

Resistance to Gender Norms in Sayaka Murata's *Convenience Store Woman*: A Feminist Analysis of Women's Roles in Japan's Patriarchal Society

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Abstract

This study examines resistance to gender norms in Sayaka Murata's *Convenience Store Woman* through a feminist literary perspective. This study focuses on the representation of women's roles within Japan's patriarchal society where social expectations surrounding marriage, career, and femininity strongly shape women's identities. This research employs a qualitative method using feminist literary criticism by Judith Butler about Gender Performativity. The analysis explores the narrative strategies and the characters in reinforcing feminist discourse within the context of modern Japan. The findings reveals that the main character, Keiko Furukura, is portrayed as a form of resistance to the dominant gender norm in Japan. Her rejection of conventional life trajectories such as marriage and corporate success destabilizes hegemonic ideals of femininity and exposes the constraints imposed by patriarchal values. Through its characters and narrative strategies, the novel also advances a feminist critique by revealing patriarchal values that marginalize women. Ultimately, this study demonstrates that *Convenience Store Woman* articulates a subtle yet powerful feminist critique by foregrounding nonconformity as a form of resistance. This study also reveal that the novel redefines female autonomy beyond socially imposed ideals of womanhood.

Keywords: Feminism; Gender Performativity; Japanese Society

Introduction

Gender norms and societal expectations have long shaped women's roles in patriarchal societies. often limiting their agency and individuality. In Japan, where traditional gender roles remain deeply entrenched, women frequently encounter rigid social pressures to conform to prescribed roles as caregivers, wives, and mothers (Belarmino & Roberts, 2019). Study by Joseph (2025) demonstrates that these expectations confine women within domestic and caregiving roles limiting women's personal aspirations. These expectations not only regulate women's life choices but also marginalize those who deviate from socially sanctioned norms. As a result, women who resist conventional trajectories of marriage and career are often perceived as abnormal or incomplete within the social order (Gunawan, 2024).

Literary works often reflect and critique the social realities in which they are produced, offering insight into how gender norms operate at both individual and structural levels. In the context of Japanese society, contemporary literature has increasingly addressed the pressures faced by women who fail to conform to dominant expectations surrounding marriage, career stability, and femininity. Sayaka Murata's *Convenience Store Woman* emerges as a significant literary response to these conditions by portraying the everyday life of a woman who exists outside socially sanctioned norms. The novel centers on Keiko Furukura, a single, childless woman whose long-term employment in a convenience store challenges conventional ideals of success and womanhood in Japan. Rather than depicting resistance through overt rebellion, Murata presents a form of quiet nonconformity that exposes the rigid nature of patriarchal expectations. Through its narrative focus on routine, conformity, and social surveillance, the novel reflects the broader societal pressures experienced by women in Japan while simultaneously questioning the legitimacy of those norms.

Previous research on gender norms in Japan and Japanese literature highlights how socially constructed expectations limit women's agency and individual identity. Scholars have shown that Japanese cultural norms such as the ideology of "good wife, wise mother" confine women to socially sanctioned roles and restrict their independence (Safitri & Sumaryani, 2025). Literary studies further reveal how women characters resist traditional roles and assert bodily autonomy, critiquing patriarchal structures through narrative strategies and character choices (Pertiwi et al., 2025). Additionally, analyses of normative female figures in Japanese literary tradition demonstrate how patriarchal hegemony continues to shape women's identities within texts, reinforcing the persistence of gendered social expectations across historical periods (Ariefa & Pratiwi, 2021). Collectively, these studies suggest that resistance to gender norms in Japan functions within a complex dynamic of conformity, marginalization, and agency, both in society and in literature.

Despite growing scholarly attention to gender norms in Japanese society and their representation in literature, existing studies have primarily focused on sociological analyses of women's lived experiences or thematic discussions of conformity and resistance in literary texts. While previous research has examined patriarchal ideology, female marginalization, and alternative life choices, limited attention has been paid to how resistance to gender norms is constructed through gender performativity in contemporary Japanese fiction. In particular, few studies have systematically applied Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity to analyze how female characters disrupt normative femininity through everyday practices rather than overt political resistance. *Convenience Store Woman* offers a significant case study in this regard, as it portrays resistance not through activism or rebellion, but through sustained nonconformity to socially prescribed life trajectories. By centering an unconventional female protagonist who refuses marriage, motherhood, and corporate ambition, the novel provides a unique literary space to examine how gender norms are performed, destabilized, and reconfigured. Therefore, this study is important in advancing feminist literary criticism by bridging sociocultural discussions of gender norms in Japan with a performativity-based literary analysis, highlighting how subtle forms of resistance can redefine female autonomy within patriarchal societies.

Based on the identified research gap, this study focuses on examining how resistance to gender norms is constructed in Sayaka Murata's *Convenience Store Woman* within the context of

Japan's patriarchal society. Rather than approaching gender resistance solely as a sociological phenomenon, this study emphasizes literary representation by analyzing characterization, narrative strategies, and everyday practices depicted in the novel. Drawing on Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, the research seeks to understand how gender is enacted, regulated, and disrupted through Keiko Furukura's actions and identity. By foregrounding performativity, this study positions resistance not as overt defiance but as sustained nonconformity that challenges normative femininity and socially imposed ideals of womanhood.

Based on the above background, this study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How are patriarchal gender norms regarding marriage, career, and femininity represented in the novel?
2. How is resistance to gender norms constructed in *Convenience Store Woman* within Japan's patriarchal society?
3. How is gender performativity represented through Keiko Furukura's actions and identity in *Convenience Store Woman*?

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design using feminist literary criticism combined with qualitative content analysis to examine resistance to gender norms in Sayaka Murata's *Convenience Store Woman*. The primary data source is the novel itself, while secondary data include academic books and journal articles related to gender norms, patriarchy, and Japanese society. Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity serves as the main analytical framework for interpreting how femininity is constructed, performed, and challenged within the text.

The analysis is conducted through qualitative content analysis involving several stages. First, relevant textual units such as narrative descriptions, character actions, dialogues, and interactions are identified and categorized based on themes related to marriage, career, and femininity. Textual excerpts are selected according to two criteria: (1) their explicit or implicit representation of gendered expectations imposed on women, and (2) their illustration of conformity, negotiation, or resistance toward these expectations, particularly through the experiences of the protagonist, Keiko Furukura.

Next, the selected data are then coded and interpreted to examine patterns of gender performance and nonconformity, particularly through the character of Keiko Furukura. Finally, the findings are analyzed critically using Butler's concept of gender performativity to reveal how everyday practices and narrative strategies function as subtle forms of resistance to patriarchal gender norms. This approach allows the study to systematically explore how the novel reconfigures female autonomy within a patriarchal social structure.

Result and Discussion

The study identified 53 relevant sentences representing gender norms, which were categorized into three themes: femininity (25), career (17), and marriage (11). The analysis reveals that the novel most frequently challenges normative constructions of femininity, followed by career and marriage norms, as illustrated in Figure 1.

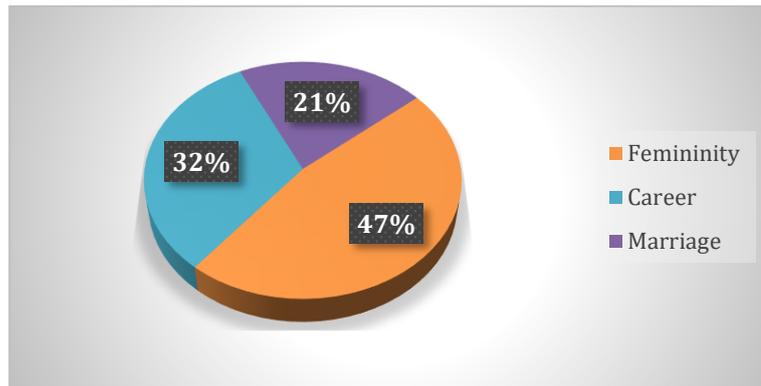


Figure 1. Distribution of Gender Norm Themes in *Convenience Store Woman*

Representation of Patriarchal Gender Norms in Marriage

In *Convenience Store Woman*, patriarchal gender norms are represented as socially enforced expectations that regulate women's identities, life choices, and social value. The novel portrays marriage as a compulsory marker of normal womanhood. The novel represents marriage as a compulsory marker of normal womanhood through repeated social interactions in which unmarried women are framed as incomplete, abnormal, or burdensome. Marriage is consistently constructed as a prerequisite for social legitimacy, adulthood, and respectability, rather than as a personal choice.

Keiko is repeatedly pressured because she remains unmarried at the age of 36. Although the novel does not show direct mockery, the narration clearly suggests that people around her judge her marital status through their reactions and attitudes. These judgments imply that marriage is treated as a standard expectation for women. In this way, the novel portrays marriage as a compulsory marker of what is considered "normal" womanhood. The data supporting this interpretation are presented in Table 1.

Tabel 1. Analysis of Marriage of Compulsory Marker of Womanhood

Data	Textual Evidence	Interpretation
(D1/C SW/M /ELS)	"Keiko, kau belum menikah?" "Belum." <i>Ekspresi bingung menggelayuti wajah Yukari. (p.40)</i>	Marriage as an Expected Life Stage for Adult Women
(D1/C SW/M /ABN)	<i>Di antara empat belas atau lima belas orang yang berkumpul, hanya ada dua orang selain aku yang belum menikah. Tak ada pikiran apa pun di benakku karena tidak semua yang datang berpasangan, tapi Miki yang masih lajang berbisik padaku, "Cuma kita yang tak bisa berdiri dengan kepala tegak, iya kan?" (p.78)</i>	Unmarried Women Framed as Abnormal/Embarrassing

(D1/C SW/M /SLR)	<p><i>"Furukura-san, kau beruntung. Berkat aku, kau yang tadinya menanggung tiga penderitaan dengan status sebagai lajang, perawan, dan pekerja minimarket, sekarang bisa jadi bagian dari masyarakat yang sudah menikah. Semua akan berasumsi kau bukan perawan lagi dan orang sekitar akan menganggapmu manusia yang layak dihargai. Sosokmu yang seperti itulah yang paling membahagiakan mereka. Kau harus bersyukur."</i> (p.80)</p>	<p>Marriage Women seen as Social Legitimacy and Respect</p>
(D1/C SW/M /SB)	<p><i>"Perempuan lanjut usia di Zaman Jomon yang tak bisa melahirkan anak, tak menikah, dan berkeliaran di desa. Hanya jadi beban buat desa."</i> (p.92)</p>	<p>Unmarried Women as Social Burden</p>

Marriage as an Expected Life Stage for Adult Women

The excerpt below illustrates how marriage is constructed as a normative and expected life stage for adult women in Japanese society:

Data(D1/CSW/M/ELS)

"Keiko, kau belum menikah?"

"Belum."

Ekspresi bingung menggelayuti wajah Yukari. (p. 40)

"Keiko, you're not married yet?"

"No."

A confused expression spread across Yukari's face. (p.40)

This interaction occurred between Keiko and Yukari, her friend, demonstrates that marriage is assumed to be a natural and inevitable milestone for women of Keiko's age (36 years old). The moment Keiko states that she is unmarried, Yukari's visible confusion signals a disruption of social expectations. The reaction does not stem from explicit criticism, but from an implicit assumption that adult womanhood is normally accompanied by marriage. In this sense, Keiko's unmarried status is perceived not as a personal choice, but as an anomaly requiring explanation. The use of facial expression rather than verbal judgment is significant, as it reflects how patriarchal norms often operate subtly through everyday interactions and social cues (Aristawidya, 2023). Such reactions function as mechanisms of social regulation, reinforcing marriage as a compulsory marker of normal womanhood. Women who fail to meet this expectation are positioned as socially incomplete or abnormal, even in casual conversations among peers (Sen, 2021).

This representation aligns with Bulter's (1990) concept of **gender performativity**, which argues that gender norms are maintained through repeated social performances rather than through explicit rules. In this scene, marriage functions as a performative requirement for femininity: a woman is expected to *perform* adulthood and normality through marital status. Keiko's failure to perform this role destabilizes the normative script of womanhood, prompting confusion and discomfort from others. Furthermore, this finding is consistent with sociological

studies on gender norms in Japan, which emphasize that marriage remains a key indicator of social maturity and feminine success. Belarmino & Roberts (2019) note that unmarried women are often viewed as deviating from socially sanctioned life trajectories, while Rosenberger (2013) highlights how women who resist marriage face subtle forms of social surveillance rather than overt exclusion.

Thus, this data exemplifies how the novel represents marriage not merely as a personal relationship, but as a socially enforced life stage that defines women's legitimacy within patriarchal society.

Unmarried Women Framed as Abnormal or Embarrassing

The excerpt below illustrates how marriage is constructed as a normative and expected life stage for adult women in Japanese society:

Data (D1/CSW/M/ABN)

<p><i>“Di antara empat belas atau lima belas orang yang berkumpul, hanya ada dua orang selain aku yang belum menikah. Tak ada pikiran apa pun di benakku karena tidak semua yang datang berpasangan, tapi Miki yang masih lajang berbisik padaku, ‘Cuma kita yang tak bisa berdiri dengan kepala tegak, iya kan?’” (p. 78)</i></p>	<p>“Among the fourteen or fifteen people gathered, there were only two others besides me who were not married. I had no particular thoughts about it, since not everyone had come with a partner, but Miki, who was also single, whispered to me, ‘We’re the only ones who can’t hold our heads up high, right?’” (p.78)</p>
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This excerpt illustrates how unmarried women are positioned as socially inferior and emotionally burdened within communal settings. Although Keiko herself does not initially perceive her unmarried status as problematic, Miki's whispered remark reveals an internalized sense of shame associated with being unmarried. The phrase “*can't hold our heads up high*” suggests embarrassment, inadequacy, and lowered social standing, indicating that marriage functions as a key marker of respectability and normalcy.

The contrast between Keiko's neutral perception and Miki's self-conscious reaction highlights how patriarchal norms are internalized by women themselves. Even in the absence of direct judgment from others, unmarried women anticipate social scrutiny and regulate their own behavior accordingly. This reflects what Pandey (2025) describes as disciplinary power, where social norms are enforced not through explicit sanctions, but through internalized surveillance.

From a feminist perspective, this scene demonstrates how marriage operates as a compulsory social benchmark for women. The internalization of shame among unmarried women reinforces patriarchal ideology by normalizing the idea that women's value is contingent upon marital status. Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity further explains this phenomenon, as women are expected to continuously perform socially recognizable femininity of which marriage is a central component. Failure to perform this role results in feelings of embarrassment and social invisibility (Tsuji, 2018).

Therefore, this data confirms that the novel represents unmarried women not merely as different, but as socially *abnormal* or *inadequate*, revealing how deeply embedded marital norms regulate women's identities and emotional experiences within Japanese society.

Marriage as Social Legitimacy and Respect for Women

Data (D1/CSW/M/SLR)

"Furukura-san, kau beruntung. Berkat aku, kau yang tadinya menanggung tiga penderitaan dengan status sebagai lajang, perawan, dan pekerja minimarket, sekarang bisa jadi bagian dari masyarakat yang sudah menikah. Semua akan berasumsi kau bukan perawan lagi dan orang sekitar akan menganggapmu manusia yang layak dihargai. Sosokmu yang seperti itulah yang paling membahagiakan mereka. Kau harus bersyukur." (p.80)

"Furukura, you're lucky. Thanks to me, you, who used to bear three sufferings—being single, a virgin, and a convenience store worker—can now become part of married society. Everyone will assume you're no longer a virgin, and people around you will see you as a human being worthy of respect. That version of you is what makes them happiest. You should be grateful." (p.80)

This excerpt explicitly constructs marriage as a source of social legitimacy and moral recognition for women. Shiraha's statement reduces Keiko's social worth to her marital status, suggesting that marriage automatically transforms her from a marginalized individual into a "human being worthy of respect." The phrase "manusia yang layak dihargai" reveals a dehumanizing logic in which unmarried women are implicitly framed as lacking full social value.

Notably, Shiraha lists Keiko's previous identities (single, virgin, and convenience store worker) as "three sufferings," positioning them as social deficits that marriage can resolve. This framing reflects a patriarchal hierarchy in which women gain legitimacy not through personal autonomy or labor, but through heterosexual marriage (Joachim & Kouakou, 2025). The assumption that others will believe Keiko is "no longer a virgin" further reveals how female respectability is tied to sexual status validated by marriage rather than individual agency.

From a feminist perspective, this discourse exemplifies how patriarchal societies regulate women's bodies and identities through marriage. Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity helps explain this phenomenon: marriage functions as a performative act that confers social intelligibility on women. By performing the role of "wife," a woman becomes recognizable within dominant gender norms, while those who fail to perform this role remain socially unintelligible or marginalized.

This representation also aligns with sociological research on Japanese gender ideology, which emphasizes marriage as a key marker of adulthood and femininity. Ochiai (2014) argues that marriage in Japan continues to function as an institution that legitimizes women's social existence, particularly by resolving anxieties surrounding sexuality, productivity, and social contribution. Similarly, Rosenberger (2013) notes that unmarried women often experience diminished social recognition, regardless of their economic independence or personal fulfillment.

Furthermore, Shiraha's insistence that Keiko should be "grateful" underscores the coercive nature of this ideology. Gratitude is demanded not for personal happiness, but for fulfilling social expectations. This reveals how patriarchal power operates not through force, but through moral obligation and emotional pressure, compelling women to internalize norms that ultimately constrain their autonomy.

Through this overtly ideological monologue, Murata exposes the violent logic underlying patriarchal marriage norms rather than endorsing them. The extremity and bluntness of Shiraha's language serve a critical function, revealing how marriage is constructed as a mechanism that grants women conditional humanity and social respect. As such, this data strongly demonstrates that the novel represents marriage as a central source of social legitimacy and respect for women within Japan's patriarchal society.

Unmarried Women as a Social Burden

This excerpt was from Shiraha, a male friend of Keiko.

Data (D1/CSW/M/SB)

<p><i>"Perempuan lanjut usia di Zaman Jomon yang tak bisa melahirkan anak, tak menikah, dan berkeliaran di desa. Hanya jadi beban buat desa."</i> (p.92)</p>	<p><i>"Elderly women in the Jomon period who could not bear children, were unmarried, and wandered around the village. They were nothing but a burden to the village."</i> (p.92)</p>
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This utterance represents one of the most explicit articulations of patriarchal ideology in the novel, directly associating unmarried women with social uselessness and economic burden. The sentence constructs women's social value through two interrelated criteria: reproductive capacity and marital status. Women who fail to fulfill both roles are depicted as surplus bodies whose existence lacks social justification.

The invocation of the Jomon period functions as a historical legitimation strategy, implying that the marginalization of unmarried, non-reproductive women is natural, ancient, and culturally ingrained. By framing this exclusion as historically continuous, the discourse normalizes the idea that women's worth is conditional upon their contribution to family reproduction and social stability. As Ortner (1974) argues, patriarchal societies frequently align women with biological reproduction, reducing their value to their perceived natural functions.

This representation also reflects contemporary Japanese gender ideology, in which women are still expected to contribute to society primarily through marriage and childbearing. Ochiai (2014) notes that unmarried women, particularly those beyond reproductive age, are often framed as dependents rather than contributors, reinforcing the belief that women's legitimacy derives from family formation. Similarly, Koyama (2018) emphasizes that women who remain single are frequently portrayed as economically and socially unproductive, regardless of their labor participation.

Through the lens of Butler's (1990) gender performativity, marriage and motherhood function as compulsory performances that grant women social recognition. The absence of these performances renders women unintelligible within the dominant gender order. In this context, the

unmarried woman becomes not merely different, but disposable—her existence framed as a social problem rather than a legitimate life choice.

By including such an overtly dehumanizing statement, Murata's novel exposes the harsh logic underlying patriarchal norms rather than endorsing them. The extremity of the language serves a critical function, revealing how deeply embedded and violent the discourse surrounding unmarried women can be. Consequently, this data demonstrates how the novel represents unmarried women as social burdens, thereby critiquing the ideological foundations that equate womanhood with marriage and reproduction.

Representation of Patriarchal Gender Norms in Career

In *Convenience Store Woman*, the novel portrays career as a measure of social worth tied to productivity and corporate success. Within Japan's patriarchal society, stable corporate employment is closely associated with productivity, respectability, and social contribution, while non-regular or low-status work is often stigmatized (Murai et al., 2022). The novel represents patriarchal career norms through repeated discourses that privilege stable corporate employment while stigmatizing non-regular labor, particularly for women. Keiko's long-term work at a convenience store is consistently framed as abnormal, immature, and socially inadequate, revealing how career functions as a gendered mechanism of normalization within Japanese society.

The data are shown in Tabel 2. Below

Tabel 2. Analysis of Compulsory Marker in Career

Data	Textual Evidence	Interpretation
(D1/C SW/C/ SM)	<i>Kalau susah mendapatkan pekerjaan tetap, kenapa tak menikah saja?</i> (p.80)	Career as Substitute for Marriage
(D1/C SW/C/ SE)	<i>Saat kuliah, aku meninggalkan rumah orangtuaku dan mulai tinggal di kamar berbiaya sewa murah. Keluargaku sepertinya mulai khawatir karena aku tak kunjung mencari pekerjaan tetap dan terus bekerja paruh waktu.</i> (p. 25)	Stable Employment as the Norm
(D1/C SW/C/ SI)	<i>"Itu karena kau terlalu aneh. Umur tiga puluh enam tahun, lajang, dan bekerja di minimarket. Ditambah lagi, mungkin kau masih perawan. Setiap hari kau bekerja dengan penuh semangat, tapi tak menunjukkan tanda-tanda berusaha mencari pekerjaan yang lebih stabil. Tak ada yang mengatakan itu padamu karena kau sangat aneh dan menggelikan. Mereka mengatakan itu</i>	Convenience Store Work as Socially Inferior

*di belakangmu. Dan kali ini, mereka akan
mengatakannya langsung di depanmu. (p. 121)*

Career as Substitute for Marriage

DATA (D1/CSW/C/SM)

Kalau susah mendapatkan pekerjaan tetap, kenapa tak menikah saja? (P.80) “If securing permanent employment is difficult, why not consider marriage instead?” (p. 80)

The statement “*Kalau susah mendapatkan pekerjaan tetap, kenapa tak menikah saja?*” reflects a patriarchal logic in which marriage is positioned as a substitute for career stability rather than a personal choice. The utterance implies that when women fail to secure permanent employment, marriage becomes an expected alternative path to social legitimacy and economic security. This discourse reinforces a gendered division of roles in which women’s value is measured either through productive labor or through marital affiliation, but rarely through autonomy or self-determined identity. Within this framework, employment and marriage are not treated as parallel life options, but as interchangeable mechanisms for fulfilling socially sanctioned womanhood. Such assumptions align with broader gender ideology in Japan, where women’s participation in the labor market is often evaluated in relation to marital status rather than individual competence or fulfillment (Murai et al., 2022; Ochiai, 2014).

From a feminist perspective, this construction reflects how patriarchal systems manage women’s lives through conditional recognition. Butler’s (1990) theory of gender performativity helps explain how marriage functions as a compensatory performance when women fail to enact the norm of stable employment. Rather than challenging structural inequalities in the labor market, the discourse redirects responsibility onto women by encouraging marriage as a corrective solution. Recent studies further indicate that despite increasing female labor participation, non-regular employment remains feminized and stigmatized, reinforcing marriage as a fallback source of security for women. Consequently, this excerpt reveals how career instability is not treated as a systemic issue, but as a personal deficiency that women are expected to resolve through conformity to marital norms. The novel exposes this logic as a mechanism of patriarchal control that limits women’s life choices by framing marriage as a necessary substitute for economic and social legitimacy.

Stable Employment as the Norm

DATA (D1/CSW/C/SE)

“Saat kuliah, aku meninggalkan rumah orangtuaku dan mulai tinggal di kamar berbiaya sewa murah. Keluargaku sepertinya mulai khawatir karena aku tak kunjung mencari pekerjaan tetap dan terus bekerja paruh waktu.” (p. 25) “While I was in college, I left my parents’ house and began living in a low-rent room. My family seemed to grow worried because I was not making any effort to find a permanent job and continued working part-time.” (p.25)

This excerpt illustrates how stable, permanent employment (*pekerjaan tetap*) is constructed as a social norm and expectation, particularly for adults transitioning into independent

life. The family's concern is not triggered by Keiko's economic survival—she is already working and supporting herself but by her failure to pursue permanent employment, which is implicitly positioned as the only legitimate form of adulthood and social responsibility.

The contrast between permanent employment and part-time work is crucial. In the Japanese labor system, permanent employment is associated with stability, long-term commitment, and social respectability, while part-time or non-regular work is widely regarded as temporary, immature, or inadequate as a long-term career path. As Genda (2020) explains, Japan maintains a strong normative hierarchy of employment, in which regular employment functions as a marker of full social membership, whereas non-regular work signals marginality.

The family's anxiety reflects this hierarchy. Their concern does not center on Keiko's well-being or autonomy, but on her deviation from a socially sanctioned career trajectory. This demonstrates how patriarchal career norms operate through familial expectations, positioning stable employment as a moral obligation rather than a personal choice. For women, this pressure is further complicated by gender ideology, as employment is often evaluated not on competence or satisfaction, but on its alignment with socially approved life courses (Ochiai, 2014).

From a feminist theoretical perspective, this scene exemplifies gendered normalization through performativity. Drawing on Butler (1990), stable employment functions as a performative act that signals adulthood, responsibility, and social intelligibility. Keiko's continued engagement in part-time work disrupts this performance, prompting concern and surveillance from her family. Her labor is rendered socially insufficient not because it lacks value, but because it fails to conform to dominant expectations of what a "proper" adult, especially a woman, should do.

Furthermore, recent sociological studies confirm that non-regular employment in Japan continues to be stigmatized, particularly for women, despite structural changes in the labor market. OECD (2021) reports that women are disproportionately concentrated in non-regular jobs, which are often framed as inferior and unsuitable for long-term independence. This stigma persists even when such work provides financial stability, reinforcing the ideological dominance of permanent employment as the normative ideal.

Thus, this data demonstrates that the novel represents stable employment as a compulsory norm, while part-time work is constructed as a deviation that provokes social anxiety. Murata uses this seemingly mundane family concern to expose how career norms function as disciplinary mechanisms, regulating women's life choices and reinforcing patriarchal definitions of success and adulthood.

Convenience Store Work as Socially Inferior

DATA (D1/CSW/C/SI)

<p><i>“Itu karena kau terlalu aneh. Umur tiga puluh enam tahun, lajang, dan bekerja di minimarket. Ditambah lagi, mungkin kau masih perawan. Setiap hari kau bekerja dengan penuh semangat, tapi tak menunjukkan tanda-tanda berusaha mencari pekerjaan yang lebih stabil. Tak</i></p>	<p><i>“That’s because you’re too strange. Thirty-six years old, single, and working at a convenience store. On top of that, you’re probably still a virgin. You work enthusiastically every day, but you show no sign of trying to find a more stable job. No one tells you this because you’re so</i></p>
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ada yang mengatakan itu padamu karena kau sangat aneh dan menggelikan. Mereka mengatakan itu di belakangmu. Dan kali ini, mereka akan mengatakannya langsung di depanmu.” (p. 121) strange and ridiculous. They say it behind your back. And this time, they'll say it directly to your face.” (p.121)

This passage explicitly constructs convenience store work as a symbol of social inferiority and personal failure, particularly when performed long-term by an adult woman. The speaker lists Keiko's age, marital status, sexual status, and occupation as cumulative markers of abnormality, revealing how career status is deeply intertwined with patriarchal judgments of femininity and adulthood. Working in a minimarket is not criticized due to lack of effort or competence—Keiko is described as working “with enthusiasm” but because it does not conform to dominant expectations of stable and respectable employment.

The emphasis on Keiko's failure to seek “pekerjaan yang lebih stabil” demonstrates how permanent, upwardly mobile employment functions as a normative benchmark within Japanese society. As Genda (2020) explains, Japan's employment system continues to privilege regular employment as a marker of social membership, while non-regular work is stigmatized as marginal and unsuitable for mature adulthood. This hierarchy persists despite structural shifts in the labor market and disproportionately affects women, who are more likely to remain in non-regular positions (OECD, 2021).

Importantly, the passage also highlights how social judgment operates through collective surveillance. The claim that “they say it behind your back” underscores the presence of an observing social audience that continuously evaluates women's conformity to career norms. This aligns with Foucault's (1977) concept of disciplinary power, in which individuals are regulated through the anticipation of judgment rather than direct punishment. Keiko's continued work at a convenience store renders her a visible target of ridicule because it disrupts the expected life trajectory of stable employment leading to social respectability.

From a feminist theoretical perspective, this scene exemplifies Butler's (1990) notion of gender performativity, where career stability functions as a performative act through which women gain social intelligibility. Keiko's refusal to pursue a “more stable” job constitutes a failure to perform normative adulthood and femininity, resulting in her being labeled “strange” and “ridiculous.” Her enthusiastic labor is rendered socially meaningless because it does not align with patriarchal definitions of success.

Thus, this data demonstrates that the novel represents convenience store work as socially inferior not because of its intrinsic value, but because of its position within a gendered hierarchy of labor. Murata exposes how patriarchal career norms devalue non-corporate work and stigmatize women who reject conventional employment trajectories, reinforcing the idea that social worth is contingent upon conformity rather than competence or fulfillment.

Representation of Patriarchal Gender Norms in Femininity

In *Convenience Store Woman*, femininity is represented as a socially constructed and normative script that governs women's emotional expression, bodily purpose, and relational behavior. Within Japan's patriarchal society, femininity is not merely associated with biological

sex, but with a set of expectations that define how women should feel, behave, and position themselves in relation to others. These expectations include emotional sensitivity, heterosexual desire, reproductive potential, and relational dependency, all of which function as markers of “proper” womanhood. Women who fail to embody these traits are often perceived as abnormal, incomplete, or socially unintelligible.

The data are shown in Tabel 3 below.

Tabel 3. Analysis of Femininity

Data	Textual Evidence	Interpretation
(D1/C SW/F/ DF)	<p><i>"Ada apa, Keiko? Duh, burung kecil yang malang. Dia terbang ke sini, ya?" ujar Ibu dengan lembut sambil mengusap kepalaku. "Kasihannya sekali. Ayo kita kuburkan!"</i></p> <p><i>"Ayo kita makan dia!" ujarku.</i></p> <p><i>"Apa?"</i></p> <p><i>"Ayah suka yakitori, jadi nanti malam kita makan ini saja."</i></p> <p><i>Merasa ucapanku tak terdengar jelas, aku mengulanginya. Ibu kaget mendengarnya. Mata, lubang hi-ung, dan mulut para wanita di samping Ibu pun sontak menganga, kaget. (p10)</i></p>	Disruption of Feminine Emotional Norms
(D2/C SW/F/ DF)	<p><i>"Aku mendengar teriakan-teriakan itu dan kupikir mereka harus dihentikan. Kubuka kotak peralatan yang ada di sebelahku, kuraih sekop, lalu aku berlari menuju anak laki-laki yang sedang berkelahi itu, kemudian kupukul kepala salah seorang dari mereka." (p.12)</i></p>	Disruption of Feminine Emotional Norms

Disruption of Feminine Emotional Norms

DATA (D1/CSW/F/DF)

<p><i>"Ada apa, Keiko? Duh, burung kecil yang malang. Dia terbang ke sini, ya?" ujar Ibu dengan lembut sambil mengusap kepalaku. "Kasihannya sekali. Ayo kita kuburkan!"</i></p> <p><i>"Ayo kita makan dia!" ujarku.</i></p> <p><i>"Apa?"</i></p> <p><i>"Ayah suka yakitori, jadi nanti malam kita makan ini saja."</i></p>	<p>“What’s wrong, Keiko? Oh, the poor little bird. It flew here, didn’t it?”</p> <p>Mother said gently while stroking my head. “How pitiful. Let’s bury it!”</p> <p>“Let’s eat it!” I replied.</p> <p>“What?”</p> <p>“Dad likes yakitori, so let’s just eat it tonight.”</p> <p>Feeling that my words were not clear, I repeated them. Mother was shocked.</p> <p>The eyes, nostrils, and mouths of the</p>
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Merasa ucapanku tak terdengar jelas, aku meng-ulanginya. Ibu kaget mendengarnya. Mata, lubang hi-ung, dan mulut para wanita di samping Ibu pun sontak menganga, kaget. (p10)

This passage depicts a disruption of feminine emotional norms. Within patriarchal expectations, women are expected to respond to vulnerable beings with empathy, gentleness, and emotional restraint. Keiko's reaction—proposing to eat the bird rather than treating it with care—violates the normative script of femininity, generating shock and social correction from surrounding women. Her emotional and relational behavior is incomprehensible to others because it does not conform to socially sanctioned feminine affectivity.

From a feminist theoretical perspective, this aligns with Butler's (1990) concept of gender performativity, which argues that femininity is not an innate essence but a set of repeated social performances. Keiko's failure to display expected empathy reveals how emotional regulation functions as a performative act through which women are socially recognized as "normal" or intelligible. The collective astonishment of the onlookers illustrates disciplinary power (Foucault, 1977), in which social norms are enforced through observation and reaction rather than formal sanction.

DATA (D2/CSW/F/DF)

"Aku mendengar teriakan-teriakan itu dan kupikir mereka harus dihentikan. Kubuka kotak peralatan yang ada di sebelahku, kuraih sekop, lalu aku berlari menuju anak laki-laki yang sedang berkelahi itu, kemudian kupukul kepala salah seorang dari mereka." (p.12)

"I heard the shouting and thought they had to be stopped. I opened the toolbox next to me, grabbed a hoe, then ran toward the boys who were fighting and hit one of them on the head." (p.12)

This utterance represents a direct breach of feminine emotional norms. Instead of mediating conflict verbally or demonstrating restraint, Keiko enacts a physically aggressive response. Patriarchal norms dictate that women should respond with passivity, care, and emotional delicacy, making her violent intervention a clear violation of performative femininity.

The scene exemplifies Butler's (1990) gender performativity, showing that femininity is constituted through repeated social behaviors. Keiko's choice to act physically renders her unintelligible as a "normal" woman, challenging the expectation that femininity inherently involves gentleness and nurturance. Moreover, the reaction—or potential shock—of observers mirrors Foucault's (1977) disciplinary gaze, demonstrating that deviations from emotional norms trigger social surveillance and corrective responses.

Together, D1 and D2 illustrate that femininity in the novel is not inherent but socially enforced, particularly through expectations of emotional regulation and relational behavior. Murata uses Keiko's disruptive responses to reveal the artificiality of these patriarchal norms and to critique the rigid scripts governing female conduct in Japanese society.

Conclusion

This study concludes that *Convenience Store Woman* represents patriarchal gender norms in Japanese society through socially enforced expectations surrounding marriage, career, and femininity. Marriage is depicted as a compulsory marker of adult womanhood and social legitimacy, stable corporate employment as an indicator of productivity and social value, and femininity as a normative script governing women's emotional expression and bodily roles. These norms function as mechanisms of social regulation that marginalize women who deviate from prescribed life trajectories.

The findings further demonstrate that resistance to gender norms in the novel is constructed through sustained nonconformity rather than overt defiance. Keiko Furukura's refusal to marry, pursue a conventional career, and embody normative femininity challenges patriarchal expectations by interrupting the repetitive enactment of socially sanctioned roles. Her everyday practices expose the coercive nature of these norms and reveal how conformity is maintained through subtle forms of surveillance and social pressure.

Moreover, the study reveals that gender performativity in the novel is represented through Keiko Furukura's actions and identity as a series of repeated social performances that both produce and destabilize gender norms. While normative femininity is maintained through repetition and recognition, Keiko's failure to perform these norms renders her socially unintelligible yet simultaneously disrupts the dominant construction of womanhood. Through this representation, the novel redefines female autonomy as the ability to exist outside socially imposed gender scripts.

Therefore, this study affirms that *Convenience Store Woman* articulates a feminist critique of Japan's patriarchal society by foregrounding everyday nonconformity as a form of resistance. By depicting gender as performative and contingent rather than natural or fixed, the novel challenges the assumption that womanhood must be defined by marriage, reproductive roles, or corporate success.

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