

Queer Resistance to Heteronormativity in Battan's Manga *Kakeochi Gaaru*

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Abstract

This article examines how resistance to heteronormativity is represented in Battan's manga *Kakeochi Gaaru*. The study addresses how queer female characters negotiate social expectations that attach adulthood, happiness, and respectability to heterosexual marriage, reproduction, and family life. Using descriptive qualitative analysis, the research reads selected dialogue, narrative scenes, character interaction, and visual motifs through Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity and Lisa Duggan's concept of homonormativity. The findings show that resistance is not represented as a single heroic break from heteronormativity, but as a gradual and situational process. Midori first internalizes heteronormative adulthood by leaving her lesbian relationship and pursuing marriage with Tazune; later, through renewed intimacy with Maki, she rejects Tazune's masculine authority and reclaims queer desire. Maki represents quieter resistance through refusal and non-participation, while Komari illustrates selective resistance shaped by the need for safety in a heteronormative environment. The article argues that *Kakeochi Gaaru* criticizes heteronormativity by exposing the violence of normative masculinity and the limits of heterosexual respectability. However, the manga also resolves queer happiness through coupledness, wedding imagery, and family, indicating a homonormative strategy of making queer life socially legible. The study contributes to discussions of lesbian representation in contemporary Japanese popular culture and highlights the ambivalence of queer resistance in media produced during Japan's LGBT Boom.

Keywords: *Kakeochi Gaaru*; resistance to heteronormativity; queer; gender performativity; Japanese popular culture

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1. Introduction

Queer communities continue to face discrimination not only through physical or verbal violence, but also through norms, institutions, and cultural expectations that mark queer lives as marginal or incomplete. A major mechanism behind this process is heteronormativity, a hegemonic system that treats heterosexuality as the natural, legitimate, and superior form of sexuality (Robinson, 2016). By presenting heterosexuality as common sense, this system

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privileges heterosexual marriage, reproductive family life, and binary gender roles while making queer identities appear deviant or socially risky.

In Japan, the legal and social position of queer communities has been marked by both gradual progress and persistent constraints. Same-sex marriage has not been legalized at the national level, although local partnership systems have expanded since Shibuya Ward introduced a partnership certificate in 2015 (Tokyo Metropolitan Government Bureau of General Affairs, Human Rights Division, n.d.; Nippon.com, 2025). Public visibility has also increased through Tokyo Rainbow Pride and the 2023 Act on the Promotion of Public Understanding of the Diversity of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (Cabinet Office, Government of Japan, n.d.). Nevertheless, a 2025 survey reported widespread school difficulty and harassment among LGBTQ students (Asahi Shimbun, 2025). The coexistence of recognition and continuing normative pressure provides an important context for reading queer representation in contemporary Japanese popular culture.

Queer themes have appeared repeatedly in Japanese popular literature, film, television, and manga. Nozawa (2023) describes the 1990s as a period shaped by the Gay Boom, when gay male characters became more visible in media alongside the rise of boys' love (BL) manga. Its conditions included the circulation of gay liberation discourse, HIV/AIDS activism, and broader public discussion of sexual minorities (Murphy, 2023; Nozawa, 2023). Wakamatsu (2018, as discussed in Nozawa, 2023) nevertheless observes that Gay Boom media often represented gay men as figures of curiosity and difference rather than complex social subjects. The LGBT Boom of the 2010s subsequently brought rights, diversity, recognition, and activism into more visible media discourse.

Battan's manga *Kakeochi Gaaru*, serialized from 2018 to 2020, is a useful object for this study for three reasons. First, although queer visibility in Japanese popular culture has often been discussed through BL manga and gay male representation, *Kakeochi Gaaru* centers lesbian desire and adult women's negotiation of marriage, pregnancy, domestic violence, and family-making. Second, the work does not treat queer romance only as private feeling; it places Maki and Midori's relationship inside concrete social expectations about adulthood, respectability, motherhood, and household formation. Third, because it appeared during the LGBT Boom, the manga captures the ambivalence between increasing queer visibility and the persistence of heteronormative pressure. The Japanese word *kakeochi* can refer to eloping, running away, hiding, or disappearing (Weblio Dictionary, n.d.). In the manga, it evokes the possibility of fleeing with a lover, but it can also be read as a flight from the heterosexual future assigned to the characters. The narrative follows Maki and Midori, two women who dated at an all-girls high school. On graduation day, Midori ends the relationship by framing same-sex romance as childish. Ten years later, they meet again: Midori is pregnant, engaged to Tazune, and preparing for marriage, while Maki still loves her. Their renewed intimacy exposes the fragility of Midori's attempt to live by heteronormative expectations (Battan, 2018-2020).

Alongside Maki and Midori, three supporting characters are important for understanding the narrative's treatment of heteronormativity. Tazune is Midori's fiancé and the biological father of her child, functioning as the figure through whom normative masculine authority is most strongly dramatized. Komari is Maki's online friend in Shodoshima, a younger lesbian whose family hosts Maki and Midori during their trip; as a closeted queer character, she also provides advice and becomes a trusted relation outside the immediate pressures of marriage and family expectation. Kon is Midori's child, later raised within the household formed by Midori and Maki. In the post-timeskip extra chapter, Kon runs away to Shodoshima because the

difference between having two mothers and the father-mother-child model around them becomes a source of anxiety. These characters allow the manga to connect lesbian intimacy to wider questions of gendered adulthood, family responsibility, and queer social legibility.

Previous studies have examined queer representation in Japanese popular culture from several angles. Firdausy and Anggraeni (2023) show how coming out can interrupt pressure to conceal non-heteronormative identity in Kamatani Yuki's *Shimanami Tasogare*. Nozawa (2023) traces the possibilities and limitations of BL as a vehicle for LGBT visibility, while Kiba (2019) demonstrates that sexual minorities in Japanese media remain vulnerable to stereotype. Saraswati (2022) shows that interpersonal support does not eliminate the legal constraints encountered by the trans woman Rinko in *Karera ga Honki de Amu Toki wa*. Fanasca (2020) similarly traces the changing representation of female-female relationships in *shōjo* culture and yuri manga, a genre broadly associated with romantic narratives between women (Friedman, 2017). Fitria and Priyatama (2025) read the film *Monster* (2023) through Gramscian hegemony and link the marginalization of queer youth to *ijime* (bullying) and *mentsu* (public face or social reputation), showing how demands for conformity shape the social regulation of LGBTQIA+ difference. Their focus on male youth and a filmic school context differs from *Kakeochi Gaaru*, yet it underscores that queer pressure is enacted through ordinary social relations, family expectations, and institutional environments rather than only through explicit legal prohibition.

Another study of contemporary manga also demonstrates the value of close attention to gendered roles. Putri et al. (2022) analyse how *seme* and *uke* conventions are deconstructed in *Shishi mo Kobamazu* through gender performativity, showing that roles in same-sex manga are neither fixed nor reducible to masculine and feminine traits. This insight is useful for reading *Kakeochi Gaaru*, but Battan's manga shifts the problem from male same-sex role conventions to lesbian desire under the pressure of heterosexual marriage, pregnancy, and family-making. This article therefore asks: how is resistance to heteronormativity represented in *Kakeochi Gaaru*? It argues that the manga depicts resistance as gradual, situational, and uneven. It critiques heteronormativity by exposing the violence of normative masculinity while also imagining queer livability through marriage, coupledness, and family, thus revealing the persistence of homonormative strategies within queer resistance.

Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity provides the first theoretical lens. Butler (1988, 2006) argues that gender is not an innate, stable identity but a performative effect produced by repeated acts. Femininity and masculinity become recognizable because gestures, desires, bodily styles, and social roles are reiterated over time. These repetitions are never perfect, however, and their gaps make resistance possible. This perspective is useful for reading Midori's attempts to appear as an ideal wife and mother, Tazune's performance of masculine authority, Maki's non-confrontational refusal, and Komari's closeted conduct.

The second lens is Lisa Duggan's (2002) concept of homonormativity. While heteronormativity naturalizes heterosexuality as the privileged basis of marriage, reproduction, gender hierarchy, and family life, homonormativity refers to a different but related process: the incorporation of queer life into dominant institutions without fundamentally challenging those institutions. For Duggan, homonormativity promises social acceptance for queer subjects by organizing queer life around privatized domesticity, monogamous coupledness, respectability, and consumption. It therefore does not make queer relationships heterosexual, but it makes them recognizable through forms historically authorized by heterosexual society, such as marriage ceremonies, household stability, and childrearing. This concept is central to *Kakeochi Gaaru* because the manga does not end with a simple escape from normative forms. Instead,

Maki and Midori's queer future is repeatedly imagined through wedding dresses, domestic partnership, and family life. These images affirm queer livability, but they also show that recognition remains attached to institutions historically shaped by heterosexuality.

2. Methodology

This study uses qualitative method of multimodal analysis to examine *Kakeochi Gaaru* as both a narrative and visual text. The primary data consist of selected scenes from the printed manga, including dialogue, narration, character interaction, clothing, facial expression, panel composition, and recurring visual motifs. The analysis focuses on evidence that depicts heteronormative pressure, gender performance, queer intimacy, toxic masculinity, selective concealment, resistance, and homonormative assimilation. Dialogue excerpts are reproduced in Japanese with English translations; all translations are the author's unless otherwise indicated.

The analytical procedure involved four stages. First, scenes concerning marriage, pregnancy, adulthood, family, and heterosexual coupledness were identified as evidence of heteronormative expectation. Second, the gender performances of Midori, Maki, Tazune, and Komari were interpreted through Butler's theory of performativity. Third, the characters' interactions with heteronormative environments were compared to identify different modes of resistance. Finally, the narrative's recurring wedding and family imagery was interpreted through Duggan's concept of homonormativity. The selected panels are placed alongside their discussion so that the analysis is grounded in visible narrative evidence rather than in plot description alone. To strengthen interpretive consistency, evidence was coded according to repeated categories: heteronormative pressure, performed femininity, toxic masculinity, closeted queer subjectivity, and homonormative assimilation. Interpretations were checked against narrative sequence, dialogue, and visual framing, rather than based on isolated panels. The purpose of this method is not to generalize all queer representation in Japan, but to provide a close reading of how one manga imagines the possibilities and limits of queer resistance.

3. Results and Discussion

The analysis is organized around four interconnected findings discussed in three analytical sections. First, heteronormativity changes across life stages, becoming most forceful when adulthood is linked to marriage and reproduction. Second, gender roles are performed through everyday expectations concerning femininity and masculinity. Third, resistance appears in different modes according to each queer character's social position. Finally, wedding and family imagery are discussed as part of queer resistance itself, because the narrative's homonormative ending both affirms queer livability and reveals the limits of recognition within heteronormative culture.

3.1 Heteronormative Environments Across Life Stages

Kakeochi Gaaru represents heteronormativity as contextual rather than uniform. During Maki and Midori's high-school years, their relationship is not depicted as the central problem within their peer group. A classmate asks Midori why she is dating Maki, but the stated objection concerns Maki's supposedly plain appearance rather than the fact that Maki is a girl. Within the temporary social space of the girls' school, same-sex intimacy is therefore not yet treated as unintelligible. The crucial break occurs at graduation, when adulthood becomes attached to an explicitly heterosexual future.

Midori 「おんなどうしなんて、いつまでも夢見てらんないじゃん？もうオトナだしっ」 [“You cannot keep dreaming about relationships between women forever, can you? We are adults now.”] (*Vol. 1, p. 7*).

The line does not deny the existence of lesbian desire. Instead, it reclassifies that desire as a temporary dream that must be abandoned in order to become an adult. This is how heteronormativity operates in the manga: heterosexuality is framed not only as a possible form of desire, but also as the condition of maturity, social credibility, and a proper future.

Maki's Mother 「普通は普通でしょう。最終的には結婚してこどもを産む！」 [“Normal is normal. In the end, you get married and have children!”] (*Vol. 2, pp. 18-20*).

Maki's mother's insistence on what is ‘normal’ extends this logic into domestic life. Maki's reply that such a life merely describes a majority makes the norm visible as a social convention rather than a natural destiny. Yet the mother's warning that Maki may die alone demonstrates how singlehood and nonconformity are associated with insecurity and failure. The post-timeskip chapter extends this pressure to Kon, Midori's child who is raised in the household formed by Midori and Maki. Kon experiences discomfort because this family has two mothers and does not match the father-mother-child model discussed by peers. Queer family life becomes possible in the narrative, but it remains exposed to social comparison.

3.2 Performed Femininity: Midori and Visual Framing

Figure 1 establishes an important visual premise for the manga's representation of lesbian intimacy. Maki and Midori are both rendered with long hair, stylized clothing, and comparable bodily scale. The panel does not allocate one partner to a visibly masculinized role and the other to a feminized role. This matters because popular representations can reproduce heterosexual relational coding by assigning butch and femme roles as a stable binary (Levitt & Hiestand, 2005). In contrast, Battan's visual framing allows the relationship to remain recognizably feminine without making one woman the substitute man. This visual choice resonates with Putri et al.'s (2022) argument that gendered roles in same-sex manga are not fixed by bodily traits. Midori nevertheless internalizes heteronormative femininity. She repeatedly understands adulthood and happiness through heterosexual marriage and motherhood. Her statement that becoming a bride was a childhood dream is later intensified during a prenatal check-up, when she compares herself to other pregnant women and imagines that motherhood should naturally produce a gentle, ‘goddess-like’ expression.



Figure 1. Maki and Midori are visually framed through comparable feminine styling rather than a fixed butch/femme dyad. Source: Battan (2018-2020, Vol. 1).



Figure 2. Midori's tearful performance of maternal happiness at the prenatal check-up. Source: Battan (2018-2020, Vol. 1, pp. 143-150).

The following narration exposes the gap between that expected expression and her actual feeling.

Midori 「よかった。あたしちゃんとできてる。ちゃんと女神みたいなフリできてる。」 [“Good. I am doing it properly. I can properly pretend to be one of those goddesses.”] (*Vol. 1, pp. 143-150*).

The Japanese word *furi*, in *furi o suru*, means both to act and to pretend. Figure 2 visually focalizes Midori's tearful face in a close-up, while the doctor is placed in a smaller adjacent panel and responds with a smile. The layout makes her face legible as appropriate maternal affect to an observing other. However, her narration states that this affect is performed. In Butlerian terms, Midori's femininity is not a transparent inner truth; it is produced through repeated acts of softness, submission, and self-discipline. Her continuing desire for Maki makes this performance unstable, because the heterosexual future she acts out cannot fully contain her queer attachment.

3.3 Toxic Masculinity and the Visual Logic of Withdrawal

Tazune functions as the manga's clearest embodiment of toxic masculinity and heteronormative authority. He repeatedly diminishes Midori's intelligence and competence, treats women at work more defensively than male colleagues, and expects marriage to confirm his superior position. His language constructs Midori as a partner who is desirable precisely because she laughs, listens, and seems unlikely to challenge him. This arrangement reproduces a conventional hierarchy in which masculinity is associated with authority and breadwinning while femininity is attached to compliance and care.



Figure 3. Tazune turns away from Midori, then strikes her after she asks him to share parental responsibility. Source: Battan (2018-2020, Vol. 1, pp. 190-193).

Tazune 「そのバカにした笑いやめて。ほんと無理。」 [“Stop laughing at me like that. I cannot stand it.”] (*Vol. 1, p. 192*).

Figure 3 turns the conflict into a sequence of withdrawal. In panels (a) and (b), Midori's face and laughter dominate the composition, while Tazune is shown smaller and partly turned away. In panel (c), the motion of the bag cuts diagonally across the page as Tazune strikes her, and panel (d) separates the aftermath into fragmented frames. His turned back is not merely a gesture of irritation. It becomes a visual refusal of the shared parental role that Midori proposes when she reminds him that becoming a mother also makes him a father. Tazune seeks the authority of husband and father without the responsibilities of care. The manga therefore positions his violence as the crisis of a masculinity threatened by equality, not as an individual outburst detached from gender hierarchy.

This visual sequence also clarifies why Tazune is the central antagonistic figure. Heteronormativity is not criticized only because it privileges heterosexual desire. It is criticized because its gendered hierarchy can normalize male authority, make feminine accommodation appear desirable, and turn resistance into a trigger for coercion. By having Midori ultimately reject Tazune, the manga frames queer intimacy as an alternative to a violent model of heterosexual respectability.

3.4 Situational Modes of Queer Resistance and Homonormativity

Midori's interaction with heteronormativity moves through five overlapping stages: relative indifference during adolescence, internalization, avoidance, confrontation, and assimilation. The visual contrast between her teenage braids and adult loose hair materializes the second stage. On graduation day, she removes the braids associated with childhood and ends her relationship with Maki. The gesture joins a change in hairstyle to a change in social legibility: becoming an adult is visually linked to giving up a lesbian relationship that she now calls childish.

Figure 4 should not be treated as proof that loose hair is inherently heterosexual. Its meaning is produced by narrative sequence. Midori lets down her braids while declaring that relationships between women cannot continue into adulthood, and she leaves the hair ties with Maki. The manga thereby turns a small visual object into a social script: heterosexuality is represented as the more adult, respectable, and future-oriented choice.



Figure 4. The change from teenage braids to adult loose hair accompanies Midori's effort to leave lesbian adolescence behind. Source: Battan (2018-2020, Vol. 1, pp. 7-9).

Later, however, Midori's trips with Maki, her refusal to return to Tazune, and her decision to cancel the wedding destabilize that script. Her resistance becomes explicit only after the visual and narrative signs of adult heterosexuality have already been internalized.

Maki and Komari offer contrasting strategies. Maki does not build a heterosexual life to protect herself, but she often meets pressure with silence, laughter, or avoidance. Her resistance is quiet and non-confrontational. Komari, Maki's online friend from Shodoshima and a younger lesbian who is still dependent on her family and local environment, conceals her sexuality more tactically. She can be more direct with Maki, who functions as a trusted queer relation, than with the people around her. These differences show that resistance is contextual: age, place, family dependence, access to queer networks, and perceived risk shape whether queer subjects can ignore, conceal, avoid, or confront heteronormative demands.

Wedding imagery and queer family life should also be understood as part of this spectrum of resistance. In *Kakeochi Gaaru*, resistance is not limited to refusing heterosexual marriage; it also involves taking visual and institutional forms associated with marriage and redirecting them toward a lesbian relationship. This strategy is powerful because it lets Maki and Midori occupy images from which same-sex couples are usually excluded, yet it is also ambivalent because those images remain tied to respectability, domesticity, and family recognition.

The manga's critique of heteronormativity is complicated by its recurring use of wedding imagery. Figure 5 shows Maki and Midori occupying dresses and poses conventionally associated with heterosexual marriage. This is affectively affirming: two women are allowed to enter a visual language of romance, ceremonial commitment, and public recognition. The final panel adds the motif of running. Midori pulls Maki away because she does not want to remove the rented dress, combining the title's sense of elopement with the pleasure of remaining in a bridal image. The sequence thus joins escape and marriage rather than choosing between them, making the bridal image itself a form of queer resistance.

Duggan's (2002) concept of homonormativity helps explain this ambivalence because the ending both resists and repeats heteronormative forms. It resists heteronormativity by replacing the male-female couple with a lesbian partnership and by refusing Tazune's authority as husband and father. However, it also repeats a normative grammar of recognition because queer happiness becomes legible through the familiar ideals of coupledness, wedding imagery, domestic stability, and childrearing. After leaving Tazune, Midori does not abandon marriage and family as ideals; she reworks them with Maki and Kon, Midori's child who becomes part of the queer household built by Maki and Midori.



Figure 5. Queer wedding imagery across the printed-volume covers and the photo-shoot sequence.

Source: Battan (2018-2020, Vols. 1-3).

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The ending grants queer subjects domestic stability, couplehood, and childrearing, but it makes their happiness socially legible through forms inherited from heterosexual normativity. The later discomfort experienced by Kon shows that this reworking does not erase social stigma. *Kakeochi Gaaru* therefore does not portray resistance as an external escape from heteronormativity. It portrays resistance as negotiation with its promises of recognition, intimacy, and family belonging. In this sense, homonormativity is not the opposite of resistance; it is one of the compromised forms through which queer resistance becomes culturally recognizable.

4. Conclusion

This article has examined the representation of resistance to heteronormativity in Battan's manga *Kakeochi Gaaru*. The manga presents heteronormativity as a system that operates through everyday expectations concerning adulthood, gender roles, marriage, reproduction, and family. Its central achievement is to show that heterosexuality functions not simply as personal desire, but also as a social demand that can organize security, respectability, and vulnerability. The results show that Midori's resistance is gradual and ambivalent. She first internalizes heterosexual adulthood, performs the affect of an ideal mother, avoids the future represented by Tazune, confronts his authority, and finally reconstructs marriage and family with Maki. Maki's quiet refusal and Komari's selective concealment as a younger lesbian in Shodoshima demonstrate that resistance takes different forms depending on social location and risk. Tazune's visualized violence, meanwhile, makes normative masculinity visible as a relation of authority that can refuse care while demanding submission.

At the same time, the manga does not fully reject heteronormative values. Wedding dresses, coupledom, domesticity, and family remain the forms through which queer happiness becomes recognizable. This homonormative ending is not simply a failure of resistance. Rather, it captures the difficulty of imagining a livable queer future when the most available cultural images of security and recognition are still attached to heterosexual institutions. Because this study is limited to one manga, future research could compare *Kakeochi Gaaru* with other queer romance works from the LGBT Boom in order to examine how lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and nonbinary characters negotiate the tension between queer resistance and social legibility.

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