

# **Hidden Borders: The Impact of Gender and Sexual Norms on Interpersonal Bonds in Japan**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Japan's gender and sexual norms have been influenced by many factors including its religious systems of Shintoism, Confucianism and Buddhism, its 19<sup>th</sup> century contact with the West, and underlying cultural values that prioritize a collective and rigidly hierarchical social structure. However, probably the strongest influence has been the industrialization process of the Meiji period and a new concept of national service that saw men dedicate their lives to careers and women to the concept of the 'good wife, wise mother'. The deeply entrenched gender roles these produced, which sacrificed interpersonal bonds for the development of a productive workforce, combined with a bifurcated view of sex, which led to a pure public world balanced against an impure 'nighttime' world, has led to serious problems of emotional communication and sexual health among modern Japanese people. These issues have given rise to numerous forms of social anxiety, stress, and anomalous behavior, and have contributed to decreasing marriage rates, lower levels of childbirth and a significant decline in sexual activity among people of all ages. This paper will outline the roots of these issues, their impact on society and what a failure to respond might mean for modern Japan.

**Keywords:** demographics, sex industry, sex worker, sexuality, virginity