

Cultivating Community, Illustrating Intimacy: A Textual and Visual Analysis of 1985 and 1987

Issues of the Japanese Lesbian *Minikomi* Series *Regumi tsūshin*

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All images are digital scans of photocopies of materials from The Japanese Association for Sex Education (JASE) archive in Tokyo, Japan. I removed any bylines in the original materials for privacy.

Note on translation: All translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

Introduction

Thumbing through a black and white stapled pamphlet, handwritten and typed text adorned with doodles and clip art greets the reader. One page lists notices of new lesbian gatherings and upcoming events, while another offers advice about coming out. These pamphlet-like self-published magazines are called *zines* or *minikomi* (“mini-communication”).¹ *Minikomi*, in contrast to professionally-published books and magazines, are often “more informal networks of communication between members of specialized political groups.”² This do-it-yourself (DIY) medium is difficult to define yet easy to produce, making it a popular form of media among subcultures and marginalized communities.³ *Zines* are not quite magazines but not quite personal writings; additionally, they visually exist between literature and comics. Despite *zines*’ ephemeral and DIY nature, these *minikomi* played a pivotal role in Japanese lesbian history. In addition to lesbian *minikomi* fostering community-building, the expression of lesbian joy, agency, and connection in these issues act as a form of micropolitics. My work also aligns with Piepmeier’s 2008 hypothesis stating that “*zines*’ materiality produces embodied community.”⁴ My research builds on her argument; I use one lesbian *minikomi* series to illustrate how *zines* as a medium help facilitate and sustain physical queer communities.

I am researching the Tokyo-based lesbian *minikomi* series *Regumi tsūshin* to examine how this *zine* series visually and textually represents its makers and how it was used to support community-building. *Re* refers to the word *rezubian*, *gumi* means “group,” and *tsūshin* means

¹ I use “*minikomi*” and “*zines*” interchangeably in this piece. The Japanese word “*minikomi*” comes from the English phrase “mini-communication.” In contemporary Japan, the loanword “*jin*” is also used for “*zine*.”

² Vera Mackie, “Feminism and the Media in Japan,” *Japanese Studies* 12, no. 2 (1992): 23.

³ Alana Kumbier, *Ephemeral Material: Queering the Archive* (Litwin Books, 2014), 193–194.

⁴ Alison Piepmeier, “Why *Zines* Matter: Materiality and the Creation of Embodied Community,” *American Periodicals* 18, no. 2 (2008): 235.

“newsletter.” This group is also referred to as simply *Regumi* or RST in scholarship. By investigating these zines produced directly by Japanese lesbian groups intended to circulate to other queer women, I can gain insight into how queer women in the mid to late-1980s navigated creating and sustaining a Japanese lesbian community. Additionally, I examine how intimacy is fostered formally through text and imagery. I argue that this series strengthened the lesbian community in Japan by cultivating a sense of intimacy with the reader and fostering a physical community. I utilize excerpts from 1985 and 1987 issues of *Regumi tsūshin* to examine two key aspects via formal literary and visual analysis. First, I focus on how design and textual strategies fostered a positive atmosphere of intimacy and affirmation for lesbians. Second, I examine the community focus of the *minikomi*, arguing that these zines helped the authors grow and sustain a physical lesbian community in the greater Tokyo area. Additionally, while *rezubian* can be misunderstood as a simple direct translation of the English “lesbian,” I note that these women were engaging with Japanese and Western cultures in complex ways to craft their ideas of women-loving-women identity. These communities were “deeply complex, internationally connected, yet locally situated and constructed. Lesbian and queer communities of women in Japan were more than simple adopters of so-called Western paradigms of gender and sexuality.”⁵ As I will discuss later, there is a rich history of queer women engaging in domestic community-building and international exchange.

While I focus my analysis on a single zine series, a broader aim of my project is to stress that queer women’s history in Japan is understudied. While there is an increasing international mass media and political discourse about LGBTQ issues and rights, “it would be safe to say that

⁵ Jane Wallace, “Lesbians and Queer Women in Japan,” in *The Routledge Companion to Gender and Japanese Culture*, ed. by Jennifer Coates, Lucy Fraser, and Mark Pendleton (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 222.

Lesbian Studies has never seriously been placed on the Japanese academic agenda.”⁶

Additionally, according to Wallace in her 2019 reflection on queer women in Japanese studies, “Lesbians and queer women have a long history of organising and creating collective spaces of belonging in Japan. These communities are by no means a new phenomenon, regardless of the extent to which these communities are (mis)represented and (not) discussed in the mainstream media and academia.”⁷ Additionally, legal protections for LGBTQ people in Japan are slim, and there is a modern myth of tolerance present in contemporary Western understandings of queer issues in Japan.⁸ Understanding this type of self-published textual and visual medium created by the grassroots lesbian community can help intervene in queer studies and Japanese studies, complicating ideas around the value of queer media and increasing female representation in LGBTQ history. Wallace confirms this, saying, “We should not allow the specific issues facing lesbians and queer women to be subsumed under hegemonic discourses that seek to erase these long histories and homogenise queer experiences.”⁹ Put simply, queer women in Japan are at risk of further academic marginalization, and “LGBTQ” studies may start to lose letters.

Finding Regumi Tsūshin Minikomi

During my Queer and Trans Historicisms course in the winter of 2023, I started to gather archives and collections of interest using Sugiura’s list of lesbian *minikomi* in the late 20th century.¹⁰ After searching all the group and *minikomi* titles on her list in academic search

⁶ Claire Maree, “The Un/State of Lesbian Studies,” *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 11, no. 3–4, (October 2007): 291.

⁷ Wallace, “Lesbians and Queer Women,” 219–227.

⁸ Katsuhiko Suganuma, “Sexual Minority Studies on Japan,” in *Routledge Handbook of Sexuality Studies in East Asia*, ed. by Mark McLelland and Vera Mackie (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 244–254.

⁹ Wallace, “Lesbians and Queer Women,” 225–226. Original spelling is preserved.

¹⁰ Sugiura Ikuko, *Nihon ni okeru rezubian minikomishi no gensetsu bunseki: 1790 nendai kara 1980 nendai zenhan made* “日本におけるレズビアン・ミニコミ誌の言説分析 : 1970年代から1980年代前半まで [A Discourse Analysis of Lesbian Mini-komi in Japan: From the 1970s to the Mid-1980s], *Wako University Bulletin of the Faculty of Human Studies* 10 (2017): 159–178.

engines, I learned that some *Regumi tsūshin* issues are available for in-person access or partial remote scanning via the National Diet Library (NDL) in Tokyo. I also applied for summer study abroad programs to improve my language ability and access this archive in person. The Inter-University Center for Japanese Language Studies (IUC) accepted my application, and I went to Japan for two months to study. Before my trip, I contacted Keiko Yokota-Carter, the Japanese studies librarian at the University of Michigan, for a general letter confirming my academic interest to present to archival staff in Japan (if needed). Instead of going to the NDL, she suggested visiting the archive at The Japanese Association for Sex Education (JASE). This archive is much easier to access and possesses the same zines, so we started to plan my visit there. She introduced me to the JASE archive staff via email, and I set up a time to visit the same day I completed my IUC program.

One hour of riding the subway and an intense rainstorm later, I arrived at the JASE archive to research. The staff explained the process of using the reading room and making photocopies of materials. After a short wait, they presented me with several large binders full of *Regumi tsūshin* issues. Based on my experience with archival visits in Michigan and reading about queer archival work, I was anticipating a couple dozen of issues at best. Instead, I had the enviable problem of having hundreds of zines to examine in ninety minutes. Before visiting, I planned how to engage with these archival materials, but the sheer number of issues prompted me to make decisions quickly. I immediately focused on the earliest issues, hypothesizing that there might be more information about the group and the purpose of the *minikomi* nearer to its inception. The staff explained that scanning whole issues was not feasible, so I skimmed issue upon issue for articles and layouts that seemed to explicitly speak to lesbian identity, the group, and the group's activity.

Doing archival queer research often requires or results in a research process. To start, locating and accessing queer primary sources can require additional creativity and persistence. Robertson's work on sexuality and all-female theater troupe The Takarazuka Revue shows this intersection of queer archival work in Japanese studies. Her difficulty accessing materials in Japanese archives over several years was directly related to the "inconvenient" nature of her research.¹¹ Additionally, changing one's mindset is of importance. As I mentioned in the previous paragraph, my own lacking expectations regarding the number of sources available negatively impacted my research process in turn. Arondekar describes how we can queer the archive itself by letting go of "the historical language of search and rescue" and focusing on "sexuality as a site of radical abundance."¹²

Letting go of problematic narratives of scarcity and rescue can feel uncomfortable as queer Western female scholar, but working to adopt this mindset can help us interact with LGBTQ materials in the archive in generative, thoughtful ways. Still, how do we examine our own affect in relation to archival work? Tortorici calls attention to the "seductive" nature of archival work, historical voyeurism, and the interactive relationship between the researcher and the archive as well, noting that this seduction can have both generative and harmful effects on one's research.¹³ Going to this archive in Tokyo was my first experience engaging with archival sources for my own research project. Even after taking a course about queer archival work, facing these considerations during my archival research is a process I continue to grapple with.

¹¹ Jennifer Robertson, *Takarazuka: Sexual Politics and Popular Culture in Modern Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 42–43.

¹² Anjali Arondekar, "In the Absence of Reliable Ghosts: Sexuality, Historiography, South Asia," *Differences* 25, no. 3 (2014): 99–100.

¹³ Zeb Tortorici, *Sins Against Nature: Sex and Archives in Colonial New Spain* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018); 82–83, 252–253.

Thesis Intentionality and Structure

I approached this project as an opportunity to explore how to intervene in Japanese studies to increase queer female representation and help engender increased academic worth of female queer media practices. Rather than housing myself in women and gender studies (WGS) and drawing on Japanese studies, I am applying feminist critique within Japanese studies. My B.S. is in WGS, and my M.A. is in Japanese Studies; I utilize my training in both areas to analyze lesbian *minikomi*. I envision my scholarship pushing against the seemingly pervasive academic notion that gender and sexuality research “belongs” in LGBT studies and is peripheral to androcentric Japanese studies. Maree describes this marginalization in her 2008 State of the Field about lesbian studies, saying:

It would be safe to say that lesbian Studies in the strict sense of the study of lesbian issues for lesbians by lesbians has never seriously been placed on the Japanese academic agenda. Rather, the critical study of same-sex female sexuality remains tentatively rocking between discussions on the validity of Gay/Lesbian Studies vis-à-vis identity politics and local reinventions of Queer Studies that lean towards masculinist desires. In contradiction to (or perhaps in support of) this, however, ‘Lesbian Studies’ (if it exists at all today in Japan), lives in shared histories of community events, in activism and in writings by woman-loving women.¹⁴

“Queer” or “LGBT” in Japanese studies often implicitly and exclusively refers to male-male sexuality, and this is a disservice to Japanese studies, queer studies, and gender equity. Recent scholarship in history and anthropology utilizing a gendered perspective to examine issues in modern Japan helped inspire my approach, especially Kimura’s *Radiation Brain Moms and Citizen Scientists* and Kim’s *Madness in the Family: Women, Care, and Illness in Japan*.¹⁵

¹⁴ Maree, “The Un/State,” 293.

¹⁵ Yumi H. Kim, *Madness in the Family: Women, Care, and Illness in Japan* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2022); Aya Hirata Kimura, *Radiation Brain Moms and Citizen Scientists* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

In addition to my project aiding the continual diversification of area studies, I aim to highlight the agency in queer women's cultural production. I consider lesbian *minikomi* as an intentional communal practice that reflects an intimate and pleasurable aspect of queer community before the internet era. I have found a few studies that I consider intersections of area studies, queerness, and zines; however, zines and queer women tend to remain footnotes in East Asian queer scholarship. Impressive monographs about male-male sexuality have helped diversify Japanese studies, but women are still sidelined. Pflugfelder attributes this marginalization to the relative lack of historical primary sources regarding female-female sexuality and "the historically male-centered bias that has governed textual production and preservation in Japan."¹⁶ Still, while he acknowledges that the new understandings of "same-sex love" at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries explicitly involved women, he maintains his focus on men.¹⁷ With my project, I hope to bolster the academic dialogue around queer women's media and self-publishing and help move queer women out of the margins.

In chapter one, I present a combined historical overview of lesbianism in Japan and literature review. Starting with the Meiji period, I trace the history of same-sex female love and identity in Japan up to the 1990s. I illustrate how female same-sex love became taboo, and I highlight how lesbian women engaged in literary production and group formation. Then, I examine relevant literature with a focus on zine studies and Japanese studies. Additionally, I investigate instances of *Regumi Sutajio* and *Regumi tsūshin* in Japanese studies scholarship as well as gaps. I end this section by explaining how I accessed my primary sources and describing the archival collection I utilized. In chapter two, I analyze textual and visual markers of intimacy

¹⁶ Gregory M. Pflugfelder, *Cartographies of Desire: Male-Male Sexuality in Japanese Discourse, 1600–1950* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999) 14.

¹⁷ Pflugfelder, *Cartographies of Desire*, 14.

and validation in several *minikomi* excerpts. I argue that the combination of direct address, knowledgeable tone, imperfections, and organic lines creates a balance of intimacy and validation that invites the reader into the intangible yet legitimate-seeming lesbian community. In chapter three, I focus on community. I examine excerpts regarding community events to show how *Regumi tsūshin* intentionally and successfully cultivated an in-person community in Tokyo while contributing to the intangible sense of lesbian community across Japan. I end my thesis by synthesizing these points in my conclusion.

Chapter One: Literature Review and Historical Context

Research focusing on queer women is typically referred to as lesbian studies both internationally and in Japan, and it has increased in the past 20 years; however, it is still sparse in both Western and Japanese academic contexts and occurs on the sidelines of Japanese studies.¹⁸ Additionally, the field of Asian queer studies is relatively new, with the bulk of academic development occurring from the 1990s to the early 2000s.¹⁹ Lesbian and bisexual women receive less attention in Japanese studies, perhaps due to the dominance of male scholars or backlash against queer and feminist movements.²⁰ Suganuma agrees, explaining that “the dominance of male perspectives and the commercial power disproportionately allocated to gay men has been criticized as a form of gender bias within sexual minority studies in Japan.”²¹ Most queer research regarding Japan centers on men, pushing women to the side as a special interest. In summation, while queer women in Japan are not wholly unstudied in international academia, they receive significantly less attention in Japanese studies across the board.²²

In this section, I undertake a mix of literature review and history. First, I start with a condensed history of female-female sexuality and cultural production in modern Japan to contextualize the creation of *Regumi tsūshin*. Then I offer a review of the literature on zines, focusing on queer self-publishing. Next, I examine mentions of *Regumi tsūshin* and *Regumi Sutajio* in primarily historical and anthropological literature. While my analysis of the history of

¹⁸ Wallace, “Lesbians and Queer Women,” 225–226.

¹⁹ Mark McLelland, “From Queer Studies on Asia to Asian Queer Studies,” *Sexualities*, 21, no. 8 (December 2018): 1271–1275.

²⁰ Claire Maree, “The Un/State,” 297–298.

²¹ Suganuma, “Sexual Minority Studies,” 251.

²² I use the term “queer women” here to reflect my uncertainty about the definition of “lesbian studies.” It seems that lesbian studies may include all women-loving women at times, such as bisexual women. However, I am hesitant to adopt lesbian as a true umbrella term in this paper and do not use it as such.

Regumi Sutajio and *Regumi tsūshin* is largely positive, I believe it is vital to discuss sticky moments in queer history as well. Welker states, “Due attention to – even lingering in – the more painful aspects of lesbian history, even aspects that undermine any straightforward narrative of progress, will help ensure that space remains for the writing of new, diverse lesbian histories in Japan.”²³ While I do not linger in these moments, I, like Welker, find it valuable to discuss tension over who belongs under the label “lesbian” and in the lesbian community in queer history. Finally, I end with an overview of the archival collection and materials I utilized for my research.

Queer History and Women’s Cultural Production in Japan

Scholars generally argue that homophobia and binary notions of gender in Japan can be attributed to Western ideology, the threat of imperialism, and the creation of citizen-subjects in the Meiji Restoration.²⁴ The idea of same-sex desire as a form of deviance or perversion took root in the Meiji period and persists into present-day Japan.²⁵ Before the Meiji Restoration, female same-sex relations and desire occurred; however, these relations are largely invisible in Japanese history.²⁶ Starting in the Meiji period, same-sex desire became perceived as deviant due to its associations with “uncivilized” peoples and its potential to subvert new heteropatriarchal constructions aimed at making Japanese women ideal mothers and Japanese men ideal soldiers.²⁷

²³ James Welker, “Toward a History of ‘Lesbian History’ in Japan,” *Culture, Theory and Critique* 58, no. 2 (2017): 163.

²⁴ Hiruma Yukiko. 近代日本における女性同性愛の「発見」“Kindai nihon ni okeru josei dōseiai no hakken” (“Discovery” of Female Homosexuality in Modern Japan), *Kaihō shakaigaku kenkyū* 17 (2003): 13–14; Suganuma, “Sexual Minority Studies,” 244.

²⁵ Mark J. McLelland, *Queer Japan from the Pacific War to the Internet Age* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).

²⁶ Hiruma, “Kindai nihon ni okeru,” 12.

²⁷ Teresa A. Algoto, “Not Suitable as a Man? Conscriptio, Masculinity, and Hermaphroditism in Early Twentieth-Century Japan,” in *Recreating Japanese Men*, ed. by Sabine Frühstück and Anne Walthall, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 241–261.

Additionally, the construction of “woman” as a concrete and distinct identity was created. Kano explains that around the 1880s, “the modern Japanese nation-state acquired its various institutional and discursive apparatuses, including those that anchored the category of “woman.””²⁸ In this new construction of the heterosexual gender binary, female same-sex love became untenable and was “made into a problem in relation to the normative images of women, the nation, and family” during modernization.²⁹ The “Good Wives, Wise Mothers” ideology, in particular, illustrates the new norm of women as ideal mothers. As Wu explains:

Ryosai kenbo shugi (the doctrine of “good wives, wise mothers”) not only came to be a powerful tool in the modernization of Meiji Japan but also reinforced the foundation of patriarchy. Under the norm of *ryosai kenbo*, the patriarchy theorized that reproduction was the ultimate end of heterosexuality – and this, in turn, created the image of the lesbian as a “revolting alien” vis-a-vis the patriarchal system (which was, of course, based on compulsory heterosexuality).³⁰

This doctrine spurred the norm of women as child bearers while also solidifying the new binary system of gender. As Wu suggests, it is only under this heteropatriarchal system that female same-sex love became taboo.

In the 1910s, female-female sexuality was recognized as a sexual category and entered public discourse.³¹ Suzuki explains, “The rise of same-sex love discourse occurred with the creation of the schoolgirl (*jogakusei*), a modern female identity that emerged from new

²⁸ Ayako Kano, *Japanese Feminist Debates: A Century of Contention on Sex, Love, and Labor* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2016), 15.

²⁹ Hiruma, “Kindai nihon ni okeru,” 29.

³⁰ Peichen Wu, “Performing Gender along the Lesbian Continuum: The Politics of Sexual Identity in the Seitō Society,” in *Women's Sexualities and Masculinities in a Globalizing Asia*, ed. Saskia Wieringa, Evelyn Blackwood, and Abha Bhaiya (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007): 69.

³¹ Wu, “Performing Gender,” 67.

institutions: the higher girls' school (*kōtō jogakkō*) and the women's college."³² Girls became the focus of public attention and debate. According to Hiruma, "because of the focus on female students, same-sex love was 'discovered,' and within the unique culture of girl students same-sex love became a visible experience."³³ The double suicide in 1911 of two women that graduated from a girls' school was a key event that increased public discourse about female same-sex love. The *Yomiuri Shimbun* deemed it "terrible same-sex love," (恐るべき同性の愛) and the *Tokyo Asahi Shimbun* called it "extreme same-sex love" (極端なる同性の愛).³⁴ Girls' schools also facilitated this new dialogue on female same-sex behavior. Hiruma describes this change in discourse about same-sex love and women:

The "discovery" of female homosexuality indicates the recognition of a "new" intimate relationship on the one hand, and the emergence of a framework that distinguishes the relationship based on the gender of the parties involved, such as "same-sex" love, on the other hand. In this sense, it can be said to be a true testimony to the process of transformation of the conception of sexuality from the pre-modern to the modern era... It is important to note, however, that homosexuality was considered "a problem that could happen to anyone in a girl's school" and was taken up as an educational issue rather than a specific, individualized problem.³⁵

The "reason" for female homosexuality would change over time, but this passage shows how constructions of homosexuality intertwine with constructions of gender. While female homosexuality was publicly recognized, this recognition also involved differentiation from male homosexuality and male-female heterosexuality. Understanding the origins of female

³² Michiko Suzuki, *Becoming Modern Women: Love and Female Identity in Prewar Japanese Literature and Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 23.

³³ Hiruma, "Kindai nihon ni okeru," 17.

³⁴ Hiruma, "Kindai nihon ni okeru," 14–15.

³⁵ Hiruma, "Kindai nihon ni okeru," 15–16. Original text: 女性同性愛の「発見」は一方では、女同七の「新しい」親密な関係性が認識されたことを示しており、他方では、「同性の」愛というように、当事者同士の性別に着目してその関係性を区別する枠組みが登場したことを示している。そういう意味では、それは...前近代から近代へのセクシュアリティを巡る観念の変容過程を如実に物語っているといえよう。しかしここで注意しなければならないのは、当時同性愛は「女学校においてならば誰にでも起こりうる問題」であるとされ、個別的で特殊な問題としてではなく教育問題として取り上げられたということである。

homosexuality in Japanese public discourse helps us understand the distinct historical trajectory of queer women in modern Japan.

In this same early 20th-century period, the modern image of womanhood was constructed as a process, beginning with naive schoolgirl romance before evolving to more “appropriate” heterosexual and maternal love. Suzuki explains how this trajectory started with these homosexual relationships, saying, “The girl would first experience ‘innocent’ same-sex love romance; then, as she matured, she would move on to ‘real’ (heterosexual) love, to be consummated in a love-based marriage; finally, she would become a mother and attain maternal love, the highest love of all.”³⁶ However, this ideology was not without its critics. In 1911, the Bluestocking Society created the first Japanese journal authored and published by women.

Suzuki explains:

Bluestocking was published by Seitōsha (Bluestocking Society), a literary group founded by Hiratsuka Raichō and others who saw the need to further women’s literature and achieve female liberation through writing. Featuring stories, poems, and essays as well as translations of famous foreign works, *Bluestocking* was the first Japanese journal written and published by women.³⁷

This early feminist journal aimed to “restore dignity and power to women,”³⁸ and the authors “enjoyed a prevalent place within the cultural imaginary” despite relatively low sales numbers. Both the journal’s contents and authors were subject to public debate, and “Seitō members were often stigmatized as being proponents of *dōseiai* (same-sex love) because of their subversion of socially accepted gender-roles.”³⁹ Still, these women succeeded in living atypical lives on their

³⁶ Suzuki, *Becoming Modern Women*, 3.

³⁷ Suzuki, *Becoming Modern Women*, 10–11. Hiratsuka Raichō was a well-known feminist and writer in the early 20th century.

³⁸ Suzuki, *Becoming Modern Women*, 11.

³⁹ Wu, “Performing Gender,” 65.

own terms. Frühstück describes this critical aspect of the Seitō Society: “They took themselves seriously as intellectuals and writers and as women with desires and aspirations. They also became known for their unconventional love lives, including divorces, multiple marriages, children with different fathers, and affairs with married men and other women.⁴⁰ These upper and middle-class women were successful in their efforts to fight oppressive societal norms. However, it is important to note that feminists in this period typically did not extend their feminism to women in the Japanese colonies. Frühstück aptly summarizes the overall lack of feminist discourse on imperialism in this period, saying: “Sadly, the freedoms these heroines of radical political change envisioned for some did not extend to the various peoples of the multi-ethnic empire they inhabited.”⁴¹ While this group and their publication are key examples of feminist literary production, it is crucial to consider the boundaries regarding who they were fighting for and who was included in the future they envisioned.

Still, it is not a stretch to say that the *Bluestocking* journal is a vital predecessor of future literary production by Japanese women, including lesbian *minikomi*. Members of the Bluestocking Society (青鞥社, *Seitōsha*) themselves engaged in same-sex love and challenged heteropatriarchy. Wu describes this often-overlooked aspect of the Bluestocking Society, saying:

Their ambiguous sexuality not only challenged the lesbian discourse in Japan but overturned the doctrine of ‘good wives, wise mothers’ supported by compulsory heterosexuality... Through their rebellion against the absolute order disciplined by the patriarchal society, members of the Seito Society were arguably the first "lesbian continuum" in modern Japan, because their gender performance succeeded in exposing the instability of the compulsory heterosexuality that had supported the Japanese patriarchal system.⁴²

⁴⁰ Sabine Frühstück, *Gender and Sexuality in Modern Japan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 81.

⁴¹ Frühstück, *Gender and Sexuality*, 82–83.

⁴² Wu, “Performing Gender,” 81–82.

While scholarship generally agrees that *Bluestocking* was modern Japan's first feminist journal and group, Wu argues that they were also the first queer female group engaged in literary production. Their critique of gender roles and rebellion against the female ideals of the time is a critical aspect of both feminist and lesbian history in Japan. Additionally, The rapid growth of what Kano calls the "female public sphere," especially among the middle class, concurrently led to over a million women's magazines in circulation as of the mid-1920s.⁴³

Militarization, World War II, and the American occupation furthered the marginalization of women and non-normative sexualities.⁴⁴ While the new 1946 constitution emphasized equality and gave women the right to vote, these constitutional promises have largely "failed to guide manifestations of equality, ...and they have also failed to sufficiently protect those with nonnormative sexualities and genders."⁴⁵ Additionally, occupation forces utilized the new status of Japanese women as a tool: "Japanese women's political liberation thus showcased the success of occupation policy to the international community."⁴⁶ However, it would be a gross overstatement to suggest that Western forces were driving the discourse regarding women's issues and rights. As Kano explains, "Publishing increased after the war, and feminist writers such as Hiratsuka Raichō, began publishing again about issues like the "housewife debates."⁴⁷

However, a boom in "perverse" media and culture influenced public discourse and attitudes about non-normative sexualities, which affected women in turn. McLelland explains:

⁴³ Kano, *Japanese Feminist Debates*, 16.

⁴⁴ Algosó, "Not Suitable as a Man?," 885–910;

⁴⁵ Frühstück, *Gender and Sexuality*, 6–7.

⁴⁶ Lisa Yoneyama, "Liberation under Siege: U.S. Military Occupation and Japanese Women's Enfranchisement," *American Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (September 2005): 887.

⁴⁷ Kano, *Japanese Feminist Debates*, 18.

“A new sexual culture arose surprisingly quickly after Japan's defeat and occupation by U.S. forces... Many people were keen to forget the past and looked forward to the beginning of a new and newly private life in which eroticism was flaunted as an important symbol of liberation.”⁴⁸ However, this liberation focused on men and the male gaze. A category of post-WWII magazines called “perverse magazines” depicted lesbian eroticism for a male audience; however, McLelland argues that these magazines had queer female readership as well.⁴⁹ Still, the colloquial term for media depictions of female-female sexuality, “lesbos love” (*resubosu ai*), was strongly associated with the heterosexual male gaze, and this association persisted as the terminology changed from “lesbos love” to “*rezubian*” to “*rezu*.”⁵⁰ Even if these magazines had female queer readers, they still cultivated an image of lesbianism tied to male erotic consumption.

The women’s liberation movement (also called “women’s lib”) began in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and feminists began creating *minikomi*.⁵¹ Self-identified *rezubian* Japanese women started forming community groups in the 1970s as well, and there was an increase in lesbian feminism and activism.⁵² The first lesbian social group was *Wakakusa no Kai* (若草の会, “Young Grass Club”), formed in 1971, and it is considered the first instance of lesbian collective activity in Japan by scholars.⁵³ However, groups would come and go as the decade progressed. McLelland summarizes the next period of queer women’s organization, saying:

From the late '70s to the early '80s, various lesbian and bisexual women's groups would come together, found in-house magazines or *minikomi*, such as *Za daiku* (The dyke) and

⁴⁸ McLelland, *Queer Japan*, 59.

⁴⁹ Mark McLelland, “From Sailor-Suits to Sadists: ‘Lesbos Love’ as Reflected in Japan’s Postwar ‘Perverse Press.’” *U.S.-Japan Women’s Journal* 27, (2004): 35–42.

⁵⁰ McLelland, “From Sailor-Suits,” 42.

⁵¹ Kano, *Japanese Feminist Debates*, 18.

⁵² Claire Maree, “The Un/State of Lesbian Studies,” 293–294.

⁵³ McLelland, *Queer Japan*, 169; Sugiura, “*Nihon ni okeru*,” 162.

Hikari guruma (Shining car) – both published for a time during 1978-and then disband or fall apart as members either lost interest due to ideological differences over who exactly was to be included in the category “lesbian” or moved on to other groups.⁵⁴

Regumi Sutajio is one of the longest-lasting lesbian groups in this period, if not the longest.

However, as I will discuss later, they were not immune to ideological differences or clashes around who is considered a lesbian.

In the 1980s, a “commercial, political, and academic” feminist boom further pushed women’s issues into public discourse.⁵⁵ However, despite increased coverage in mass media, collective organizing between different queer groups and identities did not occur. Lesbian women and gay men were largely separate communities. McLelland discusses the lack of a robust lesbian and gay movement based on self-identity, saying:

The politicization of homosexuality did take place to a lesser extent, taking hold among lesbian women earlier than homosexual men, largely because of the politicizing influence of the women's movement and the fact that women were so obviously disenfranchised in Japanese society. However, the lack of interest of the mainstream women's movement in lesbian issues and the precarious financial and social situation of many lesbians meant that lesbian activism had little visibility or effect outside of specific communities in the 1970s. It was not until the mid-1980s that a new generation of "gay" men emerged and began to employ modes of organization and activism similar to those that had been pioneered by gay and lesbian organizations in the west, and that the mainstream media began to deal with lesbian and gay issues outside of the entertainment paradigm that had dominated the discussion in the postwar period.⁵⁶

He frames this historical moment as a process toward lesbian and gay “consciousness” rather than a movement in this text. He explains further that a Stonewall-type moment was not possible in Japan due to the ability for queer and gender non-confirming men to live their lives in relative safety.⁵⁷ I do not believe McLelland is suggesting that queerness was accepted by Japanese

⁵⁴ McLelland, *Queer Japan*, 170.

⁵⁵ Kano, *Japanese Feminist Debates*, 18–19.

⁵⁶ McLelland, *Queer Japan*, 161.

⁵⁷ McLelland, *Queer Japan*, 160–161. The 1969 Stonewall Riots were a series of protests against the police that took place in Greenwich Village, New York, and they were a pivotal moment in American queer history.

society; instead, he is countering the impulse for Western scholars to view LGBTQ community trajectories through an American perspective. In other words, the formation of lesbian and gay consciousness and eventual communities in Japan requires a keen resistance to imparting Western assumptions about queer identities and histories. Additionally, he highlights the agency of lesbian women, explaining why they adopted a politicized identity before gay men. As I will explain further in chapter two, the cultural production of lesbian women via *minikomi* is a strong example of lesbian agency in the 1980s.

In the 1990s, while books and magazines on lesbianism increased, lesbianism was still lacking visibility, and women's authorship in mass media was relatively low. Mackie's 1992 article, "Feminism and the Media in Japan," details the plethora of journals, *minikomi*, and books created about women's issues in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Still, as of 1990, "only 3.5 percent of newspaper journalists were women," and few women gained editorial positions in mass media.⁵⁸ Mackie's article provides valuable insight into feminist authorship and *minikomi* but does not include any information on lesbian or lesbian feminist *minikomi*. While feminist literature and lesbian community groups increased, lesbian women were neither represented in mass media nor in broad queer political organization. However, women spoke out about the male focus in queer discourse. For example, "Kakefuda Hiroko, who was a vocal opinion maker in lesbian politics, wrote '*Rezubian*' *de aru to iu koto* (On being a 'lesbian') (1992) to critique not only homophobia in Japan, but also to scrutinise the male dominance still inherent within Japan's sexual minority movements."⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Mackie, "Feminism and the Media," 30.

⁵⁹ Suganuma, "Sexual Minority Studies," 245. Originally spelling was preserved.

Zine Studies

Zines are “noncommercial, nonprofessional, small-circulation magazines which their creators produce, publish, and distribute themselves.”⁶⁰ I argue that *minkomi* fit this description and can be included under the umbrella term “zine” or *jin* (ジン) in Japanese. There are three main crests of zine history: science fiction fanzines in the 1930s, punk fanzines in the 1970s, and feminist zines in the 1990s; however, it is vital to note that Western zine history still has a tendency to center white, middle-class zine-makers.⁶¹ Self-published magazine studies, referred to as “zine” studies, is still relatively small, with Hayes finding 163 English-language academic articles related to zine studies published between 1990 and 2018 in her citation analysis study.⁶² While there are limitations to her study, I believe this provides an accurate scope of the size of the field. Scholarly articles about zines began consistently appearing in 1990, and academic interest has slowly but surely increased.⁶³ Hayes explains the general trends of zine research by discipline, saying that zine research falls under library science, feminist studies, education, and media studies the most frequently.⁶⁴ Studies of feminist and queer zines are relevant to my work, and this field offers insight into self-published magazines as a medium. Case studies of lesbian zines in other countries provide valuable perspectives about why self-publishing and queerness are often bedfellows.

⁶⁰ Stephen Duncombe, *Notes from Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture* (Portland: Microcosm Publishing, 2008), 9.

⁶¹ Elke Zobl, “Comparative Perspectives Symposium: Feminist Zines, Cultural Production, Transnational Networking, and Critical Reflection in Feminist Zines.” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 35, no. 1 (2009): 2–3.

⁶² Anne Hays, “A Citation Analysis about Scholarship on Zines,” *Journal of Librarianship and Scholarly Communication* 8, no. 1 (2020): 15.

⁶³ Hayes, “A Citation Analysis,” 10.

⁶⁴ Hayes, “A Citation Analysis,” 10–11.

Three case studies are similar to my research but focus on 20th-century queer zines in other countries: Boellstorff's work on Indonesian queer zines, Snyder's analysis of zines created by queer activist groups in Spain from the 1970s, and Collins's research on the American lesbian sex zine *Brat Attack*.⁶⁵ These case studies argue that zines as a medium are ideal for facilitating queer narrative creation, community formation, and identity negotiation. Baker and Cantillon agree, saying, "zines can...be of significant value as primary source material, documenting individual lives, community networks and societal changes."⁶⁶ Much of zine scholarship focuses on Western regions, but the core principles of self-publishing, counterculture, and limited circulation seem transnational when comparing zine case studies. For example, the 1970s American discourse around feminism and lesbianism coincided with the creation of lesbian zines.⁶⁷ This increase in American Sapphic zines and community occurred at around the same general period as the rise of lesbian *minikomi* in Japan.

Zines as a Queer Medium

Zines are an attractive medium for facilitating queer expression and community formation both in materiality and function. I posit that zines are a queer form of media due to their intimate and DIY nature, making them an attractive option to queer communities.⁶⁸ This duality of queerness creates a dialectical relationship; zines are attractive to queer groups, so queer communities utilize zines, which then reinforces the notion of zines as queer. I suggest that

⁶⁵ Tom Boellstorff, "Zines and Zones of Desire: Mass-Mediated Love, National Romance, and Sexual Citizenship in Gay Indonesia," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 63, no. 2 (May 2004): 367–402; Jonathan Snyder, "Making Oppositional Means: The Illustrated Zine Literature of Queer Activist Groups in Spain, 1970s to the Present," *Bulletin of Spanish Visual Studies* 4, no. 2 (2020): 305–325; Dana Collins, "'No Experts: Guaranteed!' Do-It-Yourself Sex Radicalism and the Production of the Lesbian Sex Zine 'Brat Attack,'" *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 25, no. 1 (Autumn 1999): 65–89.

⁶⁶ Sarah Baker and Zelmarie Cantillon, "Zines as Community Archive," *Archival Science*, 22, (March 2022): 543.

⁶⁷ Collins, "'No Experts: Guaranteed!,'" 65–89.

⁶⁸ I mean "queer" in both the literal and figurative sense in this discussion.

the *Regumi* lesbian *minikomi* are an excellent example of this dialectical relationship; they give us insights into concrete moments of LGBTQ expression while also further enabling lesbian women to queer their lives. My arguments regarding the queer nature of zines are echoed in contemporary zine scholarship. Most English-language zine scholarship focuses on Western communities or countries, and the theoretical considerations of zines as queer apply to my study. Additionally, the history of international activity in the Japanese lesbian community suggests that American-Japanese queer cultural exchange may have impacted media practice and community formation.⁶⁹ I supplement English-language zine research with Japanese-language scholarship on lesbian history in Japan to strengthen zine theory.⁷⁰

Zine studies scholars note that zines offer marginalized communities radical means of communication and resistance to oppression,⁷¹ making the existence of lesbian zines in these decades, before commercial lesbian books and magazines, essential for understanding how Japanese women navigated queer identity and experience. If one only has access to mainstream media and culture, finding queer *minikomi* may alleviate feelings of isolation or alienation.⁷² Additionally, Piepmeier argues that “people make zines as acts of pleasure and generosity.”⁷³ I argue that lesbian Japanese women found joy in creating *minikomi*, offering an opportunity to intervene in LGBTQ history that tends to focus on oppression and pain. Piepmeier also offers a powerful insight into why zines tend to lend themselves to marginalized communities, explaining

⁶⁹ James Welker, “From Women’s Liberation to Lesbian Feminism in Japan: *Rezubian Feminizumu* within and beyond the *Ūman Ribu* Movement in the 1970s and 1980s,” in *Rethinking Japanese Feminisms*, ed. Julia C. Bullock, Ayako Kano, and James Welker. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2018), 52–60.

⁷⁰ Perhaps the authors of Western feminist zines of the 1970s and 1980s interacted with the authors of Japanese lesbian-feminist *minikomi* of the same time period, but that research question is beyond the scope of this thesis.

⁷¹ Baker and Cantillon, “Zines as Community Archive,” 539–561; Piepmeier, “Why Zines Matter,” 213–38.

⁷² Duncombe, *Notes from Underground*, 178.

⁷³ Piepmeier, “Why Zines Matter,” 231.

that zines “make visible the desire for community and human connection.”⁷⁴ While Piepmeier is speaking in an American context, it is arguable that this desire is transnational. Indeed, before the internet, lesbian women in Japan utilized printed materials like *minikomi* to share knowledge.⁷⁵

Lesbian women in Japan found a unique opportunity in zines to express their “deviant” identity and find community without engaging with commercial publishing avenues. The complete creative control offered by zines enables fuller queer expression, especially by those with marginalized gender identities. As Duncombe explains, “this desire for control is a natural reaction to a world in which zinesters feel there is all too much control, but not of their own making.”⁷⁶ Additionally, while I cannot speak to the circulation of these zines using hard numbers, I offer that this publishing style is “safer” for marginalized communities. Not only do zines require little financial investment, but they also avoid the attention of professionally published works. For people worried about being outed, zines may be a safer and more accessible form of queer media due to their small size. For example, because zines are lightweight and have no spines, they can be easily tucked away in a bookshelf or tossed in a purse. The relatively cheap price of zines makes them easier to purchase, read, and pass on or throw away.

The medium itself is just as important, if not more so at times, when it comes to zines. Those not represented in mass media or unable to access professional publishing opportunities can turn to zines for representation and creative expression. Duncombe argues that “their politics reside less in what they say and more in what they are: repositories of nonalienated creation and

⁷⁴ Piepmeier, “Why Zines Matter,” 235.

⁷⁵ Wallace, “Lesbians and Queer Women,” 220.

⁷⁶ Duncombe, *Notes from Underground*, 105. “Zinester” is a term in the zine community for a person that makes zines.

media for nonalienating communication.⁷⁷ In this sense, *minikomi* are uniquely suited to queer needs and lifestyles. As I will illustrate in my analysis, *Regumi tsūshin* issues utilize nonalienating, intimate text and visuals in abundance. In addition to their content, however, the process of obtaining a zine also encourages community affiliation. Discovering zines or *minikomi* typically involves word of mouth, visiting speciality local bookstores, or utilizing personal connections; in other words, it is difficult to discover a zine without connecting to and even becoming part of an alternative culture.⁷⁸

Regumi in the Literature

The zines I am examining were published by a lesbian group based in Tokyo called *Regumi Sutajio Tokyo* that began in the 1980s. Lesbian Japanese women started forming community groups in the 1960s and 1970s.⁷⁹ This community has been active since its inception in the 1960s via lesbian bars, dance parties, organizations, media creation, and gatherings.⁸⁰ These periods coincide with the increased use of identity terms related to same-sex sexuality, like the loanwords for lesbian (*rezubian*) and queer (*kuia*).⁸¹ This period of self-identification and community growth marks a shift from the early postwar years, where “deviant” female sexuality was often presented as an object of desire in erotic magazines intended for men. McLelland notes that these postwar erotic magazines might have had queer female readership.⁸² However, it is arguable that these lesbian zines a few decades later might be the first point in modern Japanese

⁷⁷ Duncombe, Stephen. *Notes from Underground*, 179.

⁷⁸ Duncombe, Stephen. *Notes from Underground*, 179.

⁷⁹ Maree, “The Un/State,” 294–295.

⁸⁰ James Welker, “Telling Her Story: Narrating a Japanese Lesbian Community,” *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 14, no. 4 (July 2010): 361–362.

⁸¹ Mark McLelland, “From Sailor-Suits,” 29.

⁸² McLelland, “From Sailor-Suits to Sadists,” 38–43.

history where queer women were collectively self-publishing for other queer women. Sugiura describes the creation of lesbian *minikomi* in detail:

In the beginning of the 1970s, women with identities such as “female homosexual” and “lesbian” began to communicate their experiences, and a series of *minikomi* were launched as a forum for these women’s communication... The first collective activity by lesbians is considered to be the *Wakakusa no Kai* lesbian circle established in 1971... In the latter half of the 1970s, women who felt unsatisfied with the methods of the *Wakakusa no Kai* and had contacts with the “women's lib” and “women's movement” successively published a series of mini-comics.⁸³

As Sugiura explains, these zines were a key means of communication and self-expression, especially during a period of intergroup dissatisfaction and community identity cultivation. Additionally, Welker notes that the first commercial periodicals related to queer women would not be published until the 1990s.⁸⁴ Without mass-produced commercial periodicals, the internet, or other means of media-mediated community connection, the role of *minikomi* as a lesbian (feminist) forum in the 1970s and 1980s is critical.

The lesbian group *Regumi no Gomame* started the zine *Regumi tsūshin* in 1985. However, a new group with overlapping members called *Regumi Sutajio Tokyo* (RST) took over the publication of this zine series in 1987 and opened an office space.⁸⁵ Maree describes the formation of *Regumi Sutajio*:

...Lesbian weekend retreats were formed by an alliance of international and Japanese feminists in 1985. These weekends were initially composed of mostly expatriate (white) women, but gradually attracted more and more Japanese women. After an incident in which organizers of the retreats were verbally harassed by the parents of a participant,

⁸³ Sugiura, “*Nihon ni okeru*” 162. Original text: 「1970年代に入ると「女性同性愛者」「レズビアン」などのアイデンティティをもつ女性たちが自らの経験を発信するようになり、彼女らの発信の場としてミニコミ誌が相次いで創刊された... レズビアンによる最初の集合的な活動は、1971年に発足したレズビアン・サークル「若草の会」だと見られている... 1970年代後半になると、若草の会のやり方に物足りなさを感じていた女性たち、「ウーマン・リブ」「女の運動」と接点のあった女性たちが相次いでミニコミ誌を発行する。」

⁸⁴ Welker, “Telling Her Story,” 368.

⁸⁵ Sugiura, “*Nihon ni okeru*,” 162–163.

Regumi Sutajio (Regumi Studio) opened the first lesbian community office in Tokyo in an effort to provide lesbians with a neutral safe space.⁸⁶

This new publication continued until 2013, authoring a total of 294 issues over two decades. The group's website's introductory page states that the *Regumi Sutajio* physical office in Tokyo closed in 2013, but it appears that a member still uploads an annual post around New Year's Day. According to Mizutani, the group was struggling with membership in the late 1990s and early 2000s due to labor shortages, members living outside of Tokyo, past alienation of bisexual and married lesbian women, lack of funding, and the group's political feminist nature putting off young queer women.⁸⁷ The website is still alive and functional, but it appears the group is no longer as active.⁸⁸ Additionally, the group created a digital archive of *Regumi tsūshin* covers from May 1995 to the final February 2013 issue. Each entry shows the cover page and describes the general contents of said issue. The "about" page on the archive website states that the group wishes to publish the content of the *minikomi* as well, but they need to get permission from all of the authors.⁸⁹

In my literature review process, I noticed that many secondary sources on queer and feminist Japanese history mention the role of *minikomi*, and several pieces mention *Regumi Sutajio* specifically. These sources suggest that this group's downtown office, events, and *minikomi* helped lesbian women accept their identity and find community. McLelland speaks about the group's endurance, saying:

⁸⁶ Maree, "The Un/State," 294.

⁸⁷ Mizutani, "Lesbian Tokyo: Identity, Sexuality and Community," M.A. thesis, California Institute of Integral Studies, 2001: 26–28; Sugiura, "*Nihon ni okeru*," 176.

⁸⁸ <https://regumi.sakura.ne.jp/retsushin/>

⁸⁹ <https://regumi.sakura.ne.jp/retsu-archive/about/>

The most enduring of lesbian organizations has been Regumi, a group founded in the late 1980s as a loose alliance of lesbians, some from the bar world and others involved in feminist activities... *Regumi tsūshin* (Regumi news) is its newsletter, published from 1985; it prints information about lesbian literature, various support and discussion groups and a telephone information line. Like many lesbian organizations, Regumi is staffed by a small volunteer force, which means that it is not possible for their office to be maintained as a “drop-in” space, as opening hours are determined by members’ availability.⁹⁰

The only sustained discussion of *Regumi Sutajio* in English-language literature seems to be in Mizutani’s 2001 thesis, “Lesbian Tokyo: Identity, Sexuality and Community.”⁹¹ Mizutani spends four pages discussing the group’s history and image; according to her ethnographic work in Tokyo, it began as a strictly lesbian group with overtly feminist and political roots and mainly middle-aged members.⁹² However, despite the numerous mentions of *Regumi Sutajio* and *Regumi tsūshin* in the literature, scholars have given relatively little attention to the actual *minikomi* issues.

Sugiura confirms the lack of literature on the zines’ content in her 2017 article on lesbian *minikomi* in the 1970s and 1980s. When discussing her analysis of lesbian *minikomi* content, she explains:

...The existence of the materials that my paper observes is so well known that records and historical accounts of the collective organization by lesbians mention them without fail... Despite the fact that the material is remembered in this way, only a few studies have ventured into the content of the published articles [in *minikomi*]; in my humble opinion, only Iino Yuriko (2008) and my manuscript (Sugiura 2008) have done so.⁹³

⁹⁰ McLelland, “Queer Japan,” 170.

⁹¹ Kristine Mizutani, “Lesbian Tokyo.”

⁹² Kristine Mizutani, “Lesbian Tokyo,” 26–27.

⁹³ Sugiura, “*Nihon ni okeru*,” 165. Original text: ...本稿が観察する資料の存在は、レズビアンによる集合的な動きをまとめた年譜や歴史記述が必ず言及するほど、よく知られている... そのようにして記憶される資料であるにもかかわらず、そこに掲載された記事の内容にまで踏み込んだ研究はわずかで、管見では、飯野由里子(2008)と拙稿(杉浦2008)のみである。

Since this article's publication in 2017, it appears that Sugiura's statement remains true. While *Regumi tsūshin* and other lesbian *minikomi* pop up in Japanese LGBTQ and feminist literature, the actual content of these zines remains relatively unstudied apart from Sugiura and Iino.

Sugiura highlights Iino's 2008 monograph "The Stories of <Us> Lesbians" (*Rezubian de Aru "Watashitachi" No Sutōrī*, レズビアンである「わたしたち」のストーリー). In this monograph, Iino closely reads articles from lesbian *minikomi*, including *Regumi tsūshin*, to tell the story of lesbians in Japan as a "we." She describes the purpose of the monograph as the following:

The story of the lesbian "we" is a story in which women, using the category of "lesbian," attempt to create and form a collective "we" that never existed before. However, the lesbian "we" created and formed is not created purely from the narrator's inner self, nor is it created by the "essence" of "being a lesbian." Rather, the lesbian "we" is created and shaped by the interaction between the narrator and the specific historical and cultural context in which the story is told.⁹⁴

Iino's method of examining the creation of a lesbian collective consciousness or identity through lesbian *minikomi* analysis informs my approach. She speaks to how the author-reader relationship created this sense of "we" and the importance of considering the historical and cultural context. Both Sugiura and Iino confirm the importance of *minikomi* in Japanese lesbian history, especially regarding identity formation and community-building. These Japanese-language pieces are critical components to understanding lesbian history, and I am indebted to these women's scholarship.

However, *Regumi Sutajio* did not receive Iino's book warmly. In a 2008 issue of *Regumi tsūshin*, they strongly expressed their concern "for not seeking consent from Regumi for quoting

⁹⁴ Iino Yuriko, "Rezubian de Aru "Watashitachi" No Sutōrī" レズビアンである「わたしたち」のストーリー [The Stories of "Us" Lesbians], Tokyo: Seikatsu Shoin, 2008: 53. Original text: 「レズビアンである〈わたしたち〉のストーリー」とは、「レズビアン」というカテゴリーを用いながら、女性たちがそれまで存在していなかったような(わたしたち)という集合性を創造・形成しようとしたストーリーである。だが、そこで創造・形成されるレズビアンである(わたしたち)とは、純粋に語り手の内面において生み出されるものでも、「レズビアンであること」の「本質」によって生み出されるものでもない。むしろ、レズビアンである(わたしたち)は、それを語った語り手とそれが語られた特定の歴史的・文化的文脈との間の相互関係において創造され形成されるものなのである。

so extensively from the *minikomi* and reproducing several of its covers, and for not even letting Regumi know about the publication of the book.”⁹⁵ I empathize with this response as a queer woman, but I concur with Welker’s perspective on the situation: “Regumi’s request for consent merely for quoting articles in a publication that is currently available at certain women’s centers around Japan troubles the line between public and private discourse and represents an untenable assertion of ownership over the way the group, including its history, is represented.”⁹⁶

Self-published materials are slippery, and their trajectory is difficult to control. Even as zines try to cultivate a space outside of mainstream media, there are still boundaries drawn and redrawn between “our world and theirs, integrity and selling out, purity and danger.”⁹⁷ Keeping these boundaries can help marginalized communities feel safer in relation to the very real threats that come along with existing mainstream society. I hope to follow Sugiura’s and Iino’s scholarly approach and respectfully interact with these *minikomi* as they are: an unownable part of queer history that deserves thoughtful consideration. I say this with a gentle heart. As a gesture of goodwill, I removed any bylines from the *minikomi* excerpts I utilize.

Anthropological secondary sources offer firsthand accounts of lesbian experience in modern Japan, with most studies interviewing lesbians in metropolitan areas about their experiences coming out, finding a sense of community, and meeting their partners. These interviews corroborate the previously mentioned literature about lesbian identity and community building. Many women in these case studies say that print media, digital media, and community played significant roles in identity formation and finding a sense of lesbian community in Japan. Kamano’s work interviewing lesbians offers insight into how lesbian women found community

⁹⁵ Welker, “Toward a History,” 161.

⁹⁶ Welker, “Toward a History,” 161–162.

⁹⁷ Duncombe, *Notes from Underground*, 154.

in Tokyo from the 1980s until 2002 (2005). She speaks to the impact of lesbian culture, saying, “The importance of the community from individual lesbians’ viewpoints varies, but even the fact of knowing “something” is out there makes a person’s life better.”⁹⁸ In this piece, she details how women contacted the lesbian community in Japan through a variety of sources. Many of her interviewees discuss their encounters with *Regumi tsūshin* and *Regumi Sutajio*, with one interviewee reporting that she sought information on lesbianism in a bookstore when she was finally ready to admit to herself that she was a “homosexual;” at the bookstore, she found *Regumi tsūshin* in a guidebook for women.⁹⁹ While this is one woman’s experience, Kamano highlights commonality in her interviewees’ reasons for lesbian community groups in the 1980s and 1990s, saying:

...Lesbian communities...play significant roles in the lives of lesbians, regardless of whether or not the women consciously sought something in contacting the community...Underlying all the experiences is some level of need for information about being and living as lesbians, need for connecting with people who are like them, and safe space in both the physical and non-physical sense. Socially, it is not just the simple fact of “they like men but we like women.” As long as lesbians are invisible, stigmatized, deprived of equal access to resources in society, with information relevant to lesbians not readily available and the norm requiring us to censor ourselves in our words and behavior in various contexts, “lesbian communities” are a lifeline.¹⁰⁰

She asserts that lesbians needed a sense of physical and imagined community, even if these women did not contact lesbian communities due to a specific need. As I will discuss in chapters two and three, this desire for physical and intangible belonging is apparent in *Regumi tsūshin*.

While many of the previous studies mentioned discuss LGBTQ identity and history at a macro level, there are fewer micro-level or bottom-up investigations of cultural production by Japanese queer women in the 1980s. My research helps corroborate these macro analyses with

⁹⁸ Saori Kamano, “Entering the Lesbian World in Japan,” *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 9, no. 1-2, (2005): 26.

⁹⁹ Kamano, “Entering the Lesbian World;” 20–21, 28.

¹⁰⁰ Kamano, “Entering the Lesbian World,” 26.

specific primary source evidence; if I find contradicting evidence, I will add questions to the existing discussion on historical women-loving women. Wallace’s 2019 State of the Field article provides a clear overview of lesbian studies in Japan, including lesbian history. Wallace argues that scholars need to “adopt flexible and creative approaches” to add to the academic body of work on Japanese lesbianism and warns against the recent trend in mainstream Japanese discourse of lumping all identities under the term “LGBT.”¹⁰¹ Hiruma corroborates this, saying, “When the term ‘homosexual’ [*dōseiai*] is used, it often implicitly refers only to male homosexuals, and female homosexuals are still invisible in both the everyday world and the academic field.”¹⁰² In summation, lesbian studies is still under-researched in Japanese studies and at risk of disappearing into LGBT studies; therefore, using primary historical sources about Sapphism is one way that I can add to the discourse and continue growing the field. The literature mentions *Regumi Sutajio*’s value as a key organization in Japanese lesbian history; building on this literature, I argue that their *minikomi* series, *Regumi tsūshin*, helped build lesbian community and self-acceptance through intimacy, validation, and community engagement.

Analyzing Textual and Visual Themes

I selected six excerpts from 1985 and 1987 issues of *Regumi tsūshin* from the materials I gathered at the JASE archive. I offer two arguments. First, the mix of hand-drawn elements and typed text simultaneously cultivates a sense of queer intimacy and group validity. Second, the rich content about in-person events suggests that these zines interacted with the physical lesbian community, supporting the potential of zines to create literal and cultural space for marginalized communities. Before analyzing specific excerpts, I will give an overview of the *Regumi tsūshin*

¹⁰¹ Wallace, “Lesbians and Queer Women,” 225–226.

¹⁰² Hiruma, “*Kindai nihon ni okeru*,” 9.

collection at the JASE archive. While I made copies of select pages, I was able to examine the full collection briefly. While my examination was not thorough, I gained several insights relevant to the study of *minikomi* history and materiality. These observations are heavily based on my years of experience with zines in both America and Japan; I am a zine author and have been running a local zine festival for over a decade. I am deeply familiar with the variety of analog and digital methods one might use to make a zine. The following insights are based on notes I took while analyzing the collection at JASE. While these observations reflect the materials in the JASE collection, these *minikomi* appear to reflect the (printed) series as a whole. In other words, I do not see any evidence of re-edited volumes or editions in the collection, suggesting that these issues were only printed during the time of self-publication. However, please note that these insights only apply to the printed issues of *Regumi tsūshin* in the JASE archive.

The *minikomi* in the JASE collection range in size and price, but the general formatting, article style, and visual style are consistent throughout the collection. Differences in materiality occur in issues from the mid to late 1990s. Earlier issues from around 1985 to 1998 used B5 size paper, while issues from 1998 to 2013 used A4. Issues were printed on white paper until around 1992; from the early 1990s to 2013, various shades of colored paper were often used for the cover. However, the ink was black in all of the issues I examined, seemingly for the entire run of the series. The body text of the earliest zines is partially handwritten, but the issues switched to primarily typed body text in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Mackie explains this change in the production of *minikomi* in the late 1980s and early 1990s, saying:

Newsletters which previously had to be roneoed from handwritten stencils can now be produced with professional-looking graphics, typefaces, and layout, thanks to the ready availability of cheap personal computers, desktop publishing facilities, and high-quality photocopiers.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Mackie, “Feminism and the Media,” 23. “Newsletters” refers to *minikomi*, and “roneoed” refers to a type of duplication process via a roneo machine used for printing.

The zines I am examining are from the same period as Mackie’s description. All the zines I examine use a mix of these analog and digital design elements, including handwritten text, typed text, illustrations, doodles, and clipart. Over time, the layout of the zines becomes slightly more orderly in design, with typed body text and fewer busy design elements. These elements are composed in both full-page layouts and magazine panels, including vertical and horizontal panels. The overall effect of the zine layout, formatting, and design creates a liminal impression between a personal, diary-like zine and a group newsletter.¹⁰⁴ The issues included articles on dating, LGBTQ language, coming out, community events, a community hotline, fun activities (*tanoshii koto*), and general information notices. The price per issue started at 150 yen in 1985, and it increased slightly over the years: 300 yen in 1987, 400 yen in 1989, and 500 yen in 2000.

Based on my findings, I split my analysis into two sections: Communicating Intimacy and Validity and Fostering and Sustaining Lesbian Community. I examine the design and subject matter in both sections; however, the first analysis chapter focuses on spreads with strong textual and visual design while the second analysis chapter focuses on the subject matter of longer articles. While it may be tempting to view zines as literary objects first, their “sculptural” nature demands that one examines their materiality and visuality first.¹⁰⁵ Thus, I intentionally do not focus on *just* the textual subject matter. However, my overarching goal is to investigate the impact of the aesthetic choices and subject matter in *Regumi Sutajio* zines, showing how both aspects cultivate a lesbian community based on friendly intimacy and self-acceptance.¹⁰⁶ In other

¹⁰⁴ Personal zines, called “perzines” in the zine community, are zines about the author’s life typically with a diary-like tone and intimate personal details.

¹⁰⁵ Piepmeier, “Why Zines Matter,” 214.

¹⁰⁶ I am intentionally referring to only a lesbian community. As I mentioned on page nineteen, bisexual women were seemingly not included in the *Regumi* lesbian community in this period.

words, I argue that the visual details and subject matter *both* help foster and sustain queer community, creating a synthesis of intimacy, validity, and belonging.

Chapter Two: Communicating Intimacy and Validity

It is clear from examining early issues of *Regumi tsūshin* that the cultivation of a positive lesbian connotation is one of the main purposes of this zine series. Implicit efforts to visually and textually communicate a sense of comradeship are abundant, as this chapter will elucidate. It is helpful to keep in mind that this zine series was being published during a period of reclamation and mobilization. Lesbian women were the first to sow grassroots political action and community-building based on sexual identity in the 1970s.¹⁰⁷ One major issue was the pornographic connotations of the terms *rezubian* and *rezu* that persisted from postwar perverse magazines and pornography intended for male consumption.¹⁰⁸ Even in the 1970s and 1980s, the general public perceived lesbian women as being “sexually uninhibited.”¹⁰⁹ By participating in their own cultural production created for and by lesbian women, they helped create new identity-centered understandings of the term *rezubian*. This is not to say that lesbian *minikomi* shied away from discussing sex; however, the imagery and language used feel approachable rather than sexualized. As I will discuss in this chapter, using friendly language, cute hand-drawn illustrations, and organic shapes cultivates a sense of comradeship. Simultaneously, the direct address to the reader and unapologetic embrace of lesbianism in the text affirm the validity of lesbianism as an identity.

¹⁰⁷ McLelland, *Queer Japan*, 160.

¹⁰⁸ McLelland, *Queer Japan*, 168–169.

¹⁰⁹ Sugiura, “*Nihon ni okeru*,” 162.

Join the Bouquet: Cheery Cherry Blossoms



Figure 1.1 A two-page spread on pages six and seven of the 1987 March issue introducing the staff of *Regumi Sutajio Tokyo*. I removed the names under each person for privacy.

The first excerpt I examine in detail is a two-page spread on pages six and seven in the 1987 March issue introducing the Tokyo-based staff of *Regumi Sutajio*. This graphic suggests the interconnected and growing nature of the community. Each member is drawn as a face on a sakura flower, and the flowers are scattered across the two-page spread with no visual indication of hierarchy. The entire spread is hand-drawn, apart from each member's short biography text inside each flower. Additionally, some flowers are empty, offering space for the reader to "join" this group and become part of the bouquet. The hand-drawn nature facilitates intimacy at this moment of introduction to the group; as a reader, one connects to the people making this publication through the clear evidence of a human hand. I posit that a much less friendly and intimate impression would be imparted if the group had listed each member and their information via orderly typed text without visual embellishment. However, each smiling face is drawn in a relatively consistent flat style, creating a sense of unity within the group. Each

individual member is highlighted, but the flower imagery and uniform drawing style cultivate a warm community atmosphere and offer a sense of belonging to a lesbian reader. Each short bio under the illustration appears to be written by each individual; this illustration-text combination highlights the personal nature of each staff member's words. They speak directly to readers, expressing their experiences and hopes as queer women.

This type of intimate address is common in zines, and the *Regumi* series often speaks directly to readers. While author-reader direct communication is not unique to zines, zines as a medium affect this interaction uniquely. Brouwer and Licona explain the type of care and intent key to this relationship, describing the interaction between the author and reader: "If you care for me as a writer, you will not expect me to sanitize my text; simultaneously, if you care for me as a reader, you will not sanitize your text."¹¹⁰ The lack of sanitation indicates intimacy and trust rather than carelessness.

On Cloud Nine

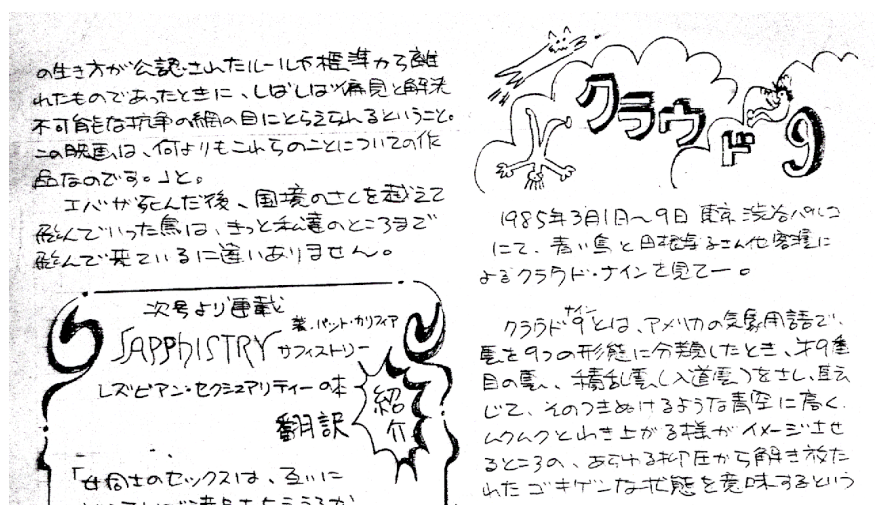


Figure 1.2 Cropped view of illustration details on page three (top half) of the 1985 May issue.

¹¹⁰ Daniel C. Brouwer and Adela C. Licona, "Trans(Affective)Mediation: Feeling Our Way from Paper to Digitized Zines and Back Again," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 33, no. 1 (2016): 75.

Before one reads the content, the visual impact of this excerpt conveys intimacy and energy. The text is written by the same hand based on its visual consistency and kanji writing style, but it is unclear if the hand-drawn adornment is by the same author. Regardless, the organic, rounded nature of the illustrations suggest a sense of levity and femininity, while the sketchy handwriting has an air of speed. The kana and kanji strokes appear to be made quickly and relatively casually; they are not written with perfect precision in mind. The illustrations on the top right of three figures among clouds have a similar energy. They are simple with minimal detail, yet one human figure tumbles upside down, another hangs onto a cloud, while a cat leaps above them. The text in this image reads “cloud nine” (*kuraudo 9*, クラウド9). In this same section, the bottom left panel introduces the 1980 book *Sapphistry: The Book of Lesbian Sexuality* by Pat Califia.

References to Western media and English phrases, like Sapphistry or cloud nine, are common in *Regumi tsūshin*. As I mentioned previously, the excerpts I examine throughout chapter two and three are from 1985 and 1987 issues. During this period, there was an “increase in transnational ties of lesbian groups from the latter half of the 1980s into the 1990s.”¹¹¹ Rather than simply borrowing from or calling to Western lesbian communities and media, I argue that these international connections help readers contextualize themselves in a larger, imagined lesbian community. Additionally, the awareness of women-loving women in other regions helps legitimize lesbianism as an identity and potentially reduces feelings of isolation or wrongness. Coupled with the bouncy imagery of clouds and jumping cats and human beings, it conveys a playful, pleasurable aspect of shared queer female identity.

¹¹¹ Welker, “Toward a History,” 161.

hand-drawn hearts and underlining both soften and strengthen the statements, gently urging readers to be brave in their efforts to come out.

Drawing on Direct Address

These three excerpts illustrate this *minikomi*'s personable visual and textual style. The authors commonly employ direct address to speak frankly to the reader like a friend or big sister. This direct address interplays with the hand-drawn or hand-written details, furthering the sense of intimacy. However, the use of typed text and direct writing style also suggests that *Regumi Sutajio* is an authority on lesbianism, therefore validating lesbianism as an identity.¹¹² In other words, combining hand-drawn elements with direct address and typed text creates an atmosphere intimate enough to welcome new members. As Duncombe argues, “stressing the personal is a way of seizing authority” and communicating that they matter as lesbian women.¹¹³ Simultaneously, this combination assures the reader of *Regumi*'s intentionality and validity as a group. They spent the time and effort collectively creating a finished *minikomi* with text and visuals, yet readers can still see the human hand behind this creation. The hand-drawn, amateur elements of zines create a sense of familiarity. Duncombe explains: “Instead of emulating the slickness of the commercial mass media, the illustrations in zines are more reminiscent of the doodles and sketches in the margins of a personal letter: a style of intimate connection.”¹¹⁴ This intimate style mixed with an ample amount of effort closes the distance between the medium and the reader without completely losing the authority and validity of published materials.

As discussed in my literature review, LGBTQ studies literature confirms the importance of *Regumi Sutajio* and *Regumi tsūshin* in Japanese lesbian history. These excerpts illustrate how

¹¹² I use “direct” to mean frank as well as direct address.

¹¹³ Duncombe, Stephen. *Notes from Underground*, 34.

¹¹⁴ Duncombe, Stephen. *Notes from Underground*, 106.

the textual and visual content of *Regumi tsūshin* both reflected the contemporary lesbian community in Tokyo while also cultivating their desired community. Additionally, the language and imagery unapologetically embrace lesbianism and suggest the positive, playful side of female queer identity. While *Regumi Sutajio*'s history is not without pitfalls and conflict, *Regumi tsūshin* is successful in communicating the Japanese lesbian community as a blooming, welcoming intangible and tangible space. While this promise of a welcoming community may not have always been fulfilled, especially for bisexual or married women-loving women, the text itself is successful in its communication.¹¹⁵ The content of these *minikomi* also suggest that this call for community participation resulted in increased physical community. As I will examine in the next chapter, the content of *Regumi tsūshin* shows the group's desire for in-person community events and relative success in event planning.

¹¹⁵ Mizutani, "Lesbian Tokyo," 26–28; Sugiura, "*Nihon ni okeru*," 176.

Chapter Three: Fostering and Sustaining a Physical Lesbian Community

Through examining excerpts from these early issues, I argue that the content and visual style communicate the group's intention to create a welcoming community via markers of intimacy. While these zines contain personal reflections and stories, the general visual and textual themes are focused outward rather than inward. Additionally, the overall effect is more intimate than a simple newsletter. For example, there are consistent reports on group meetings and outings, as one might find in a newsletter, but the tone is decidedly warmer than a simple informational report. To illustrate my arguments, I highlight four excerpts from the March and May 1987 issues. As mentioned previously, the group *Regumi Sutajio Tokyo* took over this *minikomi* series in 1987. While I examined issues from other years for this project, I am focusing on this year to examine community-building. Since 1987 is the first year of *Regumi Sutajio's* stewardship, I argue that examining these issues helps us understand the group's intentionality with their organization and zine. The Tokyo lesbian community was extremely proactive in the 1970s and 1980s; examining the beginnings of this *minikomi* series helps us understand the immediate and lasting impact of their activity.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ Welker, "From Women's Liberation," 57–60.

Embarkation: Get on the Boat!

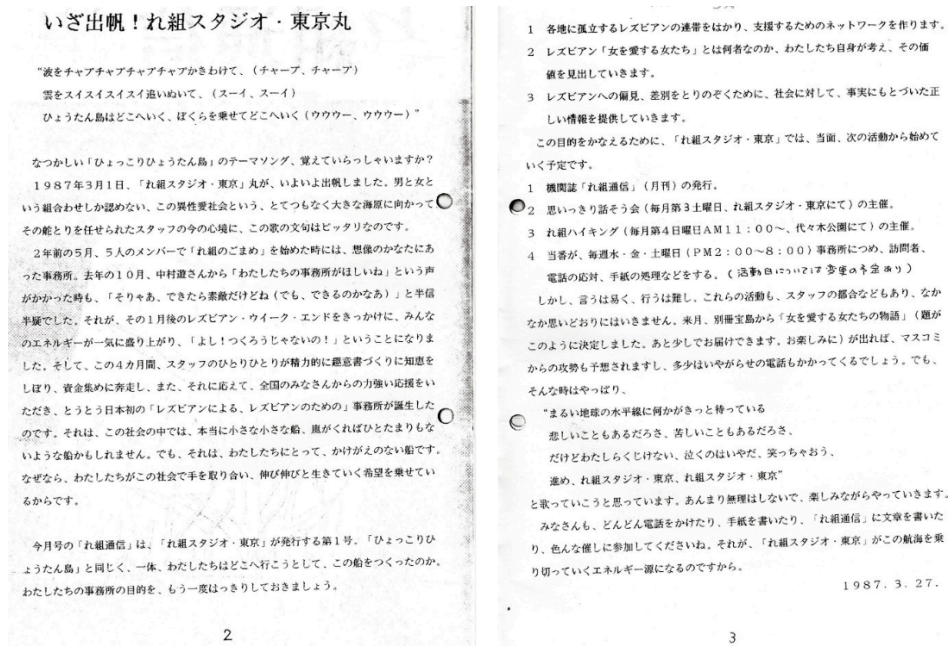


Figure 2.1 The introduction of *Regumi Sutajio Tokyo* on pages two and three of the 1987 March issue. The byline is removed for privacy.

The 1987 March issue formally introduces the *Regumi Sutajio Tokyo* group and this *minikomi* series. As mentioned previously, the *Regumi Sutajio* took over publishing this zine series this year, hence the introduction. Page two explains the literal and figurative origin story of *Regumi Sutajio*. According to this issue, this organization was born out of the five-member lesbian group *Regumi no Gomame* in 1985. In 1986, they raised funds, got an office, and gathered support from around the country. In 1987, they officially became *Regumi Sutajio*. Figuratively, this passage imagines the group as a boat named the *Regumi Sutajio Tokyo Maru* setting sail in “the vast ocean of this heterosexual society which only recognizes the union of a man and a woman” (男と女という組み合わせしか認めない、この異性愛社会という、とてつもなく大きな海原に向かって)。The metaphor continues a few lines down, saying:

In this society, it may be quite a tiny boat unable to weather a strong storm. But, that boat, to us, it is an irreplaceable boat. This is because it carries the hope that we may join together, hand-in-hand, and live freely in this society.

...この社会の中では、本当に小さな小さな船、嵐がくればひとたまりもないような船かもしれないかもしれません。でも、それは、わたしたちにとって、かけがえのない船です。なぜなら、わたしたちがこの社会で手を取り合い、伸び伸びと生きていく希望を乗せているからです。

This group is “setting sail” into unwelcoming heteropatriarchal territory, implying that this is a new collective endeavor facilitated by the communal nature of seafaring. While their boat may be small, they invite the reader to get on board. Like the community of staff members introduced via cherry blossoms, this imagery communicates the intimate yet welcoming nature of the organization. They also admit that boarding this boat carries risk, as it may be “unable to weather a strong storm” due to its modest size. This risky but welcoming embarkation suggests coming out, whether to oneself or one’s community. Still, perhaps lesbian readers are already drowning in “the vast ocean of this heterosexual society,” and any lifeboat is a welcome lifeboat.

Page three clarifies the purpose of their group, office space, and this *minikomi*, noting that it is similar to the intent of the previous issues before their stewardship. The three purposes of their group are explained as follows:

- 1) To create a network of solidarity and support isolated lesbians in various regions.
- 2) To think about what it means to be a lesbian “woman who loves women,” including thinking about ourselves, and discover the value of this.
- 3) To provide factual and accurate information to society in order to eliminate prejudice and discrimination against lesbians.

1 各地に孤立するレズビアンへの連帯をはかり、支援するためのネットワークを作ります。
 2 レズビアン「女を愛する女たち」とは何者なのか、わたしたち自身が考え、その価値を見出していきます。
 3 レズビアンへの偏見、差別をとりのぞくために、社会に対して、事実にもとづいた正しい情報を提供していきます。

These three goals speak to the intent of the group, but they also coincide with the intent of zine-making, illustrating the intertwined nature of zines and queerness. Licona asserts that “the very act of writing zines is undertaken as an act of subversion and revision.”¹¹⁷ These three goals

¹¹⁷ Adela C. Licona, *Zines in Third Space: Radical Cooperation and Borderlands Rhetoric* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), 19.

show how the group intends to subvert and revise: they are going against the heteropatriarchy by connecting and celebrating women-loving women and correcting public misinformation.

Additionally, these goals span macro and micro spheres; they mention the “smallness” of their ship in this introduction, yet their goals illustrate how far they hope to reach. Meaning, they intend to care for and celebrate their own while engaging in public discourse and mass media.

This aligns with my overarching argument that *Regumi* zines are political yet intimate, a combination that makes this *minikomi* series a powerful yet warm tool for facilitating community formation and social change.

Continuing on page three, they list four planned activities to help achieve these goals: 1) publishing *Regumi tsūshin* (monthly), 2) organizing “Let’s talk to our heart’s content” meetings every third Saturday of the month at their Tokyo office, 3) organizing hiking on the fourth Sunday of every month, and 4) having members in their office every Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday from 2 pm to 8 pm to greet visitors, answer phone calls, handle letters, and so on.¹¹⁸

While they acknowledge that there have been struggles in consistently holding these activities due to staffing issues, they remain steadfast in their efforts. Due to the upcoming release of the mook *Stories of Women Who Love Women*, they anticipate receiving intense media attention and possibly anti-lesbian phone calls.¹¹⁹ In order to weather this upcoming storm, they ask readers to cheer on *Regumi Sutajio* and have fun participating in the community. They explain this call for participation, saying it will “become the source of energy for *Regumi Sutajio Tokyo* to survive this voyage.”¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Paraphrased for brevity.

¹¹⁹ “Mook” refers to a magazine-book.

¹²⁰ Original text: *それが、「れ組スタジオ・東京」がこの航海を乗り切っていくエネルギー源になるのですから。*

casual script, cultivating a sense of trust and intimacy between the author and the reader.¹²² It stands out among the typed text, the slightly irregular curve of her name in kanji showing the humanity behind this (self) publication. A spelling error is corrected, seemingly in her hand as well. In a professionally published piece, this might be an unprofessional blunder; however, this small correction endears the reader. She squeaks in a missing small katakana *i* to correctly spell “meeting.” A smaller version of the smile emoticon footnotes the page, mentioning that an Australian woman named Sue McNab drew the cover, and she has also done cover art for the English-language *minikomi* called Daiski•Daiku. This supports the idea that lesbian communities in Japan did not exist in isolation; international cultural exchange occurred as lesbian communities strengthened.¹²³ Visually, this text begins with a wider smile and ends with a smaller, reassuring smile. These icons bookend the text, turning a largely functional page into a warm welcome.

¹²² As noted previously, I removed this byline in figures 2.2 and 2.3 for privacy.

¹²³ An example of international exchange is provided in the following subsection.

Celebrating with a Spring Festival

女の春祭りレポート



れ組スタジオのオープンを記念して催されたパーティ、女の春祭りは、70名余りの参加者を迎え、3月1日(日)午後3時から8時まで続けました。スライドショー、コンサート、ディスコ、オークション、仮装大賞と中身もぎっしり。カンパも予想以上に集り、充実したパーティだったと思います。

<スライド>



70年代アメリカで、ゲイに対する排斥運動が起こりました。ところがレズビアンは無視され、排斥の対象にさえされませんでした。これに憤りを感じた二人のレズビアンが、「それでも私達は存在する。」という事を証明しようとして作ったスライド“women loving women”を上映しました。

内容は、100名近いレズビアンの人上の紹介、レズビアングループ、レズビアンニュースレターの紹介、レズビアンの主に文化活動を通した一般社会への貢献といったもの。スライドの作られた背景を考えると、家庭の中でcome outしようとしたレズビアンが、ともすれば一突にふされて終わってしまいがちな日本の現状と、かなり似ているのではないのでしょうか。

<コンサート>



歌ってくれたのは、レズビアン、バイセクシュアル、ストレートのフェミニスト。演奏を聞いていて私が思ったのは、やっている人自身が楽しんでいれば、誰でも引込まれるということ。レズビアンとして生きていく時と似ていると思いました。

<ディスコ>

踊っている人、おしゃべりに熱中する人、食べている人、その全部を同時にする人。ディスコの楽しみ方もさまざま。中でもきわめつけは、晴着を脱ぎ捨てた人下にはぼつち着込んだジャージ姿が何とも言えません。

<仮装大賞>

大賞は“オズの魔法使い”のかかしの扮装者。帽子を脱ぐと、ざるに編み込まれた真赤な毛糸の髪、ソケットをガムテープで貼り付けた鼻は思惑しかなかったのでしょうか？その他にも、ちゃんちゃんこ姿で、昔中にDonald Duckをおんぶしていた人や、長い

4

つけまつげがとれてしまっ、おにぎりの御飯をおりなおしてつけていた人、おそろいのバジャマに身を包み、双生児と書いたワッペンを貼って(カップル指向に対する皮肉?) いる人などなど、さまざまに個性がたのしめたとします。

<オークション>

品物の多さもさることながら、流暢なせり師のいいまわしには、驚きました。

楽しめるパーティではなかったかと思えます。それでも予想外に気分が悪くなる人がでたり、大変だと感じる面もありました。スタッフとして初めて参加した私個人の感想を正直に言うと、ちょっと疲れたので、これからやるとしたら、もっと手軽なものをやってみるのもよいと思いました。それでは、女の春祭りを皮きりとした「れ組スタジオ・東京」の活動が、ゆっくりでもたゆまないで、できるだけ多くのレズビアンの力になれることを祈りつつレポートをおわります。



女の春祭り収支報告



*収入総額	¥283,947
内訳	
パーティ券売上げ	¥125,100
オークション売上げ	¥60,947
缶ビール売上げ	¥44,400
カンパ	¥53,500
*支出総額	¥125,741
内訳	
会場使用費	¥9,470
会場裝飾費	¥2,530
コンサート出演費	¥53,000
機材運搬費	¥10,055
ドリンク&おつまみ費	¥17,435
チラシ&チケット製作費	¥5,080
郵送料	¥7,700
渉外費	¥12,050
雑費	¥8,421
純益	¥158,206

去る3月1日に行われたパーティでの純益は、れ組スタジオ・東京の維持運営費として活用します。スタッフ一同、心より参加者の皆さんのご協力に感謝するとともに、今後ともよりいっそうのカンパとご支援をお願いします。本当にありがとうございます。

(パーティ会計・望月タオ)

5

Figure 2.4 A spring event report on pages four and five of the 1987 May issue. I removed the byline for privacy.

This two-page spread in the March 1987 issue reports on the group's spring *matsuri* (festival) event held on March 1st. The report explains that they wanted to commemorate the opening of *Regumi Sutajio* with a party as well as raise funds. The spread details the day's events: a slideshow, a concert, a disco, a costume contest, and an auction. It also includes a detailed record of the day's income, expenses, and attendance. The event lasted from 3 pm until 8 pm, and over seventy people participated. *Regumi Sutajio* obtained revenue from event ticket sales, auction profits, canned beer sales, and donations. Expenses included the venue rental, decorations, performance fees, drinks, snacks, flyers, etc. The total revenue and expenses totals are underlined by hand, and the net profit of 158,206 yen is outlined in a hand-drawn box.

Outside of those three hand-drawn points of emphasis, the entire spread is digitally created through typed text and clip art. Seven of the eight pieces of clip art contain icon-like images within a slightly bowed rectangle, similar to the shape of a tube television screen. Only one icon has perfectly straight sides. This icon opens the spread at the top of page four, and it consists of a simple icon of an eye with a flat globe with longitude and latitude lines. A thin rectangle surrounds the eye, and “DOCUMENTARY” is written underneath in English. This is the only icon with English text.¹²⁴ Right above this clip art, the title of the spread reads: “Women’s Spring Matsuri Report” (女の春祭りレポート). The close juxtaposition of the English “documentary” with the katakana “report” imparts a feeling of legitimacy to the event. Yes, it is an enjoyable spring festival, but they communicate to the reader that this community event is worth reporting on.

The following subsection describes a slide show they watched, emphasized with clip art of an old-fashioned movie camera. The text describes the slideshow, “women loving women.”¹²⁵ They explain that it was created by two American lesbians in response to lesbian invisibility and exclusion in the 1970s. It introduces around 100 lesbian women and lesbian groups, newsletters, and contributions to society. The English “documentary” icon above looks on, suggesting both the gaze of *Regumi* members toward foreign lesbian communities as well as the gaze of the reader. The end of the section relates the American slideshow to their situation in Japan, saying:

If you think about the context behind the slides that were made, the situation of lesbians trying to come out to their families but tend to be laughed at and dismissed is quite similar to Japan.

¹²⁴ Further down on the same page, one other piece of clip art has “drama” written in katakana within a television-like curved rectangle.

¹²⁵ The lack of capitalization is preserved from the primary source.

スライドの作られた背景を考えると、家庭の中でcome outしようと試みたレズビアンが、ともすれば一笑にふされて終わってしまいがちな日本の現状と、かなり似ているのではないのでしょうか。

This moment of international empathy regarding the anxiety of coming out to one's family provides the reader with a broader sense of lesbianism. Not only can they relate to Japanese lesbians, but they are also finding common ground with American lesbians. Despite the somewhat serious tone, the movie camera icon, with its curved lines and titled angle, suggests that this was still a fun activity.

Imagined Boats and In-Person Parties: Creating Community

These excerpts are all from 1987 issues of *Regumi tsūshin*, and they help contextualize lesbianism in this historical moment. As explained previously, lesbianism as an identity was only beginning to separate from heterosexual male desire in the 1970s. Additionally, lesbian women and feminist women started organizing in earnest in the 1970s and 1980s. These excerpts show that *Regumi* is intentionally cultivating a sense of “we” intended to affirm lesbian readers across the country and spur a physical community in Tokyo. Even if readers cannot attend the spring festivals and hiking weekends, they are all on the same metaphorical boat. Iino describes how obtaining a steady sense of queer identity is the result of participation, saying, “...such ‘steadfastness’ does not come through the ‘discovery’ of deeper truths. It can only be obtained through participation in a particular historical community or discourse.”¹²⁶ Through participating in the *Regumi* community, whether as a reader or in-person member, lesbian women helped shape and understand their queer identity.

The ample number of in-person events as well as successful fundraising numbers helps show the sustainable potential of *Regumi* and physical lesbian communities in this period. Additionally, publishing a detailed budget for a well-attended spring festival only two months

¹²⁶ Iino, “*Rezubian de aru*,” 53.

after publishing the *Regumi Sutajio*'s welcome message is a strategic move that communicates the group's ability to deliver on explicit and implicit promises of community. The group often spent several pages, including full two-page spreads, reporting past events and informing readers of upcoming events. This is not to detract from the ample space given to topics like media, dating advice, and news; it is noteworthy that community-related topics were given ample page space and treated as equally important topics.

As I have illustrated, the content and visual elements communicate *Regumi Sutajio*'s intention to cultivate a physical community in Tokyo. Ample page space is given to past and upcoming community events to simultaneously communicate the success of their efforts and encourage women to attend. In particular, the inclusion of the spring festival budget shows a strong sense of transparency, helping make the reader feel close to the group and building trust. The focus on and desire for in-person events and community is further contextualized if we recall that *Regumi Sutajio* was created, in part, to "provide lesbians with a neutral safe space" after lesbian women were verbally harassed at a weekend retreat.¹²⁷ I argue that *Regumi Sutajio* utilized *Regumi tsūshin* as a means to help get everyone on board, so to speak, to cultivate a lesbian community with stronger numbers, resources, and vitality.

¹²⁷ Maree, "The Un/State of Lesbian Studies," 294.

Conclusion

An analysis of the visual and textual components of *Regumi* zines illustrates how the lesbian group *Regumi Sutajio* in Japan intentionally cultivated a sense of intimacy and validity to grow and sustain their community. I examined this intentionality through the visual and textual elements in early issues. The visuals of the zine draw on the validity of typed text and magazine-like structure; however, the hand-drawn illustrations, hand-written text, and playful clipart cultivate an approachable sense of intimacy. Most lines are curved, and visual elements are often slightly askew or stretched. There is just enough irregularity to suggest a queer human hand without coming off as haphazard or careless. Visual markers of a queer human might prove affective to readers, helping women embrace their own explicit and implicit queerness as a lesbian.

Additionally, the emphasis on in-person community events suggests that this *minikomi* also functioned as a method to foster and sustain physical community and networking. Piepmeier discusses the potential of zines to foster relationship-building:

Zines are an inherently hopeful medium. They counter the cultural imperative “to keep distant and distrustful, alienated, lonely and safe” and make visible the desire for community and human connection. More importantly, they offer a model for how individuals might form relationships - not simply imagined ones, but relationships rooted in quirky, physical realities. Zines' materiality produces embodied community.¹²⁸

Regumi tsūshin is a key example of this hopeful desire, and I believe Piepmeier’s assertions can be taken a step further. If zines counter the cultural pressure to keep oneself isolated and alienated, I argue that their hopeful power is especially potent for those that feel the most alienated and unsafe. However, what happens when the object that helped you build community and feel safer is no longer necessary for connection or self-acceptance?

¹²⁸ Piepmeier, “Why Zines Matter,” 235.

While I am prone to lamenting the end of a zine series, perhaps the conclusion of *Regumi tsūshin* shows that it was largely successful in its mission to cultivate an in-person community. Additionally, the rise of networking using *minikomi* and the internet may have reduced the need for *Regumi tsūshin* over time. Mizutani speaks to the group's status as of the early 2000s, saying:

It has been difficult to retain new members because once many of the more geographically isolated lesbians use Regumi's newsletter to make friends and network into a community, they stop subscribing to Regumi membership. It seems that in some senses, Regumi's newsletter is its own demise; the invaluable service of linking newcomers into the community often is the same reason some women stop subscribing.¹²⁹

Mizutani describes *Regumi tsūshin* as doing a "service" for the community, especially newcomers. Zine-making can be described as an "internetworked, cultural practice,"¹³⁰ and it appears that the *Regumi* group succeeded in broadening their lesbian network via this method of cultural production. If, as Piepmeier argues, zines are a hopeful medium intended to serve a community, it is encouraging to see that some of *Regumi's* collective hopes were fulfilled.

However, I do not doubt that the *Regumi Sutajio Tokyo Maru* boat is still a necessary vessel in the sea of heteropatriarchy. Zobl describes why people make self-published magazines:

Zine makers turn to self-publishing for a variety of reasons: for personal expression, as an outlet for creativity, out of isolation, as a supportive space and network tool in search of like-minded friends and community, and as a form of cultural resistance and political critique. But one of the main reasons is to create an oppositional history and an alternative to the narrow and distorted mainstream representation of women, queer people, and transgender people, an alternative that reflects and resists their cultural devaluation.¹³¹

As Zobl suggests, self-published magazines and *minikomi* by queer women offer perspectives into lives and thoughts often absent in mainstream media. With further study, we can help map

¹²⁹ Mizutani, "Lesbian Tokyo," 27.

¹³⁰ Michelle Comstock, "Grrrl Zine Networks: Re-composing Spaces of Authority, Gender, and Culture," *A Journal of Composition Theory* 21, no. 2 (2001): 404.

¹³¹ Zobl, "Comparative Perspectives Symposium," 5.

out this ocean and recognize those who have faced its troubled waters, whether it's via *Bluestocking* or *Regumi tsūshin*.

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