

The discursive management of work-life dilemmas

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Abstract

This paper explores the ways in which a group of women construct their gender identities in contemporary Japanese society. *Critical discursive psychology* (Edley, 2001; Wetherell, 1998) was used to investigate the *interpretative repertoires* (Potter & Wetherell, 1987) these women drew on as they constructed their gender identities. The interpretative repertoires that were identified in their talk about managing domestic and non-domestic responsibilities are presented for analysis. The participants assumed different subject positions in relation to these repertoires as they managed the *ideological dilemmas* (Billig, Condor, Edwards, Gane, Middleton & Radley, 1988) that emerged from the contradictions between these repertoires. The results of the analysis suggest that modern women face a difficult task as they carefully manage these dilemmas and construct identities from the interpretative resources circulating in Japanese society.

Introduction

Japan is still considered a highly gendered society (Iwama, 2005). One area in which unequal gender relations play out is the division of household labour. Women have traditionally performed childcare, eldercare, and housework (Iwao, 1993; Sugimoto, 2004). This inequity is far from unique to Japan; in fact, in many other industrialised nations, there is a wide gender gap in domestic work among married couples (Connell, 2002: 101; South & Spitze, 1994). In Japan, the reason given for this discrepancy is that men have to devote a tremendous amount of time to their careers (Brinton, 1993; Iwama, 2005; Tsuya & Bumpass, 1998). Men are only able to do so because of the domestic support provided by their wives. As Brinton (1993) describes this, “women assume virtually all the emotional and caretaking responsibilities for the family and leave men free to devote long hours to company life” (p. 93). The working patterns of women are described as an M-shaped curve (Iwao, 1993: 163; Mouer & Kawanishi, 2005: 133; Sugimoto, 2004: 155). Basically, women work in their early twenties, quit once they marry or bear their first child, and then resume part-time work once their children are grown. When displayed graphically, the working patterns of women form the contours of the letter ‘M’. This trend, however, is changing as more women are postponing marriage and childbirth and expressing a desire for both a career and family (Mouer & Kawanishi, 2005: 134).

The participation of women as part-time workers fills the chronic labour shortage of the past three decades (Gottfried, 2003; Sugimoto, 2004: 155). Thus, women are participating in the workforce, but in the capacity of marginalised workers who receive minimal wages and few benefits yet work long hours. These ‘false part-timers’ do not have the economic resources to achieve financial independence from their husbands (Gottfried, 2003; Sugimoto, 2004: 156). Thus, while the number of working women increases, women do not work on the same terms as men.

The demand for increased labour led to the passage of the Equal Employment Opportunity Law and creation of a two-tier employment track system: the *sogo shoku* or ‘career track’ and the *ippan shoku* or ‘clerical track.’ The career track holds women to the same working conditions as their male counterparts. These conditions include demanding work, regular overtime, after-hours socializing, and transfers to branch offices. Clerical workers, on the other hand, perform routine tasks, leave work at a specified time, and are not transferred. Clearly, this so-called ‘mommy track’ is much more conducive to family life. The inflexibility of the two track system discourages women from entering the career track and results in a disproportionate number of female managers. For example, only roughly one quarter of Japanese firms

have female managers at or above the section head level and 73 percent of those in managerial positions do not have children (Sugimoto, 2004: 157).

This study investigates the interpretative repertoires a group of Japanese women draw on as they construct their identities. As Billig, Condor, Edwards, Gane, Middleton, and Radley (1988) have insightfully pointed out, everyday commonsense is intrinsically fragmented and fraught with contradictions; thus, *ideological dilemmas* develop as people construct their identities (1988: 17). Accordingly, a second goal of the study is to analyse how the participants work with the inconsistencies between interpretative repertoires in order to manage ideological dilemmas. In the next section, I discuss the concepts which form the basis of my methodological approach.

Analytic concepts and procedures

A particularly suitable approach for studying how people construct their identities through talk and manage contradictions arising from tensions between interpretative repertoires and subject positions is critical discursive psychology (see Edley, 2001; Wetherell, 1998). *Interpretative repertoires* (Potter & Wetherell, 1987) are patterned, commonsense ways that people from a given society discuss a topic. Interpretative repertoires are defined as “basically a lexicon or register of terms and metaphors drawn upon to characterize and evaluate actions and events” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987: 187). This study focused on men’s and women’s roles in Japanese society and I identified the interpretative repertoires thematically and through discursive devices which are referred to in the analysis.

Subject positions (Davies & Harre, 1990; Hollway, 1998) are the identities people construct in social interaction through drawing on, resisting, or reconfiguring interpretative repertoires. Individuals both adopt positions and assign positions to others. The others include the social scientist conducting the interview and the non-present social actors in the interviewees’ accounts. Subject positions form the base of people’s identities (Burr, 2003). As Taylor (2005) states, “a position, or subject position, can be understood as a temporary identity which is conferred on or taken up by a speaker and which becomes both who she or he is seen to be, by others, and the perspective from which she or he sees the world” (p. 96). The fact that people assume various subject positions relative to interpretative repertoires suggests that identities are not fixed but are fluid and constantly changing.

The process of identity construction is not seamless and conflict free, however. Participants strategically deploy interpretative repertoires in order to suit the rhetorical demands of the interactional context. Accordingly, tensions and

contradictions between interpretative repertoires can contribute to the formation of *ideological dilemmas* (Billig, et al., 1988). For example, in a study investigating the disparate ways a group of men discursively construct feminists, one participant faces an ideological dilemma between presenting himself as non-sexist and constructing an account where some feminists are 'extremists' (Edley & Wetherell, 2001). One pattern of accounting he uses to manage this dilemma is to endorse liberal feminist values, thus constructing a positive *self-presentation* (Goffman, 1959) while simultaneously constructing some feminists as 'extremists'. Therefore, speakers use the internal inconsistencies in interpretative repertoires as resources to manage emergent ideological dilemmas.

I will now move on to present the data of my study, which is concerned with the ways a group of Japanese woman draw on certain interpretative repertoires related to gender roles and their management of ideological dilemmas which form due to tensions between these repertoires.

The interviews

The research data consists of semi-structured, individual interviews I conducted with fifteen women. Interviews are a data collection method frequently used in critical discursive psychology (Edley, 2001; Wetherell, 1998). The purpose of the interviews was to elicit *interpretative repertoires* (Potter & Wetherell, 1987) about gender roles and any *ideological dilemmas* (Billig et al., 1988) the participants articulated. Participants were asked about traditional and modern roles of men and women and if women face social pressure. The interviews were conducted in Japanese and averaged ninety minutes in length.

The research interview is a site where gender and other identities are constructed and performed (Butler, 1999). Social actors have agency in society as they construct their gender identities, yet they are constrained by larger social institutions such as the state, workplace organisations, and educational institutions (Connell, 1987, 2002; Frosh, Phoenix, & Pattman, 2002). I followed the principles of 'responsive interviewing' (Rubin & Rubin, 2005: 30-38), thus the participants were 'conversational partners' and the resulting interaction was a co-constructed event which occurred in a specific time and place.

The criteria for inclusion in this sample were that participants be female and of Japanese ethnicity. The sample was recruited through the author's network of acquaintances and through snowballing. Potential candidates who expressed interest were asked if they would be willing to take part in an interview about being a woman.

Beyond this they were not given any specific information about the content of the interview. They were assured of confidentiality and encouraged to provide their contact information if they wished to see the results of this study. Pseudonyms are used to protect the participants' identities.

The purpose of data collection in discursive psychological research is not to generate data which is generalisable or representative of a large group (Potter & Wetherell, 1987: 161). Instead, the focus is on how participants rhetorically manage the demands of the current interactional context. For this reason, the ways participants draw on interpretative repertoires, assume subject positions in relation to those repertoires, and manage ideological dilemmas are evident even in a small corpus.

Before proceeding to the analysis, some issues related to translation and transcription conventions need to be discussed. Fairclough (1999: 186) objects to performing discourse analysis on translated texts and maintains that extracts reproduced in academic papers should be written in the source language. I conducted the analysis on the Japanese texts, but due to space constraints and to increase the paper's readability, I present English translations in this paper. The translations are as close to the original Japanese as possible with clarificatory remarks enclosed in brackets as needed. Regarding the transcription conventions, (laughs) indicates laughter; [explanation] is used for clarificatory remarks; and "quote marks" are used to indicate quoted speech. Punctuation is provided for increased readability rather than to indicate speech patterns.

Analysis and discussion

This section discusses both interpretative repertoires and subject positions. In the first part of the section, I discuss the two main interpretative repertoires that participants drew on when constructing accounts of men's and women's social roles: *work as a reason to live* and *women as responsible for domestic work*. An important point about these repertoires is that they are *gendered* (Sunderland, 2004) and position men and women in different social roles. Men are positioned as working in society where they accrue *cultural* and *symbolic* capital (Bourdieu, 1977) from their public roles while women are positioned as wives and mothers whose capital is dependent upon their husband's work-related success and children's academic results.

Work as a reason to live

This notion of locating one's *ikigai* or 'reason to live' in work developed after World War II, when Japanese salaried workers devoted tremendous amounts of time to their careers in order to rebuild war-torn Japan. A pattern emerged whereby men devoted themselves single-heartedly to their work and women to domestic responsibilities, working part-time at most, but supporting the family in many non-economic ways (Mathews, 2003). Since men were working in order to support their families, many located their *ikigai* with their families. However, the long hours spent at their workplaces resulted in work becoming the main source of *ikigai* for many men (ibid.). Ueno (1995) contends that even today some men are under the false impression their *ikigai* is family when in fact it is work. Certainly, the importance of work in Japan for men makes it difficult to construct an *ikigai* beyond work (Mathews, 2003).

This repertoire was identified in discussions around the topic of work. The participants talked about the tremendous amount of time workers devote to their jobs. In this first extract, Nayu contrasts working patterns in Japan with those in Switzerland, where she has lived. According to her account, a system exists in Switzerland whereby people (mostly women) can work reduced hours while still remaining on a career track. This system was created to support those aspiring to combine a career with other things (i.e. raising children or furthering their education):

Extract 1

111 Justin: I think the long-hours work culture that prevails in Japan makes it difficult
112 to maintain a healthy work-life balance.

113 Nayu: That's a good point. As I said before, I was in Switzerland last year.

114 Switzerland has a system where you can work fifty to eighty percent of the time.

115 This isn't part time work, just a reduction of normal working hours. In the off time
116 people can do housework or attend college. In Japan, building a career involves
117 giving one hundred percent, so the amount of time people have to spend at
118 at work makes it very difficult to combine both [a career and family].

The *work as a reason to live* repertoire is suggested by the social obligation conveyed by 'have to' (line 117). Nayu contrasts the flexible Swiss system with Japan where people are expected to give 'one hundred percent' to their careers. In the next extract, Yukari discusses how men are penalised for missing work:

Extract 2

112 Justin: Can men also take childcare leave?

113 Yukari: Yes they can, but it makes the news—that's how rare it is. If a male civil
114 servant takes leave, it's factored into his evaluation. Even though he is legally
115 allowed leave for childcare or nursing elderly parents, it works against him on
116 his evaluation. Employees are entitled to about twenty days of paid leave and
117 three to four months of childcare leave per year. However, if you take that much
118 time off...

In Yukari's account, *work as a reason to live* makes it difficult for members of both sexes to take childcare leave; however, the gendered nature of the repertoire positions men as primary breadwinners and thus unable to take leave. Yukari uses sex-based *membership categories* (Sacks, 1995: 40), when discussing childcare leave. The categories which people use (e.g. 'doctor', 'friend') are embedded with inferences about normative activities that members engage in (Sacks, 1995: 40). Since men who take leave 'make the news', this is not a typical or *category-bound activity* (Sacks, 1995: 40) that men partake in (line 114). In the last part of the account, Yukari's unfinished clause constructs members of Japanese society as unforgiving toward those who take their legally guaranteed leave. The gap between the law and employers' attitudes could lead to the development of an ideological dilemma for men who wish to combine work with parenthood:

Extract 3

44 Justin: Why do you think men use the excuse they have no time to help out with
45 domestic work?

46 Nayu: The Japanese system makes it hard to take time off. For example, in order to
47 get a good position, you cannot take much time off. It's hard to say, for example,
48 "I'm going to take a year off for maternity leave."

Nayu draws on the *work as a reason to live* repertoire as she constructs work as a legitimate excuse for not participating in housework (line 46). Even though my question is about men, Nayu does not orient to gender in the first part of the account. In fact, the repertoire makes it difficult for anyone, suggested by the generic 'you' (line 47), to take time off from work. In the last part of the account, gender is introduced with reference to maternity leave. The gendered nature of *work as a reason to live* is apparent since work and motherhood are constructed as incompatible. That is, it is difficult to take time off work for the purpose of having a baby.

The accounts presented above overlap with one another. Yukari's discussion of current childcare leave practices echoes Naya's comments about the importance of devoting long hours to the job. Resisting this powerful repertoire by taking childcare leave could affect one's chances for promotion. In addition, men who take leave not only risk damaging their careers, but also 'make the news' because of their atypical masculine behaviour. Clearly, "to "do" gender is not always to live up to the normative conceptions of femininity or masculinity; it is to engage in the behaviour *at the risk of gender assessment*" (West & Zimmerman, 2002: 13). These extracts demonstrate that while men *can* 'do' gender differently, it will not go unpunished. Furthermore, in Japanese society the proverb 'the nail that sticks up gets hammered down', constitutes a powerful interpretative repertoire, the pressure for group conformation is privileged over individual desires (Sugimoto, 2004: 2-5). Therefore, those who fail to 'do' gender appropriately are appropriately punished or 'nailed down'.

Conformity is encouraged by the unforgiving and watchful eyes of the *seken* or normative community (Lebra, 1984; McVeigh, 1997; Sugimoto, 2004), i.e. "the surrounding world of community consisting of neighbors, kin, colleagues, friends, and other significant persons whose opinions are considered important" (Lebra, 1984: 338). The *seken* becomes a sort of regulatory device that keeps personal behaviour in check. People perform in their socially legitimised roles for fear of ostracism by the *seken*. For example, many leaders involved in public scandals quickly apologise to the *seken* (Sugimoto, 2004: 281).

Since *work as a reason to live* is a gendered interpretative repertoire, it rests upon the assumption that men devote themselves to their careers, i.e. that, for men, a career is part of a normal life cycle. Accordingly, given that most men marry and produce families, childcare and housework remain central to women's lives. This was usually an implicit assumption as the women interviewees discussed working patterns:

Extract 4

29 Justin: Why do you think it is difficult for husbands and wives to divide the
30 housework equally?

31 Megumi: The chances are higher that men work more hours than women. If men
32 were also able to leave work by 5:30 then dividing the housework equally might be
33 a possibility. However, the chances that men have to work overtime are quite high.
34 The way things are in Japan right now, men have to spend so much time at the
35 company, their time at home decreases and so it's difficult to equally share the
36 housework with their wives.

Megumi uses several discursive strategies to contrast the different expectations of working men and women. She invokes the membership category, 'men' to illustrate work related obligations. Here men are bound to the activity of work, which is indicated by 'have to' (line 33). The gendered nature of the repertoire is suggested by 'men' and 'the way things are in Japan right now'.

Embedded in Megumi's account is the gendered presumption that *work is a reason to live for men*. Her description rests on the assumption that men work in the career track and women in the clerical track. Although she gives the hypothetical scenario where men leave work at 5:30, this would involve them working in the clerical track. This is unrealistic for couples who want to retain a certain standard of living.

In the next extract, Chika, who is currently job hunting, discusses explicit pressure she has experienced when applying for jobs. Chika is comparing the clerical track and career track employment system:

Extract 5

54 Chika: There is a much greater percentage of men in the career track positions and
55 sometimes the number of women [in the career track] is not written on company
56 documents.

57 Justin: Really?

58 Chika: Yeah. In the clerical track there are many women. Also, clerical jobs are
59 advertised as being popular with women. This makes those jobs appealing for
60 women and they aim toward those. It is often written on the job advertisements that
61 the career track is usually filled by men and clerical track usually filled by women.

The exclusion of women from career track job advertisements draw on and constitute the *work as a reason to live* repertoire, according to which, from an employer's perspective, women are a risk not worth taking since they may resign from their jobs (Wetherell, Stiven, & Potter, 1987). In Japan, employing women is a particularly 'risky' business since employers invest much time in on-the-job training of their employees (Dasgupta, 2000: 194-196; Sugimoto, 2004: 94). Employers try to avoid this risk on the one hand by encouraging women applicants to apply for the clerical track, where resigning after a few years is normal and not a wasted investment, and on the other by discouraging women to apply for the career track. The advertisements invite women to apply for clerical positions not through coercion but by highlighting their apparent appeal among women.

Excluding a discussion of what constitutes a healthy work-life balance, the

work as a reason to live repertoire itself is, in principle, not dilemmatic for single people able to devote a large amount of time to their jobs as they climb up their career ladders. However, the gendered nature of the repertoire means that in practice women do not have equal employment opportunities. Men are explicitly positioned as family breadwinners, while women are implicitly positioned as homemakers. That is, men are expected to enter the career track by default, while women work in the clerical track for several years prior to marriage. An ideological dilemma can develop for those women attempting to balance a career and family (plus, in principle, for men who wish to do the same). Women who are pursuing careers face a dilemma because, in the *women as responsible for domestic work* interpretative repertoire I deal with in the next section, they are first held accountable as wives and mothers before career professionals.

Women as responsible for domestic work

This brings us to the second interpretative repertoire that arose in the participants' talk: *women as responsible for domestic work*. Positioned by this powerful repertoire, women attempting to balance both work with family may express guilt for not completely fulfilling a domestic role:

Extract 6

20 Justin: What do you think about women's roles today?

21 Nayu: I think traditional thinking still persists. Women are still expected to shoulder 22 the major burden of housework and childcare. On the other hand, the number of

23 women working outside the home has increased, so they don't only have domestic 24 roles. They also work out in society where they use their skills and knowledge.

25 Justin: Why do you think that having both a career and family is so difficult for 26 women?

27 Nayu: In Japan you know many men still have traditional thinking where once a 28 woman marries, she has to do all of the housework. That is why childcare 29 facilities such as nursery schools are not so developed and a system is not set up to 30 support working women. Even for those women who want to keep working, it is 31 difficult to balance both [career and family].

Nayu's account constructs women as performing two different types of roles. First, women are still expected to perform housework. Second, women are using their skills

and working in society. At first glance, her account of the various roles women are performing suggests that gender equality is approaching. However, 'traditional thinking' (lines 21; 27) indicates that she is drawing on the *women as responsible for domestic work* interpretative repertoire. This repertoire in combination with an *equal opportunities* repertoire (Wetherell, et al., 1987) can form into an ideological dilemma. Women want to excel at their careers but the pull of domestic responsibilities hinders their ability to do so or results in a second shift when they return home (Hochschild & Machung, 2003: Chapter 1). The increasing age of marriage or decision to remain single indicate that women may wish to pursue careers but are unwilling to assume the second shift (Nemoto, 2008). In addition to reflecting a social assumption that women perform housework, *women as responsible for domestic work* has material consequences such as inadequate childcare facilities (lines 103-106), which Akiko discusses in the extract below:

Extract 7

31 Justin: Do you think that men and women are equal in the workplace?

32 Akiko: I think that teachers are pretty equal, but it is not about whether or not a
33 particular school is unfair. For example, under the current social system women
34 have to pick up their kids from nursery school by six o'clock. Due to this, women's
35 workload is decreased or they are not given that much responsibility which I think
36 is unfair.

Akiko differentiates inequalities which exist in individual schools with the overall inequality of the current social system and thus *gender order* (Connell, 2002: 54) of Japanese society. Membership in the category of 'women' entails the category-bound activities of picking up children from school, which impacts women's careers. The discursive absence of men from Akiko's account reflects the gendered nature of the *work as a reason to live* repertoire where men are released from domestic responsibilities due to paid employment.

An ideological dilemma can develop for women due to contradictions between the *work as a reason to live* and *women as responsible for domestic work* interpretative repertoires. Given that women are positioned as responsible for domestic affairs, it is difficult to draw on both repertoires in the process of identity construction. Akiko assesses this situation as unfair which suggests she is taking a resistant subject position in relation to these gendered repertoires (lines 35-36).

Women as responsible for domestic work was also suggested when participants talked about the different expectations for women and men. Irrespective of the fact

that increasing numbers of women choose to continue working, traditional social expectations still associate women with domestic work:

Extract 8

201 Justin: Do you think that women today face social pressure?

202 Akiko: Since women have to look after their children they cannot pursue their jobs
203 to their heart's content. I think this is a form of social pressure. It is not about one
204 company or one employee's individual situation, but different expectations of men
205 and women. For example, if a family does not attend a graduation ceremony, it is
206 the woman who is blamed. The husband can't help it because he has to work. If
207 the wife doesn't go people will ask why. This is you know social pressure.

...

269 Akiko: I feel social pressure from the expectation that women have to go and pick
270 up their children by a certain hour. In the end, men would not be forgiven [by their
271 employers] for leaving work early to pick up their children, so it falls on women's
272 shoulders to do so. Women are seen as having some sort of duty and are allowed to
273 leave work early. This results in women not being promoted or given tasks such as
274 serving tea. If the working hours were shortened, that would really solve this
275 problem.

This extract represents a significant development from extract seven because domestic responsibilities are now formulated as 'social pressure' for women pursuing careers (line 203). Akiko uses the membership categories 'men' and 'women' to construct membership in each category as involving different, thus gendered, category-bound activities (lines 204-205). The example of graduation ceremonies (line 205) is especially revealing as it illustrates the active role women are expected to play in supporting their children's education. The nomenclature *kyoiku mama* ('education mother') is used to reflect the pivotal role mother's play in their children's education (Allison, 1991). Since motherhood is viewed as all-encompassing, sometimes mothers even hide their part-time employment from schools for fear of being seen as inadequate mothers (Allison, 1991: 203). The obligatory nature of *women as responsible for domestic work* is suggested by 'duty' (line 272). The material consequences of this repertoire are limited opportunities for promotion and unchallenging jobs (lines 273-275). This subject positioning is not specific to Japanese society. Michelle Lazar (2002: 12) uses the term *other-centeredness* in reference to how heterosexual femininity is constructed around devotion to husbands and children. This is particularly the case in Japan where marriage and motherhood are connected to femininity. In fact, career track women

sometimes feel unfeminine due to their career pursuits (Nemoto, 2008: 230).

These accounts suggest that the current system is set up to support an outdated model based upon a sexual division of labour where a father works full-time and mother works either part-time or is a full-time homemaker. Unfortunately, women and not men are still held accountable as primary caregivers (Roberson & Suzuki, 2003: 8). Female employees, unlike their male counterparts, are first and foremost held accountable as wives and mothers who leave work early in order to care for their children, manage the household, and support their husbands. This assumption contributes to a *gender accumulation process* forming the basis of a *patriarchal dividend* (Connell, 2002: 142) where predominantly men occupy socially-powerful positions and women remain financially dependent on their husbands which limits their life choices.

Subject positions

In the second part of this section, I discuss the subject positions the women assumed in relation to the *work as a reason to live* and *women are responsible for domestic work* interpretative repertoires. These participants discursively managed work-life dilemmas by adopting the *working professional*, *homemaker*, or *superwoman* subject positions in relation to the *work as a reason to live* and *women as responsible for domestic work* repertoires. These subject positions involve resisting, accepting, or reformulating the above mentioned interpretative repertoires.

Working professional position

In discursively negotiating the work-family dilemma, the *working professional* is a position that some women assumed in the process of identity construction. The position was not drawn on by a majority of the participants, but it is still worth mentioning because of its transformative potential to disrupt a traditional gender order that locates women primarily in the domestic sphere and men in the public one. This position involves resisting the *women as responsible for domestic work* repertoire and embracing the *work as a reason to live* repertoire. In other words, these women work in the same capacity as their male counterparts—the main difference being that they are single and thus do not have the domestic support provided by the wives of their male counterparts (unless, of course, they are provided with support from a domestic husband, parents, or hired help). In any event, this position allows women to fully devote themselves to their careers. In the extract below, Akiko talks about her sister who fits into this category:

Extract 9

295 Akiko: My sister is single and on the career track. She graduated in 1993, six
296 or seven years after the Equal Employment Opportunity Law was passed, and was
297 hired by a large company. She works into the wee hours of the morning, and
298 attends late-night parties.

299 Justin: So she is treated equally with her male counterparts?

300 Akiko: Yes, I think she works in the same capacity as her male colleagues. She
301 loves her job, works really hard at it, and is really good at it. So I think she is
302 treated the same as her male colleagues.

According to Akiko's account, by working into the 'wee hours of the morning', her sister has embraced the *work as a reason to live* repertoire. Her hard work has paid off as she 'loves her job' and is 'treated the same' as her male colleagues. This position provides women with an opportunity to acquire both economic and cultural capital acquired only from working in the public sphere and consequently denied to fulltime homemakers.

This subject position is not however as conflict-free as the previous extract suggests for women. In addition to sacrificing much of one's free time, it also involves jeopardizing the prospect of marriage and a family. This is not meant to suggest that this is most women's ultimate goal but to highlight the main difference between male and female working professionals. While many working professional men have domestic support, their female counterparts typically do not.

The next extract illustrates an ideological dilemma that some working professional women face. In the account below, Kayoko draws a parallel between her friend's experience and her own conflicting feelings about male-female relationships:

Extract 10

271 Kayoko: Concerning things like salary, you know men think that it is better to earn
272 more [than their partners]. So I have the feeling that men think about these kinds of
273 things more than women.

274 Justin: Do you mean things such as status?

275 Kayoko: Yeah, that's right. I don't care about educational background at all; I see
276 people for who they are. Apparently men think about these kinds of things much
277 more than women. Like my friend who got her doctorate from Tsukuba University.
278 She said that men think that if they are not in a higher position than their partners,
279 things probably won't work out between them.

279 Justin: Does your friend want to get married?

280 Kayoko: She did at one point but not anymore.

281 Justin: Why is that?

282 Kayoko: She told me about a couple of previous relationships where the guy
283 wanted her to give up her career, and she was not willing to do that.

284 Justin: I see.

285 Kayoko: When she told me that I began to think about something. You put all of
286 your effort into something that you really want to do, yet from the perspective of
287 people around you. How do I put this? They compare themselves with you and
288 don't want to get close to you. I'm not really sure.

Kayoko positions men and women as having different ideas about gender relations. For example, men's desire to earn a higher salary is framed as readily available knowledge through the use of the discourse marker 'you know' (line 271). One function of 'you know' is to construct information as common knowledge (Schiffrin, 1987: 267). In contrast, Kayoko positions herself as unconcerned about educational background (line 275). This positioning is supported by the use of the *extreme case formulation* (Pomerantz, 1986: 219) 'at all' (line 275). This device functions to emphasise Kayoko's claim that while she is unconcerned about status, men are very much concerned about it. Kayoko constructs an account about her friend to further corroborate her claim that men and women have different views about the importance of status (lines 277-279). Similar to Kayoko's friend, Kayoko's high academic qualifications and career success potentially reduce her prospects of marriage.

The resulting dilemma for women who embrace the *work as a reason to live* repertoire plays out discursively at the end of this extract. Women who draw on the repertoire as they construct their identities face the potential dilemma of overqualifying themselves for the marriage market. Kayoko's self-positioning is that she is putting 'all of her effort' into what she wants to do, yet she is subjected to the negative gaze of others (lines 287-288). As previously discussed, social conformity is encouraged in Japan by the *seken* ('normative community') and is reflected in the proverb 'the nail that sticks out gets hammered down.' Consequently, behaviour is modified in accordance with the expectations of the *seken*. Indeed, the ever vigilant *seken* serves as a sort of disciplinary device that encourages the self-regulation of behaviour. In Kayoko's account, embracing the *working professional* position is not as seamless and conflict-free as Akiko's extract indicates.

The working professional woman position or 'career woman' is an example of *gender manoeuvring*, which involves manipulating traditional conceptualisations of masculinity and femininity (Schippers, 2002: Chapters 3-4). By engaging the discourse

of working patterns typically associated with male bodies and ultimately masculinity, women can challenge the current gender order and cause *gender trouble* (Butler, 1999: 163-180). These social actors thus have agency as they construct gender identities, yet their non-normative performances incur sanctions (Butler, 1999: 178; Connell, 2002: 58-60; Pascoe, 2007: Chapter 3; Sunderland, 2004: 190; West & Zimmerman, 2002: 13). The example of Kayoko's friend illustrates that social actors can challenge the current gender order by engaging in non-normative gender performances. At the same time, consequences such as being overqualified for the marriage market can result.

Homemaker position

This subject position involves constructing an identity by drawing on the *women as responsible for domestic work* repertoire. This position was overwhelmingly adopted by university students when asked about their future plans. In the account below, Akiko provides some relevant background information about why young women are taking up this subject position:

Extract 11

183 Akiko: My generation was heavily influenced by women's liberation and feminism
184 since we graduated [from college] right after the Equal Employment Opportunity
185 Law was passed. We felt fortunate just to be working. So we worked extremely
186 hard doing both housework and our jobs while men continued just as they always
187 had. The generation that witnessed this are now university students. They saw
188 their mothers both work and take care of the house while it was acceptable for their
189 fathers only to work and of course they hate this. So they are either becoming
190 fulltime homemakers or if they work, they are choosing not to get married. Since
191 one generation has seen this pattern, they are becoming more conservative I think.
192 My generation did not know the reality. We were happy just to be working, so we
193 gladly did the housework and cooking too.

In this account, university students are positioned by Akiko as adopting *homemaker* or *working professional* subject positions. The account maintains that, unlike the women of their mothers' generation who were thrilled by the prospect of working, they are unwilling to spread themselves that thin. The result is that many women are reportedly adopting the *homemaker* position which entails forgoing a career. This account positions young women as having a high degree of agency, choosing to focus on domestic duties since they are not expected to be family breadwinners. However,

the account does not articulate the material consequences of adopting this subject position. For instance, since these women are not developing any type of skill, it will be very difficult to become reemployed later. Their options will be limited to marginalised part-time work that does not require any skills and has few benefits (Gottfried, 2003; Iwao, 1993: 173-175; Mouer & Kawanishi, 2005: 133; Sugimoto, 2004: 155). More importantly, however, in many ways the choice to become a fulltime homemaker makes them financially dependent on their husbands.

Nayu further elaborates on the notion that women today may have more choices than men:

Extract 12

365 Nayu: Women might even have more choices than men today. Men can't really say,
366 "I want to become a homemaker." While women are able to work more, men are
367 unable to work less in today's society. I don't know who faces more pressure. For
368 example, my friend who is a researcher told me that there is a woman who he
369 wants to marry, but because he doesn't earn that much money he can't marry her.

The pattern of accounting which constructs women as having more choices than men neglects to acknowledge the resulting inequalities. In Nayu's account, men are constructed as not having agency to perform outside a breadwinning role. The *work as a reason to live* repertoire positions men in this breadwinning role. Yet they also receive benefits from this role, accumulating financial as well as symbolic and cultural capital while women's unpaid 'labour of love' remains largely unacknowledged (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003: 38). Therefore, women who adopt this subject position are positioned less powerfully than their husbands, although they may have a limited domestic empowerment.

Superwoman position

This subject position involves embracing both the *work as a reason to live* and *women as responsible for domestic work* repertoires. For these women, the large amount of time that employees are expected to spend at work makes employment difficult to balance with domestic work. One strategy to resolve this dilemma is to embrace the *superwoman* position and the resulting second shift that accompanies it.

Discursive evidence of the tension between these repertoires emerged in the women's accounts as we discussed the pressures they face. The *work as a reason to live* repertoire was implied in their accounts of the household duties they neglected due to

their jobs. The *women as responsible for domestic work* repertoire was suggested by lexical items which suggested feelings of guilt for not fulfilling domestic responsibilities. This was the case for Akiko who reportedly shares domestic responsibilities with her husband. Nevertheless, when they have to cut corners, Akiko reportedly feels as though she has neglected her parental duties:

Extract 13

129 Justin: Do you put pressure on yourself?

130 Akiko: It's not that someone has specifically said something to me. You know since
131 I am working there are times when I can't clean the house and I feel responsible.
132 Since my husband and I are both working he thinks that it's fine. When I'm late
133 picking up my child you know I feel as though I'm the only one who wasn't at
134 school on time. When [my husband and I] decide to pack our lunches and aren't
135 able to do so, I feel as though I didn't do something that I had to do. Is this social
136 pressure? Probably society didn't say anything, yet I feel this way.

In this extract Akiko formulates an account where job commitments result in some aspect of domestic work being neglected. Lexical items expressing guilt reflect (i.e., 'I feel responsible') the *women as responsible for domestic work* repertoire and are suggested by the use of 'you know' (lines 130, 133) and 'had to' (line 135). 'You know' emphasises that it is natural to feel as though she is 'the only one' who is late. 'Have to' constructs picking up her child as her duty. The *work as a reason to live* repertoire conflicts with *women as responsible for domestic work* and results in an ideological dilemma for Akiko who is attempting to construct her subjectivity by drawing on both. The *women as responsible for domestic work* repertoire is a strong ideological force as Akiko and not her husband articulates guilt. Another noteworthy point about this and the next extract is the positioning of her husband:

Extract 14

138: Justin: How do you and your husband balance the housework?

139 Akiko: My husband and I decided a long time ago to do everything together
140 (laugh). Concerning the household, the one who is not busy should jump in. Both
141 of us are able to do anything related to the house. In the morning, it's better for the
142 one who is not sleepy to make breakfast. That is how we do things. In spite of this
143 when we are both busy and cannot do something, I feel more of the responsibility.
144 Like when we decide not to pack our [the whole family's] lunches I feel as though
145 because I did not work hard enough, the lunches were not made. Yet my husband
146 thinks nothing of it.

In this account, pressure was not directly applied to Akiko. Nevertheless, childcare is constructed as her 'responsibility' and when it is neglected it is because she did not 'work hard enough', the implication being as a wife and mother. Both endurance and persistence are extolled values in Japanese society (Sugimoto, 2004: 282). In Akiko's account, we see the gendered nature of these values. The reference to *obento* or 'lunch-boxes' is significant due to its connection with motherhood (Allison, 1991). Elaborate, nutritionally balanced *obento* symbolise a mother's love for her children and that she is 'fulfilling' her motherly duty (Allison, 1991: 203). Similar to extract 13, when some aspect of domestic work is neglected, Akiko reportedly feels the bulk of the guilt.

The second point about this account is the positioning of Akiko's husband. In contrast to her self-positioning as someone who did not 'work hard enough', he is positioned as recognizing that sometimes the demands of their jobs infiltrate their ability to attend to domestic responsibilities. Unlike Akiko who 'feels responsible', he 'thinks nothing of it'. Positioning herself as concerned about fulfilling her motherly and wifely duties is one way to manage a positive self-presentation as a 'good wife and mother'.

Akiko's self-positioning as not 'working hard enough' suggests that the *women as responsible for domestic work* repertoire is still a powerful ideological force in Japanese society. A *troubled identity* (Wetherell, 1998) is one which diverges from the identities that a community accepts as normative, and requires an account by the individual concerned. Akiko provides this account by drawing on the concept of hard work to emphasise dissatisfaction toward neglecting household chores. The *superwoman* position troubles the *work as a reason to live for men and women as responsible for domestic work* repertoires. The troubling is not without tension, as suggested by the feelings of guilt constructed in Akiko's account. Even if Akiko is a 'successful' *superwoman*, culturally dominant discourses construct marriage and motherhood as *eikyu shushoku* or 'lifetime employment' (Iwao, 1993: 156), thus an attempt to construct a subjectivity outside of these roles may be 'troubling'.

Conclusion

In this study, the *work as a reason to live* and *women as responsible for domestic work* interpretative repertoires position individuals in specific, gendered ways; nevertheless, participants adopted subject positions such as complicit (homemaker), resistant (working professional), and transformative (superwoman). The *superwoman* and *working professional* are subject positions which may contribute to revolutionizing the

current gender order of Japanese society. Participants who assumed the *superwoman* subject position faced an ideological dilemma due to tensions between the *work as a reason to live* and *women as responsible for domestic work* interpretative repertoires. For this reason, the *superwoman* position is a *troubled identity* in Japanese society where motherhood is viewed as a full-time, stay-at-home job (Allison, 1991: 203). Nevertheless, women who manage to successfully perform this identity demonstrate that motherhood is not necessarily 'lifetime employment' and that women can also make equally important non-domestic social contributions. However, the gendered *work as a reason to live* and *the women as responsible for domestic work* repertoires combined with men's lack of participation in domestic work make the *superwoman* position troubling in the current discursive climate.

The *working professional* is another example of a transformative subject position. Similar to the *superwoman* position, it challenges traditional notions of Japanese femininity. As I suggested, embracing this position illustrates that if women are willing to adapt to a somewhat 'masculine' identity at the interactional level, then they can carve out a place for themselves in a largely male-dominated working world. While challenging the unequal gender order at the interactional level is an important component of structural change (Pascoe, 2007), structural, institutional inequalities still exist which disadvantage women (Connell, 2002).

The issue related to women adapting to a 'masculinised' work environment is that it sets the working patterns of men as the norm. As Edley and Wetherell point out, conflating gender equality with sameness fails to incorporate the notion of gender diversity. Instead of respecting gender diversity, 'masculine' becomes the gold-standard which others are compared to (Edley & Wetherell, 2001: 452). In reference to this study, the particular talents or abilities women could bring to the workplace are not recognised, but instead women are expected to accommodate to a 'masculinised' work environment. The 'masculine' work environment and overall patriarchal gender order remain unchallenged and moving toward gender equality involves women changing themselves.

This paper suggests that while Japanese women may have made some steps toward gender equality, in reality women today do not have the multitude of choices that their male counterparts have. Indeed, their option to work rests on the assumption that they still perform a majority of the domestic labor since this option is not easily available to men. One way to escape this second shift is to construct an identity entirely within the domestic realm—which has been the typical pattern in the post-World War II era (Sugimoto, 2004: 163-164). This identity may provide women with a sense of power and control within the household; nevertheless, this power is

limited by the domain itself (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003: 38). The woman remains dependent on her husband allocating the resources that he collects in the public domain. In addition, her social status is dependent on her husband's since he is the one engaging in non-domestic work which ultimately receives recognition by society. As Deborah Cameron (2003) perceptively observes, "ultimately it is men who have power (in public and private life) whereas women have only responsibility" (p. 197). Women who adopt *superwoman* and *working professional* subject positions can contribute to challenging the entrenched and repressive patriarchal gender order and facilitate movement toward greater gender equality.

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