# Tokyo man 'married' to virtual singer Hatsune Miku fights for acceptance of 'fictosexuals'

TOKYO -- Four and a half years have passed since a Tokyo man "married" the popular virtual character Hatsune Miku. The Mainichi Shimbun recently interviewed the man about his life, including an association he started for people who have romantic feelings for fictional characters.

Akihiko Kondo, now 40, wed Miku, a Vocaloid with striking blue hair, in November 2018. Even now, when the local government employee comes home from work, he calls out to the life-sized Miku doll, "I'm home." She never replies, but it makes him feel at ease and brings a smile to his face anyway.

Like any human family, Kondo says "Good morning" to Miku when he wakes up and eats his meals facing her as she "looks" at him. He told the Mainichi that his love for her has not changed.

**Not unusual**

Being in love with a fictional character may seem outlandish, but it is in fact not that uncommon as a form of sexual orientation.

According to the "national survey on sexual behavior of youth" conducted in 2017 by the Tokyo-based Japanese Association for Sex Education, more than 10% of both male and female students from junior high school to university said they have had romantic feelings for characters in games and anime. The highest figure recorded was for female university students, at 17.1%.

"It is not unusual for people to develop affection for characters," said Ichiyo Habuchi, a sociology professor in Hirosaki University's Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences who researches romance with anime and game characters.

Habuchi has been investigating the phenomenon since the 1990s. She pointed out that, though diverse sexualities are now understood and interest in romantic feelings for fictional characters has grown recently, the percentage of people with this preference has very likely remained constant over time and place.

**Prejudice against minorities**

However, the public's attitude toward people with this sexual orientation has remained harsh. When this reporter told Hatsune Miku's self-declared husband that he was not bothering the people around him, he replied, "I can't count the number of times I've been told, 'It's disgusting' or 'You're sick.' I can't help it if people say they are offended by the way I spend time with a character."

In June, Kondo and his peers launched the Association of Fictosexuality, a general incorporated association. "Fictosexual" refers to having romantic feelings for fictional people such as dolls and anime characters. The purpose of the association is to hold meetings with concerned individuals to exchange views and to expand public understanding.

Habuchi said of forming the association, "There are many people connected to this issue who are having a hard time. We believe it's necessary to call for social consensus against discrimination and prejudice toward minorities."

**How this love began**

What led Kondo to develop affection for Miku? He had been romantically interested in human women until he was in high school. He has confessed his love seven times, but says none of his attempts was successful.

It was four years after he became a working adult that he "met" Miku. Kondo suffered from an adjustment disorder due to bullying at work and had to take a leave of absence. While recuperating at home, he heard Miku singing on a video-sharing site. He became enamored with her clear voice, which soothed him and helped him escape his shut-in life. He returned to work and since then, Miku has been his "life partner."

Kondo said that many of his peers have had similar experiences. He said, "I have never met anyone who was born 'fictosexual.'" He added that other fictosexuals he knows have also fallen for real people, and in the same way, they may have developed feelings for fictional characters.

Kondo does not confuse these characters with reality. He and Miku eat their meals facing each other, but he prepares food only for one person. "I don't think Miku has any human rights," he said.

**Any possibility of divorce?**

Kondo, whose wedding to Miku was covered by the media and whose real name and face have been made public, continues to receive a stream of messages from people who also love fictional characters. Many of them are people going through hard times in their lives.

Words of encouragement posted on the association's website include, "There are people who have found emotional support in cartoons and characters," and, "We want people to know that there is a place where they can talk about what's bothering them."

Aiming to be a "place of comfort" for fictosexuals, Kondo said of the association's goal: "I would like society to become a place where people can easily hold weddings with their beloved characters as a milestone in their lives."

This is the fifth year since he married Miku. Asked if there was any possibility of divorce, Kondo laughed.

"I can't say that my mind will never change in the future. The divorce rate for humans is not low, either. I think it's the same for us," he said calmly, looking very happy.

(Japanese original by Yuka Obuno, Digital News Group)