as she mentioned earlier. This can be interpreted as meaning that as a pro wrestler she is conscious of being someone looked up to by people, and thus, she tries to appear proper in her looks.

The next section will examine how women pro wrestlers manage their clothes after their bodies became too big for women's clothes sold in shops, regardless of their tastes in clothes before they became pro wrestlers.

(2) Clothes to replace *kawaii* clothes—an appearance that is not embarrassing, even if being watched by other people

Rie and Maki are, like Akiko, conscious of being pro wrestlers and they are careful about what they wear in their everyday lives. It is not clear what kind of tastes in clothes they had before they became pro wrestlers, however, they had no choice but to change the style of their clothes after they became pro wrestlers.

Rie's body also developed and became bigger after she became a pro wrestler, and she had difficulties in finding the right clothes among commercially-available clothes for women. But she has looked for shops that sell clothes for large-size women, and she has tried to wear something feminine. Her character as a pro wrestler in her organization suggests "adult sexiness." She believes that if her "customers" see her in "masculine clothes" outside the ring, they might "simmer down a little." Thus, she wears something feminine in her daily life so that her image will not be hurt.

Another reason why she is self-conscious about wearing something feminine is because a man named Otoyama, who was once a male coach in her pro wrestling organization, told her, "Women pro wrestlers must be men in the ring

but be women in everyday life. If you forget being women, you are not women pro wrestlers anymore. You must be neat and feminine in everyday life.” She used to walk around towns in a sweatsuit just after she joined her organization, but since Otoyama’s speech she has tried to be as neat as possible in everyday life. In her interview, too, she wore a long skirt and looked feminine.

Some women pro wrestlers are too big to wear large-sized women’s clothes even if they want to dress like Rie. They have a limit to dressing up in a feminine way ⁽⁴⁾. Maki solved this problem by using a different method. She says that she used to wear something “looking poor” similar to sweatsuits, but after she did pro wrestling in the US she began thinking “of wearing something proper when being watched by somebody else” and she changed her fashion style to wear something “simple but made with good materials.” According to Maki, pro wrestling is widely perceived as a kind of performance in the US, and pro wrestlers are perceived as entertainers there. Since entertainers are objects of desire for people in the US, they are expected to wear something respectable so that they do not destroy people’s dreams. She also says that she could not dress up because her body is too big for the clothes sold in Japan, but in the US, she found large-size clothes easily, which gave her more choices of clothes. The clothes she wore during interviews were also simple ones. Her hair was long and reached her shoulders, and it was dyed gold and brown. She wore a long-sleeve T-shirt, a windbreaker-like jacket and a pair of pants with three stripes on each side. I could not tell what kind of material was used for the pants.

(3) Clothes to replace *kawaii* clothes—men’s clothes and sweatsuits

Regardless of their tastes in clothes before becoming pro wrestlers, many women pro wrestlers cannot wear commercially-available clothes for women because they are too big for them, and they end up choosing men’s clothes or sweatsuits.

Since Yuka’s weight became over 70 kg, the clothes sold for women in shops have become too small for her. She never thought of dressing up “girlie,” and rather wants to dress up like a boy. However, if she chooses clothes from among women’s clothes, they are too small to wear regardless of whether they are boyish or not. Thus, she now wears men’s clothes. During her interview too, she wore something boyish. Her hair was short and dyed brown. She wore a light-blue T-shirt, a pair of loose beige short pants and white sneakers. However, I could not be sure if they are men’s clothes. Yuka and some other women pro wrestlers have no choice but to wear men’s clothes,

but Maho and Sayaka are rather satisfied with wearing men's clothes.

Maho was always a boyish woman, and she has become more so since she became a pro wrestler. This is because she started to wear men's clothes. Her thighs are too big for women's jeans. If she wears a women's T-shirt, it will be too tight around her breasts. This is probably because she has big chest muscles due to her training. Most women's clothes do not fit the shape of her body, but she finds that she can wear any men's clothes and thus she wears them. She is not upset about not being able to wear women's clothes, because she has never worn skirts in her life. During an interview, she wore a light-blue baseball cap. Her skin was white, and she was thin and tall. Her hair was short and dyed gold. She wore a silver necklace and had her ears pierced. She wore loose gray sneakers shaped like Dutch wooden clogs. She wore a red sweat top and a pair of pants. On the whole, she gave me a boyish impression, just as Maho had described.

Sayaka says that her choices of clothes have changed since she became a pro wrestler. Before she joined her pro wrestling organization, she was conscious that she hated wearing men's clothes, even if her body was big. Thus, she wore women's clothes. However, after she became a pro wrestler, she was given many used "men's clothes" from her senior pro wrestlers. As she began wearing them, the style of her clothes changed to a boyish look. Then, she began liking the boyish style of clothes. Now she does not even look for clothes among women's clothes, and always finds something from men's clothes. Women's clothes are often too small for her anyway, but she can find the right size and designs of clothes among men's clothes. Her taste in clothes changed from women's clothes to "big and cool (men's) clothes." During the interview, she wore a brown sweatshirt with some writing on it in white and a pair of jeans. She wore sneakers and holding a shoulder bag. I thought her clothes were casual but could not tell whether they were men's.

Some women pro wrestlers spend their days in sweatsuits. Tomiko thought of wearing *kawaii* clothes because she is a woman, but as Mika also mentioned, even jeans are too small for her if they are women's. Moreover, it takes more than 30 minutes to go to the *dojo* for training. She commutes to her *dojo* for training on a bicycle every day. Thus, wearing sweatsuits is more comfortable and practical for her than wearing jeans. She does not go out on holidays, so she has no opportunity to wear other casual clothes. She does not get a chance to wear *kawaii* clothes, and a sweatsuit is more practical for her style of life. Thus, she is not dissatisfied with the fact she cannot wear *kawaii* clothes. She wore a cream-color sweatsuit during her interview.

Yoshie also says that she spends most of her days in a sweatsuit. During the interview, she wore a sweatsuit because she came to the interview directly from her *dojo*.

Sweatsuits are kind of formal wear as well as casual dress for me. At home, I wear little old sweatsuits (laughs), and when I go out, I change into better sweatsuits. When I go to training, I wear specialized sweatsuits. So, probably, I am wearing sweatsuits all the time.

Why does she always wear sweatsuits? She says that it is because “it is easy to move about” in sweatsuits. The reason why she prefers to wear something easy to move in is because her day goes around doing pro wrestling, except for a few days when she does not have either matches or training. Like Tomiko, she also does not have much time to wear other casual clothes. What is interesting here is that though all the clothes she wears are a type of sweatsuit, new sweatsuits are for going, while old sweatsuits are for training and staying at home. However, she says that when she meets someone, she wears a pair of jeans. Thus, she is not ignoring what other people think. She is rather conscious about what others think in a way.

Aki says that she has been spending more time in sweatsuits since she entered the pro wrestling world, and she feels that this is not feminine enough. However, she is not thinking about it too seriously. She thinks that she has no choice because she has to deal with her busy schedule. Aki thinks that her femininity will not be under threat even if she spends a lot of her time in a sweatsuit. Tomiko and Yoshie were not thinking about spending their time in sweatsuits in relation to femininity, but Aki perceived that femininity and spending time in a sweatsuit are opposites. However, she chose the convenience of spending time in a sweatsuit in comparison to femininity, which is expressed by not spending time in a sweatsuit. When she had an interview, it was snowing. She wore a kind of black jeans, and not a sweatsuit.

Being mistaken for men

(1) The characteristics perceived as men

Some interviewees told about their experiences of being mistaken for men. They say the reason why they were mistaken for men was because they have certain characteristics that include short hair, a casual style of clothes (like a T-shirt and a pair of jeans) and a big body.

Short hair involves shaving the hair short on the back of the head. When

Sawako was a rookie, she was too busy to take care of her hair, so she had her hair cut short and shaved some parts. She says that because of the hair style, she was mistaken for a man. Many rookies cut their hair short. This is because they have a long-period of training and do a lot of small jobs, so they sweat a lot every day. For example, the rookies who joined each women's pro wrestling organization in 1994 were featured under the title "Shinjin san irasshāi" (come on, rookies!) (Yokohama James Dean, 1995). In this article, only Tamura Yoshiko of Zenjo had a hairstyle with long hair that came down to her shoulders, among the 11 completely rookies who had never been in other pro wrestling organizations before.

According to wrestlers' narratives, it is clear that when a person whose sex category is female expresses herself through a style involving short hair and rough clothes, some people perceive the person as a man in terms of gender. For example, Aya was often called a "guy" in towns. She says that she was called this not because she was muscular or has a body that could be perceived as a man, but because she often wore a T-shirt and jeans and had her hair short and sometimes shaved. She also says that she has a masculine face and had no make-up on, and these are some of the reasons why she was mistaken.

The characteristics for women who are mistaken for men include a big body, broad shoulders, tall height and big girth in the body. Sayaka says that she is mistaken for a man due to her appearance and physical characteristics. Her description of herself is that she has short hair and a big body. She says that she is mistaken for a man because "no other woman has a back as wide as mine."

(2) Reactions when women pro wrestlers are mistaken for men

Sayaka has had the experience of feeling uncomfortable from being mistaken for a man. One day, she was in a women-only train-car. The other women in the train-car were probably thinking she was a man and "kept looking" at her. Then some men got on the car without realizing that it was exclusively for women. A station attendant came and told the men that it was for women only, and they got off immediately. During this, "Because I'm a woman, of course, so I just sort of looked down and pretended to be doing something," she said. The station attendant did not say anything to her and left. Sayaka was relieved, and "I thought: now, everyone knows I'm a woman. I silently made them accept it as fact (laughs). Like, 'what, do you have a problem with that?'"

Sawako was walking in Roppongi, one of the busiest streets at night in Tokyo, with another wrestler of her tag team. They were in nice dresses. A tout called to them from their backs, "Hey, beautiful *okama*." They turned around and protested saying "We are women." The man was surprised and said "Wow, you are ×× (the name of her tag team)!" *Okama* is a derogatory term to mean some men who deviate from normative masculinity (Ito, 2000). This term here means a man who dresses up like a woman in Japanese. In short, the man thought that Sawako was a man who was dressed up like a woman.

Women pro wrestlers are often mistaken for men, and they feel uncomfortable and embarrassed the most when they go into toilets for women. Sayaka was no exception, and she had one of the most embarrassing experiences. When she tried to go into a women's toilet in a *karaoke* shop, she was "told by a man, hey, guy, it's for women (laughs)." She ignored him and entered the toilet. When she is mistaken for a man, she feels "embarrassed," and wishes people would not think that she is a man. It is too embarrassing to tell people, "I am a woman," so she ignores whatever she is told.

When Yumiko went into a toilet for women, she was also told, "The men's toilet is over there. I was really uncomfortable with that." Sometimes when women see Yumiko coming into the toilet for women, the women think that they are the ones who are making a mistake. So the women go out to check whether it is for men or women. After they realize that they are not making a mistake, they come back into the toilet for women. Then they watch Yumiko, wondering whether she is a woman. However, it has happened so many times and she is used to it now, so she is trying not to worry about it.

However, it is still stressful to know that the wrestlers are making others confused, to know that they are being watched and to be told that they are making a mistake every time they use a toilet, even though they try to ignore those incidents. When Sawako was a rookie, she had many such experiences. So, she often used men's toilets, since women's toilets were often too crowded to use anyway. Since these wrestlers explained that it was not surprising to be mistaken over their sex category because of their appearance, they mainly talk about how to deal with it.

However, only Midori told of how she felt hostile at being mistaken over her sex category. It does not bother her too much to be mistaken for a man when she is with other wrestlers, but when she is alone and tries to use public toilets, "If I am told aloud by a middle-aged woman that I am in the wrong toilet, I feel really embarrassed." She feels anger towards the woman who tells her this aloud and she really hates being watched by others. However, she does not give in, and she uses the toilets while she tells them, "I

am a woman.”

(3) The by-products of being mistaken for men

The women pro wrestlers who are mistaken for men did not obtain an appearance causing them to be mistaken for men by accident. They wanted to be pro wrestlers and ended up obtaining bodies with which they are mistaken for men⁽⁵⁾. Thus, none of the wrestlers said that they have any benefits from being mistaken for men. However, Sachi said that since she is being thought of as a man by others, she believes that she will never be attacked when walking alone on a street at night. In the case of this too, she was saying this with a nuance meaning that situation is happening as an unexpected by-product caused by the fact that she became a pro wrestler. The pro wrestlers are not conscious about the benefits caused by the results of being mistaken for men, but rather they understand the whole situation of being mistaken for men as troublesome and something negative.

Comparison with previous studies and the perception of women pro wrestlers

This section compares the benefits and challenges women wrestlers received and faced through their involvement in pro wrestling with findings in previous studies. First of all, the pro wrestlers talked about the actual benefits that are also pointed out by previous studies. The wrestlers mentioned their ability to carry heavy objects without any help from others in relation to physical strength. Furthermore, as mentioned in some previous studies (Blinde et al., 1993; Granskog, 2003; Scott-Dixon, 2008), they are conscious of their physical strength. On the other hand, some women pro wrestlers mentioned that they gained not physical strength but mental strength, while some wrestlers mentioned that they obtained both.

Some pro wrestlers obtained politeness and appreciation of others, which are benefits not mentioned in the previous studies. These benefits are obtained not by doing pro wrestling, but because they are in an unusual organization such as pro wrestling organizations. Some women pro wrestlers obtained politeness and appreciation of others as they were in a severe hierarchical relationship with their senior members, while some obtained mental strength as they endured that relationship.

No wrestlers mentioned most challenges pointed by the previous studies. None of the women pro wrestlers mentioned that they suffer prejudice about

being lesbians because they are pro wrestlers. This is not because Japanese society approves of the existence of lesbians and their practices, but because it assumes that women are not capable of recognizing their sexual desires, and that their sexuality is finally decided by men. As people believe this strongly, the existence of lesbians is thought of as null in Japan (Kakefuda, 1992; Takemura, 1997).

Obtaining physical strength as empowerment

Women pro wrestlers have obtained physical strength by doing pro wrestling and they have come to have confidence about it. In other words, they have obtained physical strength and have realized that their bodies have potential, and as a result, they have come to have a confidence in their bodies. In contrast to these pro wrestlers, such confidence is presumably not held by many women in Japan today. The reasons for this assumption can be explained by distinguishing between girls aged 19 and under, and women aged 20 and over.

According to a survey conducted by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (2013), the chances that elementary school female students⁽⁶⁾ were engaged in physical exercise for under 60 minutes in a week was about 21 % of the total in 2013, while the chances of elementary school male students was about 9 %. The chances of the female students were twice as much as for the male students. On the other hand, the chances of elementary school female students being engaged in physical exercises for 420 minutes and over in a week were about 27 %, while it was about 55 % for the male students (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2013). This is a large gap between female students and male students.

The chances that female junior high school students were engaged in physical exercise for under 60 minutes in a week was about 30 % in 2013, while the chances of male junior high school students was about 10 %. The chances of the female students were three times as much as for the male students (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2013). In contrast, the chance that female junior high school students were engaged in physical exercise for 420 minutes and over in a week was about 56 %, while it was about 81 % for the male students (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2013). Among female high school students, about 25 % of the entire number of students was not engaged in playing sports

and doing physical activities even once in a year except PE classes and school athletic events (Sasakawa Sports Foundation, 2013). Under the circumstances above, it is assumed that it is impossible for many girls to fully obtain physical strength and any confidence in accordance with that strength.

How do adult women perceive their own bodies? There has been few study conducted in Japan. A “Public opinion survey on physical power and sports” was conducted in 2013 from a total of 1,900 men and women who were the ages of 20 and over (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2013). Only a little information was obtained from the survey that shows that more men than women answered “having confidence in physical power” and more women than men answered “having concerns about one’s own physical power” (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2013). Are adult women also not engaged in activities and sports by which they can feel their physical strength and competence like the girls aged 19 and under? The situation of adult women being engaged in exercises and sports is a little different from that of girls aged 19 and under. There is data analyzing the situations of sports and exercises engaged in by people between their 20’s to over their 70’s in 2012, using 5 different levels (Sasakawa Sports Foundation, 2012). The 5 levels consist of: Level 0 as no exercise and sports in the last one year; Level 1 as exercise and sports once a year and more, and under twice a week; Level 2 as exercise and sports twice a week and more; Level 3 as exercise and sports twice a week and more, and for 30 minutes and more each time, and; Level 4 as exercise and sports twice a week and more, and for 30 minutes and more of “relatively hard” sports and exercise each time.

According to the data, the total percentage of men at Level 2 and above, that indicates regular exercise, was about 47 % in all the different age-groups, while it was about 51 % in all the different age-groups for women. It appears that more women are engaged in physical activities than men (Sasakawa Sports Foundation, 2012). The ratio of Level 0, however, is about 23 % for men and about 28 % for women. This indicates that adult women become polarized at the levels that show their actual engagement in exercises and sports (Sasakawa Sports Foundation, 2012). Moreover, in terms of the types of exercises women engaged in walking and stretching significantly more than men. In terms of the types of sports women engaged in using balls with opponents (such as tennis and table tennis) and exercises such as aerobic dance and yoga significantly more than men (Takamine, 2012). The reason why people engaged in them was to maintain and improve the shape of their bodies (Taka-

mine, 2012). Thus, it is possible that adult women are engaged in physical activities in order to shape the ideal female body as well as to maintain it, but not to obtain physical strength or to perceive the potential of their bodies.

In contrast, women pro wrestlers said that they attained physical strength by doing pro wrestling, and they have come to perceive that their bodies are strong and to have confidence in their bodies. Like other women in today's Japanese society, women pro wrestlers are exposed to the normative force of physical socialization. As was described in Chapter 1, this is a process whereby girls and women are strongly encouraged to make their bodies closer to the ideal female body, but they are encouraged neither to participate in sports (Itani, 2004a), nor to develop their physical strength and athletic abilities (Castelnuovo & Guthrie, 1998; Dowling, 2001). What we consider here is, as described in Chapter 5, that many women pro wrestlers obtained physical confidence by taking part in a wide range of sports, including combat sports, before they joined their pro wrestling organizations. All of the women pro wrestlers who said that they have attained physical strength by doing pro wrestling in this chapter have had experiences of participating in sports and other physical activities before they joined their pro wrestling organizations. This is a process that is different from the normative process of socialization of the female body. In addition, they have experienced the physical activity called pro wrestling after they joined their pro wrestling organizations.

As defined earlier, physical empowerment means the process whereby women in Japanese society today, who cannot exercise their innate physical strength, obtain physical strength and perceive their bodies as having potential. This can be interpreted that although, like other girls and women, women pro wrestlers have also lived under the influence of the normative physical socialization of today's Japanese society, they have experienced physical empowerment by experiencing sports and doing pro wrestling.

Challenges from the ideal female body

Many pro wrestlers cannot wear *kawaii* clothes anymore because they have obtained the body with which they can do pro wrestling. This—not being able to wear what one wants to wear—has been happening to many women frequently. However, this has never been discussed by women with others who are not close to them. That is because it is hard for women to say that they cannot wear the clothes they want to wear, since it implies that the size of

their body does not fit the body size that is considered to be desirable. Moreover, such matters have never been taken up in studies of gender. This chapter analyzes the circumstances or feelings of women wrestlers who could not wear *kawaii* clothes, and elucidates that *kawaii* clothes, which signify “young women,” control female bodies by constructing a particular size (no. 9).

A body that is not small enough to fit into *kawaii* clothes does not mean to be the body of a “young women.” Moreover, in many cases, *kawaii* clothes are made in size no. 9, and thus, women are required to be thin. This implies that those women who do not fit size no. 9 deviate from the thinness that is part of the characteristics of the ideal female body. However, it was only Akiko, among the interviewees, who thought that it was a big loss that she could not wear *kawaii* clothes anymore. Mika said that she could not wear *kawaii* clothes but she would be able to wear them once she quits being a pro wrestler. She put her first priority on pro wrestling and wearing *kawaii* clothes was put aside. She did not think about it seriously at that moment. Other wrestlers were not obsessed with wearing *kawaii* clothes, and they solved the problem of not being able to wear *kawaii* clothes by wearing men’s clothes and sweatsuits. Women pro wrestlers are not challenging the ideal female body as well as the category of “young women” that is embodied clearly by *kawaii* clothes, but they also do not try to come to terms with them. Instead, they have found ways in their daily lives to exhibit the bodies they have with which they can do pro wrestling.

The body mistaken for a man

Some women pro wrestlers are mistaken for men. This is because people use the premise of the sex/gender system—it is a system whereby each of the ideological connections of sex category, gender category and sex orientation has a dichotomous structure—in the process of giving a gender category to other people. Women pro wrestlers feel uncomfortable at being mistaken for men and their bodies are challenged by the sex/gender system in this view, but it has also been clear that the wrestlers challenge the system as well.

Gender attribution process

In this process, every person is at first estimated according to whether his/her sex category is a male or a female, and his/her gender category is a man or a woman, as well as being masculine or feminine. Then, as a second part, “physical characteristics, mannerisms, and personality traits of others”

(Devor, 1989, p.147) constitute cues to their gender and “are interpreted as either masculine or feminine” (Devor, 1989, p.147). “Observed gender cues are instantaneously and unconsciously weighed, and a gender status is attributed, i.e., feminine people are seen as women, masculine people are seen as men” (Devor 1989, p.147-148). When there is uncertainty about giving gender to an individual, people have a strong tendency to perceive masculinity in that person (Kessler & McKenna, 1978). That is to say, when people find cues indicating that a person is a man, the person’s masculinity is approved positively, while only when persuasive cues of femininity and no cues of masculinity are found, femininity is perceived (Kessler & McKenna, 1978).

Gender blending females

Devor (1989) studied women who choose to practice masculinity in order to obtain public dignity and freedom, although they need to lose their femininity. These women are called “gender blending females.” As a result of practicing masculinity, they are often mistaken for men. I would like to compare the experiences of gender blending females with women pro wrestlers who are mistaken for men in accord with the process of assigning gender as described in the previous section.

According to Devor (1989), gender blending females have both positive and negative experiences, like women pro wrestlers. Examples of positive experiences are that they do not need to worry about sexual assaults from men and are given respect not as women but as men. Examples of negative experiences include being condemned when using public toilets for women and being mistaken for men who are transvestites when they wore makeup. Although they have these negative experiences, they are determined to pay the price in order to obtain the benefits related to being a man (Devor, 1989).

Women pro wrestlers and gender blending females share similar experiences. Sawako is also mistaken for a man in women’s clothes when she is dressed up. Also some wrestlers are condemned by others when using women’s toilets. The gender blending females studied by Devor (1989) were happy enough to have negative experiences as a way of paying the price of the freedom and privileges connected to being a man. However, the women pro wrestlers thought that being mistaken for a man was uncomfortable and troublesome. This is because they could not find any positive benefits in being mistaken for men.

The wrestlers who feel uncomfortable at being mistaken for men have a gender identity that they are women, and thus, they wish to be perceived as

women, regardless of their appearances. However, in spite of this wish, the women pro wrestlers who are mistaken for men do not offer cues of gender that make others perceive that they are women, and thus, they end up being mistaken for men. Therefore, though it is not intentionally, they eventually challenge the sex/gender system that expects women to offer cues of gender to show that their gender category is a woman.

Physical resistance of women pro wrestlers

The women pro wrestlers have gained a level of physical strength that is not attained by many other women and experienced of physical empowerment through playing sports before they joined pro wrestling organizations and doing pro wrestling. This suggests that even those women who are not currently engaged in physical activities may be able to experience physical empowerment through physical activities. This conducted the first study in Japanese society that considers what kinds of influences physical activities, including sports, may have on those women who participate in such activities in their daily lives. However, this study has just begun and more research is necessary. Moreover, the benefits and challenges women receive or face may change depending of the types of physical activities they engage in. Thus, more and similar studies should be conducted regarding a wider range of physical activities.

The women pro wrestlers have had the experience of not being able to wear *kawaii* clothes because they attained bodies with which they can do pro wrestling. They do not consciously challenge the category of “young women” that is embodied by *kawaii* clothes as well as by the ideal female body. Some pro wrestlers, however, had no intention of changing their bodies to fit *kawaii* clothes. They rather express their bodies in clothes other than *kawaii* clothes in their daily lives.

Moreover, some women pro wrestlers had the experience of being mistaken for men against their intentions. This suggests that when a person has a masculine appearance, including the large body attained by being a women pro wrestler, then even if the person’s sex category is a female, the sex/gender system will define that person as a man. This is a kind of sanction against women who exhibit masculinity that is enforced by the sex/gender system. In spite of this kind of sanction imposed on the women pro wrestlers who are mistaken for men, they eventually challenge the sex/gender system by not changing their appearance, even though it is not intentionally. This

point provides a new perspective for gender studies in the future because men and women who accept their sex category and construct their gender identity based on the assigned sex category may disturb gender norms like the women pro wrestlers in this chapter.

Notes

- (1) Initially I conceptualized the socially negative influences that women pro wrestlers receive in society as they do pro wrestling as a “disbenefit.” However, “disbenefit” is a term with a pragmatic sound, and thus, I looked for another term to use. Then, Ms. Naoko Ikeda suggested the term “challenge” instead of “disbenefit.”
- (2) In sports science, strength means muscle force and power means the multiplication of muscle force and speed.
- (3) The shapes for female adult bodies in Japan are categorized in four ways, and one of them is the A-shape. The A-shape is a shape defined by “the highest incidence of the size of the hip of women among the paired combinations of height and size of breast when the heights of Japanese female adults are categorized into 142 cm, 150 cm, 158 cm and 166 cm, and the sizes of their breasts are categorized by every 3 cm if they are between 74 and 92 cm, and by every 4 cm if they are between 92 and 104 cm” (Kaken Test Center). 9 AR means size no. 9 of an A-shape body with 158 cm in height.
- (4) Of course, there is the possibility of having tailor-made clothes, however, the pro wrestlers did not mention this much.
- (5) Some wrestlers are attracted to masculine bodies. For example, Kiriko says that every time she put on some muscle during her training prior to the test for becoming pro wrestler, she tried to put on more and realized, “I was becoming a narcissist gradually.” However, the body she wanted was a body only with muscles and without fat, like bodybuilders, and that is different from the bodies of pro wrestlers that have both muscles and fat. None of the interviewees said that obtaining a body like a pro wrestler’s was one of their motives for becoming pro wrestlers.
- (6) In the survey of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (2013), the survey was conducted on girls in the fifth grade of elementary schools (ages around 10 to 11) as representative of elementary schools girls, and girls in the second grade of junior high schools (ages around 13-14) as representative of junior high school girls.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Physical Transformation and Physical Feminism

I have studied various aspects of the bodies of women pro wrestlers on the assumption that they transform their bodies in a different direction from the ideal female body and that they attain physical strength similar to those women who participate in self-defense training. This final chapter will consider what perception and experiences of women pro wrestlers suggest to women who do not do pro wrestling. Especially, this chapter will focus on the question of whether the experiences held by women pro wrestlers can shed light on the situation for those women who cannot be free from the ideal female body and who cannot counter violence by men. In order to find answers to these questions, the major findings shown by this book will first be summarized and then the possibilities of physical feminism suggested by the bodies of women pro wrestlers will be discussed.

What the bodies of women pro wrestlers show

When field work was started at the beginning, my attention was grabbed by women pro wrestlers who exhibit bodies that are different from the ideal female body and show their aggressive performances. I then made assumptions that everything about the bodies of women pro wrestlers and their performances would transform gender norms such as the gender order and the sex/gender system. However, my studies found that everything about the bodies of women pro wrestlers and their performances not only transform but also reproduce the gender order of heterosexuality. Moreover, even those women pro wrestlers who are not required to be thin for their occupation are not free from the ideal female body that is established outside the world of women's pro wrestling.

In spite of this, the bodies of women pro wrestlers have the potential of transforming gender norms and of resisting the limits caused by them. At first, some women pro wrestlers are proud and confident about their bodies, though their bodies are different from the configuration of the ideal female body. Two wrestlers had both elements of the ideal female body and male body within their bodies, thus they transformed the gender order of heterosexuality. Some women pro wrestlers found that they could not wear *kawaii* clothes any longer or that they were mistaken for men because they had attained bodies with which they could do pro wrestling. However, some women pro wrestler did not take it very seriously even if they could no longer wear *kawaii* clothes, but rather they do not try to fit themselves to the category of “young women” that is embodied by *kawaii* clothes, as well as to the ideal female body. Furthermore, those wrestlers who are mistaken for men—though not by choice—try not to change what their bodies should be and their appearance that is perceived as masculine. As a result, they eventually challenge the sex/gender system, though it is not intentional.

Why have these wrestlers develop such perception? I infer that it is because the world of women’s pro wrestling offers various kinds of persona that entertain their audience. As already described, though women pro wrestlers do not aspire to have thin bodies, their bodies are diverse compared to bodybuilders. For example, Mika’s build is ordinary and she easily blends into the crowd in towns, Akiko is short but well built, and Rie’s body is muscular and well developed. Many women pro wrestlers try to establish their own personas through their pro wrestling styles, characters, and how their bodies should be, and struggle over how they could make a strong impression on their audience by such personas.

While women pro wrestlers made such efforts, they were conscious that their audience appreciated their physical features and performances as one of the important persona that makes pro wrestling exciting, which turns to provide women pro wrestlers with pleasure and confidence. Even being *kawaii* that exists as an absolute value outside the world of women’s pro wrestling is just one of many personas in the ring and it adjacent area. The world of women’s pro wrestling recognizes the physical features of each woman pro wrestler. If this sense of value in the world of women’s pro wrestling is shared even by people outside the pro wrestling world, people will stop acknowledging that an only specific type of body has a value and different bodies from the type have no value.

Physical empowerment and the potential for physical feminism

Some women pro wrestlers have obtained a lot of confidence in countering violence from men, as well as their physical and mental strength. This means that they perceive their bodies as a source of power. In other words, they have attained physical strength and experienced physical empowerment. Then, how can many women in Japanese society who have not yet obtained physical strength experience physical empowerment? One of the answers to this question is to spread the idea and practice of physical feminism in Japanese society.

What is physical feminism?

Grosz (1994) points out that the feminists of liberal feminism and social constructivism accept the dichotomy between mind and body. This is a way of thinking whereby mind and body are exclusive substances from each other and mind is considered to be superior to body. Moreover, Grosz (1994) criticizes that feminists take an approach of either conceptualizing that the body has essentially sex differences or ignoring the body completely ⁽¹⁾. Based on this criticism, she tried to sever the exclusive relation between mind and body through an alternative method that not be resolved to either essentialism or biologism. This is to reconstruct what is considered to belong to the existing spiritual realm, including consciousness and ideas, under a paradigm that conceptualizes subjectivity based on the importance of embodiment. Such an approach is called “corporeal feminism.” As a response to Grosz, McCaughey called the feminism that “gives primacy to the (re)construction of the body” as “physical feminism” (1997, p.201) and explored its development.

McCaughy argues that “gender is a system which organizes the meaning of our biological bodies” (1997, p.20). Women are encouraged to refine “physical differences from men, and not just any difference” (1997, p.33). Women shape their body in terms of “vulnerability,” “smallness” and “female attractiveness, which is sexual availability to men” (1997, p.34). As a result, women become physically weak, and require other men or police to protect them from violence by men. Making the female body vulnerable maintains compulsory heterosexuality, which makes women easy targets for violence. Consequently, this creates men’s domination over women.

McCaughy argues that “self-defense is feminism in the flesh” (1997, p.90) to solve the problem, because obtaining fighting ability, women will

stop physicalized femininity that has functioned to maintain compulsory heterosexuality and men's domination. In other words, for McCaughey (1997), physical feminism means practicing self-defense.

Dowling (2001) does not use the term physical feminism but sees what women have been physically weakened as a problem and argues that this imposes a great loss on them. On the other hand, Dowling (2001) argues that women can obtain many benefits by strengthening their bodies, making them flexible and having endurance. For such goal, Dowling (2001) argues that more women need to participate in physical activities for obtaining physical capability and strength and to master how to defend themselves, as McCaughey (1997) also argued.

Castelnuovo and Guthrie (1998) do not use the term physical feminism but argue for the importance of mind-body empowerment. They point out that women are not only repressed in their consciousness and mental attitudes but also in their bodies. The repression of the female body includes female genital mutilation, bound feet, and forced rape as well as the limitations imposed on physical movements, physical strength and the development of reflexes in girls and women. Therefore, feminists' liberation strategies that focus only the mental process of women, i.e. mental empowerment, are not satisfactory, and they will require adding physical empowerment. In this sense, Castelnuovo and Guthrie (1998) criticize the strategy of Grosz (1994) that tries to overcome the dichotomy between mind and body, because, although Grosz (1994) advocates changing the recognition of the body, which is limited to thinking and writing, and does not demand physical practice.

Castelnuovo and Guthrie (1998) mention the practices in a *karate dojo* called Thousand Waves in Chicago, US, as a model for mind-body empowerment. Two lesbian feminists own and run the *dojo* and teach *karate*. The practices conducted in this *dojo* are based on their mission as two female feminists. Their mission is to reconstruct gender relations through empowerment and to give comfort to women. There are some boys among the students but most of them are girls and women. Thus, this *dojo* has become a shelter for women escaping from the stress of a male-dominant society. Beside the two teachers, women with black or brown belts that indicate their higher skills in *karate* also teach and encourage the female students who have white belts (an indication of beginners). This *dojo* has a function as a political center for the community, and the students are encouraged to participate in regional and political activities. More importantly, short-term

self-defense classes are conducted besides their regular *karate* training. A regular meditation class is also held once a week and students have workshops in feminism and discuss feminist literature. In the locker rooms there are published materials on feminism as well as on martial arts. Here, in addition to physical empowerment through *karate* and self-defense, mental empowerment is conducted by learning feminist philosophy, exchanging ideas with other women and raising consciousness.

More importantly, mind-body empowerment is not conducted only at the individual level but is conducted and shared among the group of women who participate in the practices of the *dojo*. Some of the women pro wrestlers who were studied in this book have experienced physical empowerment at the level of the individual, but it does not mean that physical empowerment is practiced at the level of women's pro wrestling organizations. The women pro wrestlers who have experienced physical empowerment did not experience the mental empowerment that helps them understand the recognition and practice that transform norms about their gender categories through the philosophy of feminism. Thus, it is interpreted that they have not experienced the mind-body empowerment described by Castelnovo and Guthrie (1998).

In accord with the arguments above, I define the movements and practices aiming to conduct physical empowerment by women grounded on feminist thoughts as physical feminism. This is because, as pointed out by Castelnovo and Guthrie (1998), women neither can obtain benefits from physical activities and nor can avoid the loss caused by not doing physical activities, even though they have mental empowerment. Moreover, they fear violence from men and cannot protect themselves from it. However, if they only conduct mental empowerment without understanding feminist thoughts, there is a danger that they may be uncritically involved in the reproduction of the superiority of the male body, of heterosexism and homophobia, which are integrated in sports and other physical activities. Because of this, even if they participate in physical activities, their initial intention will be weakening. What should be emphasized here is that physical feminism aims not only for the empowerment of the body but also for the empowerment of both mind and body, as Castelnovo and Guthrie (1998) describe. Thus, this approach also will be one of the practices seeking to overcome the dichotomy between mind and body.

The agent of physical feminism is "women," but "the unity of this identity—woman—has been challenged by recent feminist theory, research,

and politics” (Lorber, 2010, p.309). This is because, although women have a gender identity as a woman, the experiences individual women face are different depending on their social status, ethnicity, sex orientation, age, the level of disability and other social positions (Lorber, 2010). As to physical feminism, it is necessary to examine and practice how women can obtain physical strength without treating women as a single existence but with a recognition of the variety of experiences of women who are constructed by multiple social positions other than gender.

Physical feminism and physical empowerment

Physical empowerment of women is most important in what is realized through physical feminism. In Chapter 7, physical empowerment is defined as the process whereby women in Japanese society today—women who cannot exert their physical strength fully though they potentially have this—obtain physical strength and perceive their bodies as having potential. In the normative process of the socialization of the female body, women have a tendency to learn that they do not have such elements. Thus, this means that they resist the normative process of socialization of the female body as they obtain physical strength (Liimakka, 2011).

I hereby emphasize that physical strength derived from physical empowerment does not mean only muscle force. This is because physical power is composed of multiple elements. Physical power includes fitness for performance and protective fitness. Fitness for performance is a basis for “competitive power,” while protective fitness is a basis for “health” (Iida, 2004). Moreover, “competition power” is divided into energetic fitness (including muscle force) that comes with strength, and cybernetics fitness that comes with skill. Especially, cybernetics fitness not only helps someone do better in competitions and games, but it becomes a basis for someone to do better in his/her life (Iida, 2004). This is because, if skills in cybernetics fitness improve, they will help the person to “gain prevention of injuries, reduction of fatigue and prevention of having mental illness, including the sense of loss of confidence and alienation” (Iida, 2004, p.206). The women in the earlier studies who were examined in Chapter 7 have not only obtained physical strength but also obtained skills and capability from physical activities and sports (For example, Blinde et al. 1993; Hollander, 2004; Wedgewood, 2002).

Moreover, obtaining physical strength does not necessary mean obtaining the muscular body that is encouraged for men. Physical feminism does not mean for girls and women to gain muscles and to be better than men

in competitions, but rather it aims for women to become capable of something they could not do before: recognizing their bodies as having potential and having confidence in their bodies through obtaining various physical strengths. Moreover, physical feminism aims to weaken the influence of the ideal female body that has no muscle and fat, and thus, if women develop muscular bodies in the process of improving their physical strength, physical feminism accepts such bodies as one of the diverse bodies. However, physical feminism will not idealize such bodies as those women should pursue because it would mean that a certain body becomes the ideal or a standard for them. I believe that it is one of the missions of physical feminism to transform the connection between a gender category and a certain body type, as a reflection of the idea that the male body is a rough and solid body with muscles.

The aims of physical feminism

Based on the analyses, the goals of physical feminism are two points. One of the goals is to encourage girls and women in Japanese society to participate in physical activities so that they can obtain various kinds of benefits from them. Another goal is that girls and women perceive that they have “the power to defend themselves” (Hashimoto, 2004, p.26) against violence from men through participating in self-defense training. As a result, they come to realize their own physical strength. Some benefits people can obtain by participating in physical activities will be introduced in the following, by making reference to studies in the US.

The benefits obtained from physical activities

There are a great deal of benefits girls and women can obtain from physical activities. According to some reports in the US ⁽²⁾, interdisciplinary studies among physiological, psychological and sociological aspects have investigated about how physical activities have an impact on girls and women. In this section the benefits girls and women obtain from physical activities will mainly be discussed, but issues left open and problems caused by physical activities will also be mentioned. Moreover, some findings shown by previous studies, besides the reports, will also be mentioned in this section.

(1) Physiological benefits

Regular participation in physical activities improves the functions of the

heart, aerobic power, cardiovascular performance and sports performance (Nichols et al., 2007). Participation in exercises to strengthen muscles is safe and beneficial for girls and women (Nichols et al., 2007). Moreover, it has been made clear that if girls just before and after puberty participate in activities of high-impact exercises for several minutes per day for three days a week, they can increase their bone mineral density (Nichols et al., 2007).

(2) Psychological benefits

As described already, women who participated in physical activities perceive that they have physical power and physical capability as well as having confidence in their physical strength.

In addition to this, regular exercises are known to be beneficial to people's mental health (Wiese-Bjornstal, 2007). For example, in the case of children aged between 8 and 12, it is reported that children who are not physically active are in more danger of falling into a depressive state than the children who are physically active (Tomson et al., 2003). Meanwhile, it has been found that participation in sports at the medium degree ⁽³⁾ will enhance people's mental health, but excess participation in sports will not enhance it (Women's Sports Foundation, 2009). There has been no definite conclusion as to whether exercises and physical activities will offer a positive influence on women's self-esteem (Women's Sports Foundation, 2009).

As described in Chapter 7, other previous studies show that by participating in various physical activities women come to perceive their bodies are strong, capable and have potential, and to feel a connection to their own bodies (Blinde et al., 1993; Granskog, 2003; McDermott, 2000; Scott-Dixon, 2008; Theberge, 1987; Wedgewood, 2004; Wright & Dewar, 1997; Yarnal et al., 2006). Women who participated in physical activities also obtained a positive attitude about their lives (Blinde et al., 1993).

(3) Sociological benefits

It has been pointed out that there is a strong positive correlation between participation in sports and academic achievement among high school students (Hartmann, 2008). In high schools, those students who participate in sports tend to have better academic records than the students who do not participate in sports. However, what we have to be careful of here is that in many aspects the correlation does not have a direct causal relationship (Hartmann, 2008). That is because the strong positive correlation between participation in sports and academic achievement at high school is depen-

dent on numerous kinds of social factors (for example, social status, ethnicity, gender, types of sports participated in and its frequency, and how this participation is connected to academic studies) (Hartmann, 2008).

It is also pointed out by the Women's Sports Foundation (2009) that in terms of academic achievement, by participating sports, girls receive more positive benefits than boys. However, only a few studies support these findings. For example, in 2009 and 2012, a study compared the graduation ratios between male and female basketball teams of universities that were members of NCAA Division I in the US, and found that the female teams had higher ratios of graduation than the male teams (Lapchick, Harrison, & Hill, 2009; Lapchick, Harrison, Hill & Bukstein, 2012). Moreover, it was suggested by the Women's Sports Foundation (2009) that girls obtain more benefits than boys from participation in sports in terms of their academic results in mathematics and science. However, only a few studies support this point.

For example, according to a long-term study conducted on children from kindergarten to the fifth grade of elementary school, girls who participated in a physical education class for as long as 70 to 300 minutes per week did better in tests measuring their ability in mathematics than did girls who participated in a physical education class for as little as 0 to 35 minutes per week (Carison et al., 2008). On the other hand, a long period of physical education has not statistically significant effect on tests measuring boys' ability in mathematics (Carison et al., 2008). Meanwhile, Stevens et al. (2008) point out that physical activities have a statistically significant positive effect on academic achievements in reading and mathematics among both girls and boys in the fifth grade of elementary school.

Hanson and Kraus (1999) studied how academic achievements in mathematics and science were influenced by whether girls participated in sports. In this study, the subjects were limited only to girls. In the case of girls in the first grade of high school (10th grade), participation in "other team sport" and "individual sport" had a statistically significant positive effect on their mathematics achievement scores. Moreover, participation in "individual sport" had a statistically significant positive effect on their science achievement scores, too. However, participation in football had a statistically significant negative effect on their mathematics achievement scores, and participation in a drill team ⁽⁴⁾ had a statistically significant negative impact on their science achievement scores. What we should be careful of with this study is that mathematics and science achievement scores include not only "achievement (e.g., standardized math and science scores)" but also "access

(e.g., course-taking), and attitudes (e.g., attitudes about math and science classes and about abilities in these areas)” (Hanson & Kraus, 1999, p.100).

Thus, it is necessary to conduct more studies on school achievements in mathematics, science and other subjects in connection with participation in sports and relations by gender ⁽⁵⁾.

Self-defense training and empowerment

Since no study has been conducted about to what extent women fear violence by men in Japan, studies conducted in the Anglophone countries will be referred to in this section. Previous studies show that women tend to be fearful of becoming the victims of violence by men. For instance, Gordon and Riger (1989) argue that women are fearful of being raped because they are fearful of being injured physically and of death caused by rape. Such a fear about being raped works to limit how women behave (Madriz, 1997).

It is assumed that Japanese women and girls especially have a tendency similar to this. This is because, as described in Chapter 5, some women pro wrestlers have had experiences of helping girls who could not do anything to defend themselves when they were being sexually molested by gropers on trains. It can be inferred that Japanese girls are not only fearful of violence by men, but that they also have a tendency not to stop violence by men by using their physical strength. On the other hand, in self-defense training, women can learn the skills to defend themselves when they encounter violence by using the strength they potentially have. Moreover, this will help them to realize that their bodies are not vulnerable to violence, and that their bodies have the potential to deal with the violence they encounter. This is physical empowerment as described earlier. Therefore, I hope that more people in Japanese society perceive that women can experience physical empowerment by conducting self-defense training, and this recognition will be spread widely in Japanese society.

A vision of physical feminism in Japan

Are there any interdisciplinary studies in Japan about why Japanese girls and women do not participate in physical activities to the same degree as Japanese boys and men, and about what kinds of benefits they obtain from physical activities and the losses people suffer if they do not participate in physical activities?

There are a few advanced studies that consider the current sports partici-

pation of girls and adults in terms of gender. Examples of these are: *Josei supōtsu hakusho* (The white book of women's sports) (edited by Itani et al., 2001) and *Supōtsu jīendā dēta bukku* (Japan Society for Sport and Gender Studies, 2010) that is an information packet where the data collected in *Josei supōtsu hakusho* has been updated. Unfortunately, these two sets of information packets do not “reflect the purpose of questioning the relationship between women and sport” (Itani et al., 2001, p.2) as the editor of *Me demiru josei supōtsu hakusho* (The white book of watching women's sports) writes in the “preface.” On the other hand, Chapter 4 of *Supōtsu jīendā gaku he no shoutai* (*Invitation to the Study of Sport and Gender*) (Iida & Itani, 2009) mentions the current situation that school's physical education curriculum prevented girls from participating physical education sufficiently, studies on the causes of women losing interest in playing sports, the differences between men and women in their athletic capabilities caused by how they played when they were children, and problems of gender bias in sports tests conducted by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. The chapter has sections overlapping with the already mentioned interdisciplinary studies in the US that are valuable. However, even the chapter does not study about what kinds of benefits girls and adults receive from physical activities and what kinds of losses they suffer in doing without physical activities.

Thus, what is important for realization of physical feminism is to reveal why Japanese girls and women do not participate in physical activities to the same degree as boys and men, what kinds of benefits girls and women receive, what kinds of harmful effects non physical activities produce; and then these findings need to be widely presented to society. This is because if it becomes apparent that girls and women receive a variety of benefits by participating in physical activities, this will motivate girls and women to participate in physical activities and it will also attract people's interest to the factors that currently prevent girls and women from participation in such activities. Moreover, it would be desirable that many women share the importance of self-defense training and practice such training, as described in Chapter 5. I hope that the thought and practice of physical feminism will be shared among many people in Japanese society, so that girls and women will chose any physical activities they are interested in freely, and that they can gain confidence in the transformation of their bodies and receive the benefits of freely participating in physical activities.

Notes

- (1) Egalitarian feminism sees that sexual differences essentially exist. This position accepts the premise of a patriarchal society as well as misogyny. This is based on the recognition that the “female body is more biological, more physical and more natural than the male body to some degree” (Grosz, 1994, p.14). Social constructivism, in contrast, ignores the body. This position conceptualizes that subjectivity is not related to body and constructed socially because this position assumes that the body is ahistorical and universal. Thus, social constructivism tries to realize gender equality by transforming ideologies of masculinity and femininity.
- (2) They are these three: *The President’s Council on Physical Fitness and Sports Report, Physical Activity & Sport in the Lives of Girls* (The Center for Research on Girls & Women in Sport, University of Minnesota, 1997); *The 2007 Tucker Center Research Report, Developing Physically Active Girls* (Tucker Center for Research on Girls & Women in Sport, 2007) and: *Her Life Depends On It II: Sport, Physical Activity, and the Health and Well-Being of American Girls and Women* (Women’s Sports Foundation, 2009).
- (3) This means participation in sports for from 3 to 6 hours per week (Sanders et al., 2000).
- (4) “Teams of which members demonstrate marching or gymnastics severely as well as precisely in the way they are trained, in order to support their own team in sports” (Kotobank.jp).
- (5) In Aiba (2013), this point was not fully revealed.

Afterword

I had no interest in women's pro wrestling before I decided to pay attention to it for the study of this book. Since the beginning of this study, I have received questions about whether I have always been a fan of women's pro wrestling, but I had neither visited the exhibitions of pro wrestling nor watched women's pro wrestling on TV. When I was a junior high school student, Beauty Pair released a hit song called *Kakemeguru Seishun* (meaning blossoms of youth flashing). I knew the song because I used to hear it on the radio, but I never watched their pro wrestling even on TV.

I began watching many matches by women pro wrestlers as a part of my research for this book, and the match I remember most vividly was the one I watched for the first time in my life. The match was held in a simple hall set up for All Japan Women's Pro Wrestling on empty land covered with weeds near JR Shin-Kawasaki station on August 20, 2002. I felt the hall was very ragged, but I thought it was a very fantastic space as I sat on a folding pipe-chair. It was the night of a full moon and I could hear trains running behind the hall. The wind was blowing strong after the sunset, but it helped the place feel cool and comfortable. When I turned to my right on the seat, I could see the reflection of tall buildings around the station shining above the aqua-colored sheet used as a wall of the hall. The first match began at 7:00 p.m. A big light was hanging above the ring, and it was illuminating the ring brightly and creating darkness around the ring. The strong light was projecting the faces of the wrestlers and flying dust shooting up from their right to the left. When the exhibition ended, the light was turned off and the wrestlers and audience disappeared. Later, I observed the space where the hall stood from the window of a train car and discovered that it was a

heliport. Three years after this, All Japan Women's Pro Wrestling dissolved and no pro wrestling organization now organizes exhibitions on empty land. The women pro wrestlers who gave me a hand for the research retired from wrestling one after another and disappeared from the ring. I feel how long a time has passed between the day I saw the first match and the day this book was published.

The bodies of women pro wrestlers may be considered as something unique, but they also suggest various kinds of hints to the women who are not as active as pro wrestlers physically, as described in this book. Hopefully, many gender researchers will realize the problems related to the dichotomy between mind and body, and recognize the importance of the issues of the gendered body and participate in studies of this field. Therefore, I would be grateful if this book is found useful for such study.

In the process of completing research for this book, I received a lot of support from many people. First of all, I would like to thank the women pro wrestlers who came for interviews in spite of their busy schedules, including part-time jobs, as well as the concerned personnel of the pro wrestling organizations. The biggest problem I faced for this study was that it took two years before I began interviewing women pro wrestlers. At the beginning, I asked the public-relations agents of the organizations and freelance pro wrestlers for interviews, but it was not easy to have actual interviews with them. However, the situation changed in January 2004, when I sent New-year cards to my friends and acquaintances with a note asking them to introduce me if they knew women pro wrestlers or fans of women's pro wrestling. Prof. Yumiko Ehara introduced me to Ms. Atsuko Umezawa, who is a fan of pro wrestling. Ms. Umezawa then introduced me to Mr. Takeshi Ito, who has been publishing magazines related to men's pro wrestling. Mr. Ito took me to a restaurant run by a retired women pro wrestler, hoping that she might help me with interviews. Unfortunately, the restaurant was closed—later we found that it was closed down completely, thus he took me to a restaurant run by a man pro wrestler for a meal. I explained to the male pro wrestler that I was looking for women pro wrestlers for interviews, and he introduced me to two women pro wrestlers whom he knew. One of them was already retired from pro wrestling and another was still an active pro wrestler. The active woman pro wrestler showed her understanding of my study and situation, and asked concerned members of women's pro wrestling for cooperation with interviews. As a result, I had the chance to interview many women pro wrestlers. I would like to thank all of the people who

provided me with such opportunities. Furthermore, the photographs in the book are used with permission from Mr. Tetsuya Koda, who was the representative executive of NEO, JWP women's pro wrestling, and Mr. Daisuke Onodera of Office Kana.

I also wish to thank Prof. Kumiko Fujimura, who immediately recognized and encouraged the importance and content of my eccentric study, of which the theme is the bodies of women pro wrestlers, Dr. Keiko Tanaka, Dr. Raymond Jussaume, Dr. Anne Bolin and Dr. Scott North. Moreover, the reason why this book could be published in Japanese at first was because Mr. Hitoshi Jinno, an editor of Akashi Shoten, read the draft of this book without having any prejudice against pro wrestling. Thus, I wish to thank Prof. Kimiko Kimoto who introduced me to Mr. Jinno. I also want to thank Mr. Kouichi Tejima, an editor, who provided me with detailed advice in the process of completing the Japanese edition of this book. I also would like to thank Dr. Hiroshi Ikeda of Union Press, who recognized the importance and meaning of this book and provided me with great help with in the process of obtaining a grant for publication. Last but not least, I thank Jennifer Igawa who gave me useful advice regarding translation.

When I started having vague ideas about conducting a study on the connection between women and their bodies, the issue that came cross in my mind at first was the question of whether there were women who train their bodies for the purpose of making money in Japan. To this question, my husband, Hideki, answered "women pro wrestlers." This is how my study on women's pro wrestling began. I am grateful that he introduced me to a research subject that I would never have thought of by myself. He supported me so that I could concentrate on my research for as long as possible. Without his support, I would have never completed this book. I thank him greatly.

Some chapters in the Japanese edition of this book were published earlier, and the details, are here as follows. The rest was newly written for it.

Chapter 4: (2007). *Henyou shitashintai he no jiko ninshiki—joshi resurā noshintai to jierendā* [Self-perceptions toward transformed bodies: Bodies of professional women wrestlers and gender]. *Supōtsu to jierendā kenkyū*, 5, 4-17.

Chapter 5: (2008). *Tatakaku gino to jiko bouei—joshi puroresurā no sintai to jierendā* [Combat skills and self-defense: Gender and the bodies of pro-women wrestlers]. *Jierendā & Sekushuaritei*, 3, 3-22.

Chapter 6: (2008). Engi to shiteno joshi puroresu to jindā [Women's pro wrestling as performance and gender transformation] *Kokusaigaku Kenkyu*, 34, 1-20.

Chapter 7: (2010). Shintai katsudou kara josei kyougisha ga ukeru eikyou—joshi puroresurā no keiken [The influence of physical activities on women athletes: Experiences of women professional wrestlers] *Kokusaigaku Kenkyu*, 38, 27-44.

In addition, Chapters 7 and 8 of this book were composed with some additional pages from the Japanese edition.

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Appendix:

Questions for Interviews

1. Before joining your pro wrestling organization:

- Q1: How old were you when you decided to become a pro wrestler? What was the reason for your deciding this?
- Q2: Did you play any sports when you were a child? How old were you when you were playing the sport/sports?
- Q3: What were the reactions of your family when you were playing the sport/sports?
- Q4: What was your build when you were a child?
- Q5: Besides playing sports, what did you do when you were at the pre-school stage, during elementary school, junior high school and high school?
- Q6: Did you use to fight at school?
- Q7: How did your family react about you taking a tryout to become a pro wrestler?
- Q8: Do you remember your height and weight before joining your pro wrestling organization?

2. Between the time when you joined your organization and the time when you made your debut:

- Q9: When did you take the tryout?
- Q10: What kinds of training did you have every day after you became a trainee and until you made your debut?
- Q11: What did you use to find difficult in your everyday life around that time?

- Q12: What did you use to enjoy in your everyday life around that time?
Q13: When did you pass a pro test to become a pro wrestler?
Q14: What kinds of differences did you notice about your body when you passed the test, comparing with the period before you joined your pro wrestling organization?
Q14-1: What did you feel about the changes to your body?
Q15: When was your debut match?

3. Since you made your debut:

- Q16: Do your family members come to see your matches? Are you happy when your family members come to see your matches?
Q17: When were you acting as an assistant for your senior women pro wrestler(s)? From when to when?
Q17-1: What were your tasks when you were acting as an assistant?
Q18: Do you think that acting as an assistant is useful for becoming a full-fledged pro wrestler?
Q19: Do you think that acting as a second is useful for becoming a full-fledged pro wrestler?
Q20: Did you like the job as a second?
Q21: Please tell me what your day is like while you are touring with pro wrestling exhibitions.
Q22: What are the hardest and the most difficult things for you while you are touring with pro wrestling exhibitions?
Q23: Did you feel any resistance to hitting and kicking your opponents?
Q24: How do you feel when you hit and kick your opponents?
Q25: Is it painful when you were tossed onto a mattress of a ring?
Q26: Do you attack your opponents verbally? If you do so, how do you feel?
Q27: Do you become out of control during matches?
Q28: Do you find any changes in your training, compared to before you made your debut?
Q29: What are you conscious of in your current training?
Q30: It used to be said during the era of group competitions that women's pro wrestling was dangerous, since bold moves and techniques were used. Do you think that it is still dangerous?
Q31: Have you ever done pro wrestling against men pro wrestlers? (If your answer is yes) Did you find any differences from doing pro wrestling against women pro wrestlers?

- Q32: Did you make any efforts to make yourself appealing to your audience?
- Q33: Do you think that being *kawaii* and sexual attraction are important characteristics for women pro wrestlers?
- Q34: Do you think that strength is an important characteristic for women pro wrestlers?
- Q35: What is/are the important property/properties for pro wrestlers?
- Q36: Do you put on makeup and/or do your hair when you fight in matches currently? Why do you do so?
- Q37: Do you have a different feeling when you put on makeup and/or do your hair?
- Q38: How did you begin to wear the costumes you wear currently?
- Q39: Have you been injured badly and/or had a serious sickness since you became a pro wrestler?
- Q40: What is your current health condition? Do you have any illness involving your neck, hips or knees?
- Q41: What are you careful about when you eat currently?
- Q42: How much do you earn per a match?
- Q43: Are you satisfied with your current income?
Q43-1: If you are not satisfied with it, have you ever thought of quitting pro wrestling? What makes you continue pro wrestling?
- Q44: Have you ever thought of quitting pro wrestling? (If your answer is yes) When did you think of quitting it?
- Q45: When did you find changes to your body after you made your debut? How did your body change? What did you feel about the changes to your body?
- Q46: What kinds of differences in features do you find in your body in comparison to those women who are not doing pro wrestling? Are you proud of the features?
- Q47: Do you think that your body is attractive as a pro wrestler?
Q47-1: How about as a woman?
- Q48: Have you had any experience of anything being said about your body or of anything being done to your body by male audiences or male fans? Have you ever been touched by them?
- Q49: How about your female audiences and fans?
- Q50: How do you think ordinary people see your body?
- Q51: Have you ever had anything said about your body or done to your body by men in your daily life since you became a pro wrestler?

- Q51-1: How about by women?
- Q52: Have you noticed any changes in your behavior and clothes in your daily life since you became a pro wrestler?
- Q52-1: For example, have you noticed that you do not fear walking on the street at night?
- Q52-2: For example, have you ever fought off male gropers?
- Q52-3: For example, have you ever helped people who were harassed by men or suffered physical violence by men?
- Q53: Have you ever received anything negative said about your doing pro wrestling by your family members? (If your answer is yes) How are you dealing with it?
- Q53-1: Have you ever received anything positive said? (If your answer is yes) How do you feel about it?
- Q54: Have you ever received anything negative said about your doing pro wrestling by people other than your family and friends? (If your answer is yes) How are you dealing with it?
- Q54-1: Have you ever received anything positive said? (If your answer is yes) How do you feel about it?
- Q55: Do you think that you have become strong since you became a pro wrestler?
- Q56: What do you like the most about pro wrestling? What do you hate the most?
- Q57: Have you learned anything new since you became a pro wrestler?

4. The attributes of a pro wrestler:

- Q58: What is your final level of education?
- Q59: Are you married?

5. A question for a final checkup:

- Q60: Please add anything you think that you did not tell enough about.

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Cover image:

Kuragaki Tsubasa jumps over another wrestler, Commando Bolshoi, using the move called moonsault © JWP



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