

INVESTIGATING THE FUNCTION OF SOCIAL CAPITAL: A CASE STUDY ON SELF-HELP GROUPS THAT HAVE NON-ATTENDANCE SCHOOL CHILDREN*

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I. *Introduction*

1. **Aim of This Article**

Futoko (school refusal, school absenteeism) has been a social problem in Japan since the mid 1970s. Psychiatrists, psychologists and psychotherapists led the research up to the 1980s.

However, as people began to acknowledge the rapidly increasing school absenteeism as a more complicated problem beyond the psychiatric level, sociologists became involved in the research of Futoko in the 1990s. Complying with this trend, in recent government statistics, “Futoko” means non-attendance at school for more than 30 days in an academic year due to complicated reasons other than sickness and economic poverty.

Over the past couple of decades, a considerable number of sociological studies of Futoko have been conducted. Current studies have focused on three topics: (i) ethnographic inquiry on governmental and/or private support organizations for Futoko children (Sagawa 2006, Ito 2009a, Higuchi 2011); (ii) a large scale follow-up survey to understand the direction of those who have experienced Futoko (Morita et al. 2003); and (iii) study on building support networks for Futoko children (Takagaki and Kasugai 2004, Sakai 2014).

These studies have focused on those who have experienced Futoko and the support organizations as mentioned above. They have clarified the experiences that Futoko children have gone through and how support organizations have assisted them. On the other hand, there have been few studies on the experience of families that have Futoko children (and family support organizations) from the sociological perspective (Ono 2000, Matsumoto 2003, 2004, 2005, Kikuchi 2009).

How families support their children is important for the direction that children take after Futoko. The first one to use a support network for Futoko children is the child him/herself. However, regarding the decision of which of the various support organizations to choose and access (including the option not to take advantage of a support organization), it is not the person in question, but their family that holds this important key. Depending upon the situation of the person in question, there are many cases where, if anything, the other family members' decision making is regarded as more important.

The purpose of this article is to examine support mechanisms and how the associations of parents who have Futoko children [hereafter APF] assist group participants. An APF is a non-

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12 step self-help group consisting of the family of Futoko children and their supporters (e.g. teachers, psychotherapists, staff of alternative schools and so forth). An APF is not only a self-help group, but also a support organization for distressed families. To clarify how the APF supports its members and why members join the APF offers the key to an understanding of how each family addresses Futoko problems, and of the logic behind their decision.

In this article, I explore the following three research questions.

- (i) How does the APF form a support network at the individual or organizational level?
- (ii) What resources does the APF create and accumulate?
- (iii) How do members use the support network and resources that were created in the APF?

2. Previous Studies and Analysis Framework

In exploring these issues mentioned above, I focus on the social capital created and accumulated in the APF. In previous research, there are two main theoretical frameworks for social capital. Some researchers have focused on social capital as collective goods. They emphasize social capital as a social bond (Coleman 1988, Putnam 2000). On the other hand, some researchers focusing on social capital as an individual resource have considered social capital as private goods (Lin 2001). It seems that researchers prefer to refer to social capital as collective goods in the field of sociology of education in Japan.

Most members are encouraged by the APF to have a collective identity that redefines the meaning of Futoko problems (Yamada 2002, 2003). As they become more involved in APF, they start to think that non-attendance at school is not only a problem, but also an event promoting change of the relationship within the family unit. They look for an alternative way of life without dependence on credentialism, and some core members of that group get involved in the social movement to support their children and to fight against prejudice toward Futoko (and/or Hikikomori, social withdrawal) problems. The APF creates and accumulates social capital as collective goods for the very good reason that it forges member-specific beliefs, and builds a trustful relationship within members.

On the contrary, members of the APF have exchanged information about support organizations for children. Participants have shared experience on Futoko in order to determine how to manage troubled children at APF regular meetings. They participate in the meeting for various purposes, but, from the viewpoint of their own personal gain from the meeting, they have obtained social capital as an individual asset, that is, resources embedded in a social structure.

Lin (2001: 29) defines social capital as “resources embedded in a social structure that are accessed and/or mobilized in purposive actions”. In a discussion on social capital, Lin focuses on individual action that utilizes resources as a means to accomplish a specific purpose. However, it is likely that social capital as individual “resources” includes specific beliefs or ways of thinking shared by groups. If APF members were to mobilize social relations underpinned by a collective identity in purposive action, how would social capital be defined as an individual asset or as collective goods? In this respect, there is room for reconsidering the dichotomy of individual-collective goods (or bonding-bridging social capital).

Literature on parenting support networks for families in contemporary Japan has shown

that the most effective support network is neither strong ties supporting affectional bonds nor weak ties bridging different groups, but rather a “moderate” network in terms of its size and density (Matsuda 2008). Matsuda’s research has focused on a social network that is embedded in social capital rather than itself. But to clarify that *both* collective support and utilization of information on parenting by each person are indispensable for successful child-rearing, his findings suggest that a dichotomic theoretical framework such as individual assets vs. collective goods seems to be inadequate to grasp the character of social capital.

Matsuda has emphasized the mixed effect of combination of weak and strong ties in family support networks, and it is likely that he considers the two types of social ties are independent of each other. However, as mentioned below, ties created in APF are two-sided: weak ties functioning as bridging social capital as well as strong ties functioning as bonding social capital.

We discuss the features of social capital and the social network in which they are embedded by examining a few case studies in the following chapter.

II. *Outline of Research Methodology*

1. **Outline of Research**

I have conducted ethnographic field research in 5 APFs since 2000 (see Table 1 and Table 2). This article mainly refers to qualitative field data obtained from a second and third survey conducted until 2010.

TABLE 1. OUTLINE OF FIELD SURVEY

First survey (from July 2000 to August 2003)
Investigation object: APF-A, APF-B, APF-C
Outline of Survey: participant observation on APF regular meetings, Interviews on core member in APFs
Second survey (from May 2006 to March 2009)
Investigation object: APF-A, APF-B, APF-C, APF-D, APF-E
(Note: Survey conducted on APF-D from June 2006 and on APF-E from November.)
Outline of Survey: participant observation on APF regular meetings, Interviews on core member in APFs
Third survey (from April 2009 - ongoing)
Investigation object: [APF-A], APF-B, APF-C, APF-D, APF-E
(Note: APF-A has suspended regular meeting since 2012)
Outline of Survey: participant observation on APF regular meetings, Interviews on core member in APFs

I outline the five APFs surveyed. APF-A, B and C are active in large city areas in the Kanto region. APF-A was founded in the early 1990s. APF-A members increased rapidly, and some members wished to join meetings near their home. They split into three associations, APF-A, B, and C. Thus, some members involved in APF-A for many years participate in both APF-A and other associations.

APF-D is active in large city areas in the Kansai region. This APF has become a member of a nationwide network of APFs as well as the other three APFs. The head office of this network is close to its action area, and APF-D has a close connection with core members of the

TABLE 2. FEATURES OF FIVE APFs IN WHICH WE CONDUCTED RESEARCH

Features of 5-APFs	APF-A	APF-B	APF-C	APF-D	APF-E
How associations operate	Consensual decision making by “Sewanin” [core members of each APF] Note: Center president and staff of education support center participate in decision-making in APF-E				
frequency of regular meetings	alternate month meeting	once monthly meeting	once monthly meeting	alternate month meeting	twice monthly meeting
main activity	regular meeting, convivial gathering	regular meeting, convivial gathering	regular meeting, convivial gathering	regular meeting (including lecture meeting), convivial gathering	regular meeting, outdoor activity with children, explanation of examination system
action area	large city area (Kanto region)			large city area (Kansai region)	local city (Tohoku region)
date of foundation	early 1990s	early 1990s	late 1990s	early 1990s	early 2000s
circulation of newsletter for members	30~40 copies	around 70 copies	80~100 copies	around 200 copies	no newsletter for members
approximate number of regular meeting participants	3-5 participants	5-10 participants	5-10 participants	15-20 participants	5-15 participants

nationwide network¹.

APF-E is a single association unlike other APFs. This association was founded by parents using a public education support center. Their activities take place in a room of the education support center, and APF core members have built close relationships with the staff of the education support center. Activities of APF-E are independent of the education support center, but, staff of the center attend APF regular meetings and sometimes give advice to participants.

2. Analytical Perspective on APFs Activities

I consider two viewpoints for a comparison among APFs to understand how social capital functions. First, we focus on the difference in the way to connect with each association. More specifically, I examine: (i) the relationship between each APF, and: (ii) that between the APF and the broader network of APFs².

¹ There are two types of wide-area networks, those that have been organized on the prefectural level, and those that have been organized on the national level. The prefectural level network to which APF-D belongs has close ties with a nationwide network, and the two overlap substantially. While APF-A to C have ties to national networks through prefectural level organizations, APF-D is distinctive for the fact that it promotes activities with a more direct connection to its national-level wide-area network.

² Membership in these regional networking organizations is not limited to members of the association of parents; indeed, educators, local support organizations, researchers, and other individuals and organizations interested in the issue of Futoko are affiliated.

The organization emphasizes collaboration between parents and educators. By involving other local citizens and organizations interested in the issue, the objective is to reconsider the state of society and why it has given rise to this

In the former, I argue about the relationship between APF referring to cases of APF-A, B, and C. In the latter, I compare APF-A to C with APF-D to clarify how its relationship to the broader network affects each APF activity.

The second viewpoint features the organization connected to each APF. As mentioned above, whereas APF-A to D are independent of public support service, APF-E has a close relationship to education support center founded by local government. I compare APF-A to D with APF-E to examine how features of the organization connected to each APF depend on its activities.

These viewpoints are established to focus on the difference in the social network formed by APF activities at the collective or organizational level. In comprehending the effect of the network on participants, I examine how each participant utilizes the resources embedded in a social network. I discuss what relating one's experience of Futoko means for APF participants in terms of involvement level and their children's state.

I discuss the case study results in the next chapter. To protect informant privacy, the names of persons, organizations and so forth in this article have been changed.

III. *Results & Discussion*

1. **Network Effects on APF Activities at Organizational Level**

(1) Merits of APF activities

In this section, I focus on the typical case of APF-B to clarify the resources an APF creates. APF-B has the closest connection to other APFs. Participant observation makes it clear that the merits of connections among associations are (a) increasing the information path and (b) adding places for storytelling.

(a) Increasing information path

Ms. Koba passes around the flyer for today's participants. The lecture meeting is entitled "Rethinking contemporary society from the viewpoint of Hikikomori [social withdrawal] a total of 8 times".

Ms. Endo: "I know that Ms. Kosaka is assisting with this lecture. The main speaker is a school counselor with a clinical psychotherapist certification. [Other APF member] Ms. Nara's daughter is invited to speak about her experience of Futoko". (excerpt from field notes on APF-B: 5/8/2010)

Ms. Endo is a retired schoolteacher. She is a counselor at the support organization founded by the teacher's union for parents suffering from their children's problems. She participated in APF-A, B, and C when she worked at school. Thus she is located on a significant node in the

issue.

Membership in each association of parents differs from site to site. Similar to the national organization, the associations we observed were not closed associations limited to parents with Futoko children; on the contrary, they allow membership by the public and others interested in the issue at large. (Similarly, at APF-E, participants other than parents or guardians attend regular meetings.)

network of APFs. Ms. Endo mediates information between APFs. Therefore, the participants of each APF can obtain information from the node in the network such as Ms. Endo. That is a merit made possible by networking among APFs.

(b) Adding places for storytelling

APF-A and B are active in areas nearby, and some participants join both associations. Storytelling is a core activity in each APF, but, storytelling means different things for each participant. Some APF-B members often participate in regular meetings at APF-A. They are mainly longstanding members of APF-A, and their children have reached adolescence in many cases.

They have told similar stories at both APF meetings, and there is a lot of time for them to tell their story at APF-A because of its smaller size. Moreover, as they can meet longstanding friends whose children are in the same situation, and can recount their stories to each other as just an ordinary member that has no say in how the association operates, it is more dependable and comfortable for them to tell their story at APF-A rather than APF-B.

In addition, core members of other APFs have infrequently participated in APF-B meetings to share information about Futoko as shown in the following example.

Ms. Osaki: "I founded Nonbiri Ikou no Kai [APF name means Slow Down] in May 1995. In our association, many members' oldest child is over 20 years old, though there are some whose child is still of school age. My son is in his late 20s, he is the oldest child in our association, and leads a quiet life at home similar to other youth that have experienced Futoko or Hikikomori".

Ms. Osaki: "I owe my encounter at our association to my son. I can say whatever I want to say with a cup of tea and sweet treat in the regular meeting. We are in a positive mood. Maybe, I'm not as positive as others [laugh]. I retired from work a while ago. I think about my son's future a lot".

Ms. Fujisaki: "I also get antsy when I'm with my son and he withdraws from social activities everyday. My son has participated in Himawari no Kai [Self-help group for Hikikomori youth and their families which means Sunflower Association]. I guess he is likely to share his experience with other youth in the same situation". (excerpt from field notes on APF-B: 6/9/2007)

"Himawari no Kai" was founded by members of APF-B. This case shows that a member of APF utilizes activities created by other APFs if they cannot obtain resources for their own needs from an APF to which they belong. This seems to be one of the network effects on APF activities at the organizational level.

(2) Effects due to the relationship between each APF and the broader network

(a) Similarity in how meetings are organized

Whereas APF-D participates in a broader network as is the case in other APFs not involving APF-E, this APF is close to the head office of this network, and both have close ties. For example, APF-D and the network hold regular meetings on alternate months, and its members can participate in both meetings. A system like this is introduced in other APFs in this prefecture, and the head office is a social network hub for each APF in this region.

Effects due to this relationship are summed up in two points. First, meeting similarity was observed. The regular meeting in APF-D combines a lecture presentation with a storytelling session; this meeting setup is similar to the one that takes place at the head office of the network.

Participants introduce themselves to each other after the lecture on the direction of Futoko children. They briefly tell each other what is going on in their lives in rotation. Mr. Kazuo Fukui, the chair of this meeting asked his wife, Ms. Keiko, “What shall we do now?”.

Mr. Fukui: “There are a few parents with adolescent children in severe situations today. So, shall we all talk together?”

Ms. Fukui: “[When a large number of participants gather] it is difficult for a new member to tell their story. [After a moment’s thought] First, let’s talk together; if a member wants to speak more, we will have separate meetings”.

Mr. Fukui: “Yeah, [He tells all participants] let’s talk together today. We will resume the meeting after a ten-minute break”.

(excerpt from field notes on APF-D: 4/19/2009)

When a regular meeting takes place at the head office of the APF network, the storytelling session consists of a sectional meeting in order to gather together participants in situations similar to their own. Although APF-D has more flexible principles to organize groups, they also have a similar manner of operation. APF-D learns how to organize groups from its connections with the broader APF network.

(b) Another way of increasing the information path

The nationwide network of APF including APF-A to D holds an annual meeting in many different locations around Japan. The participants of this meeting are members of each APF, teachers, researchers, supporters who are interested in Futoko and Hikikomori issues and so forth [Some members of each APF who rarely participate in regular meetings join the annual meeting]. Core members of APF-D have frequent contact with the network head office, thus they participate actively in the annual meeting, and tell other members about it in the regular meeting. In doing so, members of APF-D who do not participate in the annual meeting can understand it.

Mr. Fukui: “The annual meeting took place in X town near here. Participants of this meeting, let’s tell each other how we feel”.

Ms. Tanoue: “I joined the “children with ‘problem behavior’” section meeting. I’ve gained a new acquaintance, Ms. Kato from Z prefecture in the Kanto region”.

Ms. Nishi: “I have participated in this meeting twice. The number of entrants was about 600-700 and I was overwhelmed by the large number of people. I felt that I was in a place where people understand each other”.

(excerpt from field notes on APF-D: 9/7/2008)

Similar conversations are observed in APF-A to C, but members of APF-D are more willing to share their experience of participating in the annual meeting than other APFs.

(3) Effects due to the type of organization to which the APF is connected

APF-E was founded by parents using a public education support center and it has close

relations to the board of education whereas other APFs are independent of the public education system. I compare APF-E with other APFs to comprehend the effect due to the type of organization to which the APF is connected.

(a) Difference in membership requirements

As shown in Table 2, APF-E does not publish a newsletter for members. Many members of APF-E are encouraged to use the public education support center as they can then know about APF-E and its activities without a newsletter.

Its close relationship to the support center affects the membership conditions. Except for some exceptions (some long-standing members of APF-E have children who are adolescents), most members have children in the period of compulsory education who qualify for the program provided by the education support center. Therefore, requirements for APF-E membership imply that its participants must have children who are in compulsory education. This is a peculiar feature of the membership requirements for APF-E and is very different from other APFs.

(b) Obtaining information about school and outreach activities for potential members

Conversations at the regular meeting in APF-E are often a substitute for the intake interview for the education support center user. We have observed situations where staff give advice to participants about how to relate to schools from the standpoint of school officials.

Ms. Mishima, a new member of APF-E told us that it is very difficult for her to explain to the homeroom teacher why her child is absent from school. She is stumped about how to tell the school what she feels and thinks and her demands to simplify communication between school personnel and parents.

Ms. Ichikawa: “You would be better off telling the principal or vice-principal your demands”.

Ms. Hayashi: “My recommendation is to explain your feelings directly to your homeroom teacher”.

Ms. Hatakeyama [support staff]: “It may seem strange to you, but from the teacher’s view, to ask whether your child is attending means a confirmation of the safety of children in his/her class. If you were to previously tell your teacher that you will look after your child whenever she is absent from school, your teacher would not adopt such a questioning stance. Some teachers are unwilling to be directed by the principal without notification. If your teacher is the “couldn’t you talk to me first” type, you would be better off telling the principal your demands including your teacher’s personality and better off asking him to care about the relationship between you and your teacher”.

(excerpt from field notes on APF-E: 1/24/2009)

Participants can obtain much more information about school through the advice of staff from the standpoint of a school insider in APF-E regular meetings than other APFs. In addition, core members hold special meetings as outreach activities for potential members at each school over which the board of education holds jurisdiction.

Ms. Hayashi: “Last week, we held a special meeting at Z junior high school at which Ms.

Saruhashi's child attends". (excerpt from field notes on APF-E: 3/28/2008)

Connection with local public authorities affects (a) what is required to become a member and (b) what information members gain in APF-E. However, in spite of differences that stem from the network position at the organizational level, we find that the five APFs have a lot of similarities in our research. In the next section, we discuss the common points of APFs to comprehend the key features of social capital that APFs create and how members utilize it.

2. What It Means to Share Personal Experience

(1) Reflection on own experience inspired by other members' storytelling

The most important activity in all the APFs is to tell and share one's own personal experience. Members emphasize the uniqueness of experience whenever they tell their own story in regular meetings of the APFs, although they show their experience to other members in a way that somehow correlates with their story. One of the characteristics of storytelling in the APF is to implicitly or explicitly connect to the story told by others.

Emphasis on storytelling is not only applicable to members who have Futoko children but also to other types of members. All participants are encouraged to recount their own personal experience in APF meetings as mentioned below.

Ms. Hamamoto said that she often had an argument with her stay at home child. Ms. Hayashi, one of the core members in this APF said "Sometimes, it is better to put your feelings on the table without any hesitation".

Ms. Ichikawa [to Mr. Yamaguchi, a staff member of the education support center]: "What is your idea of a desirable relationship with a child"?

Mr. Yamaguchi: "It's difficult to foster a desirable relationship with a child. I am a junior high school teacher. One day, my son said 'You treat me like a teacher.' [He said, with an air of embarrassment] 'Dad, you say exactly the right thing, I can't argue against you.' It was shocking, and I felt apologetic for my parenting style".

Ms. Shirai: [She is a volunteer staff member who has experienced Futoko: "My parents have a sharp tongue too".

Ms. Ichikawa: "It is tough to swallow to be rightly criticized".

Ms. Hamamoto: "My older sister said to me, 'Maybe you are right. But, I could ask you the same question'".

Ms. Shirai: "I guess it is nice that your child can say frankly what she is thinking. If you can't exchange small talk, you will have a strained relationship with her".

(excerpt from field notes on APF-E: 9/9/2009)

Mr. Yamaguchi is on loan from the school to the support center and he is engaged in case management there. However, as shown above, he recounted a personal child-rearing story as a father, not as an educational expert. This excerpt shows that the most important activity is to tell one's personal story without there being differences between expert and layperson.

A similar situation has been observed in other APF meetings. To tell one's own personal story and to listen to others enable participants to feel secure with each other and to obtain

clues as to the future of their children.

Ms. Aoyama: [She said that her daughter finally went out with her friend] “Listening to Ms. Sawazaki’s story [She is one of the core members in this APF], I feel some relief. She said ‘You have no need to care whether your child actually goes out with friends or not; the most important issue is whether your child wants to do it or not. She will initiate her own activity when the time is right’”.

Ms. Sawazaki: “It seems that children grow easily. They have learned through doing various things. It’s amazing that your daughter can go out with her friend. Children do something if they feel a strong motivation to do so, I guess”.

(excerpt from field notes on APF-C: 7/8/2006)

Longstanding members of the APF often refer to episodes related to the situation in which newer members suffer from their children’s problem to support them.

Ms. Sugiura explained the background to her younger daughter’s Futoko experience. She seems to be disaffected by the school and she wants the school to care for her child. But, she finds it difficult to say this to the school, and does not want to be labeled a “monster parent” [meaning helicopter parent in Japanese].

Ms. Sugiura: “Anyhow, I feel that the school is neglecting my child”.

Ms. Zinno: “Ms. Igarashi has a similar experience to her, doesn’t she”?

Ms. Igarashi: “The teacher said, ‘Actually, we are preoccupied with the care of children attending school; Futoko children are a low priority’. Them’s the breaks, I think”. [Her child’s school was suffering from a breakdown in student discipline at that time.]

Ms. Mizutani: “In my case, I have been trying to reach the school office to explain my family situation”. (excerpt from field notes on APF-D: 4/19/2009)

(2) What it means for participants to tell their life story

The “chain of storytelling” is central to the activities of APFs. As mentioned in the excerpts from field notes, it is observed that relatively short episodes are mutually related in some cases. On the other hand, there are situations where some members tell their own life story for a longer period of time, and others listen attentively to the story in silence.

We suggest that the stories told by the participants function as social capital accumulated in APFs. Participants of the meeting utilize storytelling as a means to create a bond of caring and compassion [functioning as bonding social capital] and to obtain new information other than their own experience [functioning as bridging social capital]. This reveals the two sides of social capital are accumulated in each APF. As examined in more depth below, whether the former or the latter should be used depends on their ideas about Futoko.

(a) Strengthening bonds among APF members

One thing most participants commented on is the experience that they do not feel alone. Participants often said, “Other members listen carefully to my story, so I do not feel alone”. It functions as bonding social capital to share personal experience.

Ms. Senoh: “Last March...” [She is nearly in tears, and is choking on her words].

Ms. Hayashi: “Take your time”. [Ms. Kawagoe sheds tears in sympathy with her.]

Ms. Senoh: “I have a daughter in fifth grade of elementary school. She is very shy and withdrawn. [...] Sometimes, my friend gives me advice but I feel hurt by her non-understanding of my situation”.

[...] Ms. Senoh participates in the regular meeting for the first time. “At this meeting, I do not feel alone. I feel relieved after sharing my heartache. I couldn’t cry until I joined the meeting. Even when I’m at home, I can’t cry”, she said after the meeting.

(excerpt from field notes on APF-E : 2/14/2009)

(b) Obtaining information from the experience of others

On the other hand, participants obtain necessary information through the stories told by other APF members. They can discover ways to deal with difficult teachers, to search for trustable mental health professionals, and to select suitable support organizations for their child from stories shared in APFs. It is emphasized that participants handle their problems very differently and therefore they should choose whichever means suits them best in the meeting, although we observe that participants often tell their stories to provide helpful information to other members. The facilitator for the APF meeting often encourages members to tell their stories that yield valuable information, especially when a new member joins the meeting.

Ms. Hara: “The subject of teachers in school is always brought up, but there’s the matter of whether or not a teacher suits you. It’s quite difficult to find one who suits you, but how has it been for you”? [Asking for a response from Ms. Miyata]

Ms. Miyata: “Our homeroom teacher is sports-minded, which appears to suit the kids well. He has a lot of energy and is close to us”.

Ms. Hayashi: “There are a lot of different teachers. It’s difficult to get a teacher who is just the right fit, but if even just one teacher understands your feelings, it leads you to a connection with the school and as a parent I can say it puts my heart at ease... Even as a parent if you throw your emotions at the school it doesn’t quite get through to them, so it’s good if there is a third party to mediate. I think it’s difficult to separate communication with the teacher from school”.

Ms. Ichikawa: “So much so that you’re lucky when there is one. ... I thought that because the school has a lot of meetings information would be shared, but that’s not the case. However, in some situations if the principal understands, then it is shared properly. I think it’s good to have a good homeroom teacher, to the point that there may be other good teachers, but it felt like they weren’t able to communicate with each other on a mutual basis. Not that I want to be critical though”.

(excerpt from field notes on APF-E: 2/23/2008)

On the whole, participants who have just joined APF are apt to obtain information from the experience of others. The reason is that they feel anxiety about their child’s problem and they struggle to find their way out. As they are extremely upset by their children’s Futoko, they are likely to view issues from the perspective of “problem-solving schema” [specific cognitive framework]. They are eager to search for the right answer without delay, but other members show their relevant experience to them rather than a direct way of solving the problem.

(c) Difference in understanding regarding what constitutes understanding/acceptance

A point to keep in mind here is that storytelling that provides helpful information *leads simultaneously* to the creation of a bond of caring and compassion.

Previous research clarifies that the most important activity of APF is to listen intently to the words of those who join the meeting, and members of APF avoid evaluating what participants say in an obvious manner (Yamada 2002). APF members attend to communicate with new participants who are upset and eager to find a solution to their problem the message that the most important thing for them is to understand/accept their children and themselves. In this case, “to understand” includes understanding that it is difficult to truly understand their child and/or themselves, and “to accept” also includes accepting themselves whenever it is difficult to accept themselves and the situation around them. In other words, the terms “understanding” and “accepting” imply things that are comprehended at the level of second order observation (Yamada 2003).

On the other hand, as Futoko has become a major social problem, the notion that accepting/understanding their child is important has spread among parents who suffer from Futoko. They are inclined to regard accepting/understanding their child as a way of solving the problem. APF members show their experience in order to transform the idea of trying simply to solve, that is, problem-solving schema.

[When it was time for the participants to express their thoughts at the end, Mr. Kurihara who participated for the first time stated the following.

Mr. Kurihara: [...] “It was good for me to join this meeting. I thought that it was nice to hear a lot of different stories, and I felt that I would also want to create an opportunity to drink tea and chat like this in my neighborhood. My child is not being bullied or being burdened with emotional problems as far as I can tell, so I would just like to learn more and then review everything. I just need to stay calm, but not take up too much time”.

Ms. Ichikawa: “You are a wonderful father. Please tell us what you have learned”.

Ms. Hayashi: “I’m sure it’s a major effort just to get here. There is a lot of information, but there’s so much that it’s confusing, so I think that it would be good to choose what would be easiest for you.

I think that it’s important to look for places or connections where you can go to calm down without hesitation, and I think that it’s important to relax. As for me, I wasn’t working, so it was like I was competing with my children 24 hours a day, and that was really tough. So I started taking classes, and that put my child as well as myself at ease. We should do our best without pushing too hard”.

(excerpt from field notes on APF-E: 1/24/2009)

This excerpt as shown above indicates that APF members have acknowledged that new participants want to solve their problem as soon as possible, and they manage to communicate that there is more than one right answer and there is no need to struggle to solve the problem.

Judging from the above, it seems that there is a difference in what they consider “understanding” and “acceptance”. On the one hand, new participants tend to consider “understanding” and “acceptance” of their child as a way to immediately solve problems. They

are apt to rely on the problem-solving schema and to join the meeting to obtain useful information. On the other, what is shown by longstanding members of APF is the understanding of how to relativize this schema itself.

Two points are emphasized at the APF meeting. The first point to be emphasized at the meeting is that based on the premise that each case is unique, families need to acknowledge the fact that there are no absolute means (no “correct” answers) to “solving” their problems, and that they need to—as much as is possible—focus on finding methods of putting both themselves and their children at ease.

The second point that was emphasized at the meeting is that rather than regard Futoko as a problem that needs to be resolved or eradicated, it should be viewed as an opportunity to redefine ideals on children, family, and society as noted below³.

After Ms. Shisido [she is a new participant at this meeting] recounted her own experience, Ms. Nishina began telling her story.

Ms. Nishina: “I also have a child who stopped going to elementary school from 4th grade. Now she’s 20 years old, and she doesn’t go to school or work, but she’s trying to find what she wants to do by going to Juku [private tutoring school] and playing instruments.

It’s really tiring for a parent to [trust my daughter and] wait. So joining this meeting and talking kind of helps me listen to my daughter.

In the end, children find their own way and act on it. Looking back on my own life, I was reminded how I grew up earnestly like your child [Ms. Shisido’s daughter], and how I used to think like this too. Thinking about how I felt when I was a child makes me regret how I hadn’t listened to my daughter properly.

Earlier, my daughter told me, “I just want you to listen to me. I’m not asking for advice”. And I realized that, oh, children don’t want advice from parents, they just want parents to listen to them.

Sometimes my daughter vents at me until I feel like, anymore and I’ll blow up too, but seeing her express herself like this, I remember how when I was a child, I couldn’t talk to my parents like this.

Looking at my daughter is like repeating my own adolescence; I’m learning by empathizing with her. Through her problematic behavior associated experience of Futoko, I think I grew up from being an un-motherly parent, and my range of emotions was enriched.

When I’m talking with my daughter, there are times I think, “Yes, she should do well in society”. Seeing her growing little by little, even though she’s still dependent. Of course I worry sometimes about how she will fare because Japanese society is very tough now”.

(excerpt from field notes on APF-C: 7/8/2006)

Storytelling practice emphasized by APF members pedagogically functions to change the participant’s mind from the problem-solving schema to relativizing this schema itself (Yamada

³ It should be noted that these two points of emphasis have a tendency to be told as a story in the form: “By relativizing problem solving schema, both children and parents will be more at ease”.

2002, 2003). The two ideas are united in emphasizing the importance of understanding/acceptance, but there is a difference in understanding about what constitutes understanding/acceptance. APF members correlate departing from the problem-solving schema with truly understanding the importance of understanding/acceptance of their child. On this point, Ms. Nishina's statement, "joining this meeting and talking kind of helps me listen to my daughter" shows the importance of understanding/acceptance of a child. On the other hand, her remark, "through her problematic behavior associated experience of Futoko, I think I grew up from being an un-motherly parent" shows the importance of not being obsessed with solving a problem.

Needless to say, pedagogic practices of APF members don't necessarily perform well because anyone can join the meeting. Participants can utilize the regular meeting to obtain helpful information to solve "the problem". And, if they have very different notions about Futoko, some members might withdraw from APF.

In any case, what is important is that the storytelling practice of APF members creates both types of social capital. Storytelling practice as pedagogic communication has transmitted the specific belief shared within the APF to participants, and it creates a bonding social capital that strengthens ties between APF members by forging a collective identity. Simultaneously, storytelling practice has enabled participants to obtain helpful information; in doing so, it creates a bridging social capital by which participants can form a new relationship with those whom they first met through the meeting.

(d) To share through suffering and to be your convoy over the life course.

We can identify two types of bonding social capital that APF generates in terms of relativizing the problem-solving schema.

On one hand, the bonds created by shared Futoko experience enable participants to feel secure, and in doing so they can listen to their children. As mentioned above, Ms. Nishina's remark suggests such effect caused by the bonds. The bonding social capital of APF develops strong ties that function as an empathy-based support network among their members.

On the other, APF members (especially longstanding members) have emphasized the uniqueness of experience and the singularity of life to relativize simple problem-solving schema whenever they tell their own story. This type of storytelling practice seems to forge specific bonds that show another way of supporting their members if they have struggled with their "problem" stemming from Futoko for a long time.

There are some members in APF whose children have become maladjusted adults in the wake of school non-attendance. They join the meeting, and tell the story of their own experience. And as other members listen to them, telling the story somehow correlates with those of others, although they know that no one can really put themselves in someone else's shoes. The bonds forged at such meetings create a so-called "convoy" (Plath 1980), a constant companion during their time of suffering.

Ms. Fujisaki: "My son [Her son has been suffering from social withdrawal for a long time] does say, "What am I going to do in the future"? He starts to get going, he even goes outside and he does seem to have the feeling that he wants to use his experience to do something. But then he gets a migraine from the mental strain, and it certainly seems painful. The day after he says that he wants to do something, he says things like, "I want to die". I'm not good at talking so I

don't know what I should say. When he says, "What am I even living for"? I wonder the same thing".

[The participants are listening to Ms. Fujiski's story quietly.]

Ms. Kiba: That's difficult, isn't it? Because the only person listening to his problems is you. My daughter is twenty-one years old and will be twenty-two next year. She has lived in our home but she has so much free time that she gets irritated and vents about it. Sometimes I get into arguments with her. My oldest son living at home won't say it but I think he is quite frustrated by it. But he bottles it up and can't say anything".

(excerpt from field notes on APF-B: 12/8/2007)

Stories told to the convoy include not only the experience of Futoko, but also every problem in their life (e.g. their experience of illness, aging, bereavements and so forth). Furthermore, stories about problems told at the meeting sound somewhat humorous.

Storytelling practices like that imply an attempt to reinterpret various "problems" they face as meaning that apparently problematic things necessarily have positive aspects, and it makes us mature. If they are faced with a complicated problem that is difficult to solve, participants of APF will attempt to find the positive from the "problematic" experience. Storytelling practices that relativize the problem-solving schema are underpinned by strong ties between longstanding members. Their strong ties function to support participants through sharing their own experience and relativizing it even though they do not feel secure.

IV. *Conclusion*

This article examined how APFs support their participants and the type of social network/capital that is forged by their activities through ethnographic research. From the discussions above, we respond to the three questions mentioned at the beginning of this article as follows.

First, it was found that the organizational network created by APFs enables participants to obtain helpful information and to utilize support organizations. A key feature of membership of each APF and its activities depends on the type of organization connected to APFs. Some members join different APFs in order to add a place for storytelling; they are located at the hub of the support network.

Second, our research clarified that the main resources created by APF activities are storytelling practice and the personal story told by participants. Like other self-help groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous, and self-help groups for people who have experienced bereavement, APFs have established "a place for a purified narrative act" (Ito 2009: 12), and the most important activity is to tell one's own story and to listen to each other in APFs.

Third, participants of the APF meeting have utilized storytelling practice as a means to obtain helpful information to comprehend the situation from which they suffer and to solve their "problems". On the other hand, they have told their own stories in order to forge strong ties that enable them to feel secure or to reinterpret the problem-solving schema itself. With this in mind, we conclude that storytelling practice and its outcome function as bridging and/or bonding social capital at APF meetings, and we also conclude that their opinion about Futoko

and degree of commitment to APF influence which type of social capital is used by the participants.

I would suggest that these findings contribute to research on social capital in the following ways: in Lin's literature on social capital theory, he argues that any theory needs to distinguish a) the characteristics of a given social network and b) the resources embedded within that network; in other words, the social capital itself (Lin 2001). Based on this, Lin argues that the types of networks and resources that are considered the most important are changing in terms of his distinction of whether emphasis is placed on the instrumental or the expressive use of social capital (Lin, op. cit.). In our study, we find that how participants utilize resources accumulated in APF depends on their purposes: whether to emphasize problem-solving (instrumental purpose) or to reinterpret it (emotional purpose).

However, by overemphasizing the need to distinguish between social network and the resources embedded within it, Lin seems to glance over the role social capital plays in *creating* new social networks.

As mentioned above, participants of APF have utilized various supporting resources by talking and listening to their own story. Storytelling practice is a type of resource and it enables participants to *create* new support networks among them. Participants of APF can access support organizations that they would not have known about and they can become acquainted with those with whom they wouldn't have otherwise interacted. Especially for longstanding members, storytelling practice transmutes their relationship into something deeper; it enables participants to create emotional ties among themselves, so that they can be a constant companion during their time of suffering, the so-called "convoy".

Our study shows that utilizing resources (use of social capital) *creates* new social networks, although I am aware that we should avoid overgeneralization of our findings. Therefore, we need to focus on this pathway, not only to distinguish a given social network and the resources embedded within networks (i.e., social capital) in discussing social capital.

Finally, we confirm what remains to be seen. We should explore each member's egocentric network in order to comprehend the APF network in more detail. Furthermore, we must examine whether APFs are a homogeneous or heterogeneous group in terms of social background because it is found that social capital accumulated in the APF is two-sided and its features depend on the member's purpose. However, we have yet to clarify the homogeneity of APF members at the group level, and it may be that bridging social capital created by APF activities is underpinned by bonding social capital that functions to make participants homogeneous. We plan to conduct a questionnaire survey for APF members in order to achieve these future tasks. Quantitative research on APF members will clarify the support mechanism for those suffering with Futoko children.

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