

**RAISING SMILING FATHERS: THE CONSTRUCTION OF MASCULINITY
IN JAPANESE NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS THAT PROMOTE ENGAGED PARENTING**

by

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Abstract

This dissertation presents my research on the messaging and effectiveness of Japanese nonprofit organizations and community groups that encourage Japanese men to participate actively in their families' daily activities, including child care and housework, and to perform more empathetic, emotive masculinities. Drawing connections between many Japanese men's reluctance to engage with their families and the gender inequality that pervades Japanese society, these groups view men's detachment from their children as a significant contributor to Japan's declining birthrate, which threatens the future of the country's workforce. The organizations' leadership acknowledges the challenges facing Japanese women, who must simultaneously work in the market economy and accomplish most domestic labor and whose double burden affects the decisions of Japanese couples to give birth to fewer children than in previous generations. In response to this demographic crisis, nongovernmental organizations and community-based gatherings of young fathers, guided by the philosophy of such nonprofits as Fathering Japan, portray parenting as a rewarding, enjoyable experience. Fathering Japan's effort to "increase the number of smiling fathers" appeals to many fathers, whose attachment to paying jobs and to the paradigm of men as primary providers has weakened since the collapse of Japan's postwar economic bubble. According to my 13-month ethnographic research in the Greater Tokyo Area, the parenting groups that promote active fathering also provide members with comradery often absent from relationships mediated by money and paid labor. However, despite these organizations' ideals and members' mutual support, some participating fathers cannot involve themselves fully in their families' affairs because of structural barriers posed by the mandatory, excessive overtime required by many Japanese employers, some of which—ironically—sponsor

events hosted by Fathering Japan. Other participants become too fixated on fathering groups' enjoinder to enjoy fathering and then select for themselves from a position of masculine privilege only those parenting practices that they find entertaining and relaxing. Consequently, nonprofit organizations and local groups focused on fathering must continuously adapt their message to changing social circumstances in ways that may sometimes seem rhetorically inconsistent or that may eventually become ineffective.

Lay Summary

In previous generations, Japanese white-collar workers earned the family income and had few to no household responsibilities, while their wives minded the children at home. Today, men are still generally exempt from child care and housework, but women's greater involvement in paid employment has not resulted in a curtailment of their domestic duties. With these considerations in mind, organizations in Japan's parenting movement attempt to interest men in child care by portraying fatherhood as fun and rewarding. These associations hope that men's engagement in the domestic sphere will reduce the disproportionate burden that raising children places on women, thereby potentially increasing Japan's low birthrate. As a result of these groups' educational outreach and public policy advocacy, social perceptions surrounding fatherhood are slowly changing. However, a number of ideological and structural obstacles continue to impede Japan's movement toward greater gender equality in the workplace and in the home.

Preface

This dissertation is the original, unpublished, independent research and work of the author, Evan T. Koike.

The UBC Behavioural Ethics Board approved this dissertation's research under the title, "Project on Japanese Masculinities," certificate H15-03513.

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Glossary

Romanization	Japanese	English
Aidoru	アイドル	Idol, entertainer
Akutibisto	アクティビスト	Activist
Andō-byo	安藤病	Ando disease
Barabara	バラバラ	Onomatopoeia, “scattering,” “dispersal”
Beki da	べきだ	Should
Bishōjo	美少女	Cute girl
Borantia	ボランティア	Volunteer
Bosei	母性	Motherhood
Bōsōzoku	暴走族	Biker gang
Burakku kigyō	ブラック企業	Black company, a company that exploits its employees
Chanbara	チャンバラ	Sword fight
Chichi	父	Dad
Chichi	父親	Father
Chiiki katsudō	地域活動	Community engagement
Chiiki no pasupōto	地域のパスポート	Passport to the local community
Chiji	知事	Prefectural governor
Chōnaikai	町会	Neighborhood association
Corona rikon	コロナ離婚	Corona divorce
Daibāshitei	ダイバーシティ	Diversity
Daikokubashira	大黒柱	“Main pillar” that supports a family financially
Danchi	団地	Apartment complex
Don	ドン	Onomatopoeia, “bang,” “thud”
E-hon-uta Asobi-uta	えほんうた・あそびうた	Nonprofit organization
Fazāringu	ファザーリング	Fathering, enjoyable and active parenting
Fazāringu Zenkoku Fōramu in Oita	ファザーリング全国 フォーラムinおおいた	Fathering National Forum in Oita
Fazāringu · Jyapan	ファザーリング・ ジャパン	Fathering Japan
Fazāringu · Jyapan “hi”kōnin dantai	ファザーリング・ ジャパン“非”公認団体	Fathering Japan “un”official organization
FJ Tsuā	FJツア	Fathering Japan Tour
Furenchi Tōsuto Kikin	フレンチトースト基金	French Toast Fund

Fusei	父性	Fatherhood
Futsū no otōsan	普通のお父さん	Regular father
Garagara	ガラガラ	Onomatopoeia, “with a clatter”
Gatagoto	ガタゴト	Onomatopoeia, “rattling”
Gimu	義務	Obligation or duty
Guchagucha	グチャグチャ	Onomatopoeia, “pulpy,” “soppy”
Gūzō	偶像	Image, idol
Hachimaki	はちまき	Headband
Happi	法被	Traditional kind of short-sleeved coat
Hentai	変態	Pervert
Hikikomori	引きこもり	Social recluse, shut-in
Himitsu Kessha “Shufu no Tomo”	秘密結社「主夫の友」	Secret Society “The Househusband’s Friend”
Ibasho	居場所	Place to belong
Ikemen	イケメン	Handsome man
Iki	域	Region
Ikigai	生きがい	Reason for living
Ikimen	イキメン	Men who participate in chiiki katsudō
Iku	育	Bring up or raise
Ikubosu	イクボス	IkuBoss, benevolent work supervisor
Ikubosu dōmei kigyō	イクボス企業同盟	IkuBoss Corporate Alliance
Ikubosu purojekuto	イクボスプロジェクト	IkuBoss Project (see Ikubosu)
Ikuji	育児	Child care
Ikukyū	育休	Child-care leave
Ikumen	イクメン	Active father
Ikumen būmu	イクメンブーム	Ikumen boom
Ishi no ue ni mo san nen	石の上にも三年	“Three years on a stone”
Jidōkan	児童館	Community children’s center
Jikoshōkai	自己紹介	Ritual self-introduction
Juku	塾	Cram school
Kachigumi	勝ち組	Winner
Kachigumi jyanai hito	勝ち組じゃない人	People who are not winners
Kaji	家事	House chores
Kami-san wa kami- sama	かみさんは神様	“[One’s] wife is a god”
Kanji	漢字	Chinese characters used in the Japanese writing system

Kanpai	乾杯	“Cheers”
Karoshi	過労死	Death from overwork
Katsudōka	活動家	Activist
Kawa no ji	川の字	Japanese co-sleeping pattern
Kazoku sābisu	家族サービス	Family service
Kine	杵	Long-handled wooden mallet with an asymmetrical head
Kisama wo tabete yaru!	貴様を食べてやる!	“I’ll eat you up!”
Kojikara Nippon	コジカラ・ニッポン	Nonprofit organization
Koma	独楽	Japanese spinning top
Koseki seido	戸籍制度	Lineage registration system
Kōshoryōzoku	公序良俗	Public order and morals
Kosodate	子育て	Child rearing
Kosodate Suicchi	子育てすいっち	Website offering services and articles related to child care
Kosupureiyā	コスプレイヤー	Cosplayer, costume player
Kūchūsen	空中線	Aerial warfare
Kurumin māku	くるみんマーク	Kurumin Mark
Kyūshū danji	九州男児	Kyushu boy
Magosodate Nippon	孫育て・ニッポン	Nonprofit organization
Majime	真面目	Serious
Mamakai	ママ会	Mama meeting
Masukyuriniti	マスキュリニティ	Masculinity
Matahara	マタハラ	Workplace discrimination against pregnant women
Matsuri	祭り	Festival
Mein Man Purojekuto	メインマンプロジェクト	Main Man Project
Mendokusai	めんどくさい	Tedious and tiresome
Mimamoru	見守る	To affectionately watch over
Mochi	餅	Pounded rice cake
Mochitsuki	餅つき	Event for making mochi
Mukō sangen ryōdonari	向こう三軒両隣	Maintaining positive, close relationships with neighbors
Nakama	仲間	Member of the same social group, colleague, companion
Nanpa	ナンパ	Hitting on, flirting with
Natsukashii	懐かしい	Nostalgic
Nise-ikumen	偽イクメン	Fake ikumen

Nomikai	飲み会	Drinking party
Obasan	おばさん	Auntie
Oishiku nare	おいしくなれ	“Become delicious”
Onsen	温泉	Hot spring
Otoko wa Tsurai yo	男がつらいよ	Movie series, “It’s Tough Being a Man”
Oyaji	親父	Pops
Oyaji-no-kai	親父の会	Fathers’ gathering
Pachinko	パチンコ	Game superficially resembling pinball
Papa keiken	パパ経験	Papa experience
Papa meishi	パパ名刺	Papa card
Papa robotto	パパロボット	Papa robot
Papa ryoku	パパ力	Papa ability
Papa sākuru	パパサークル	Papa circle
Papa senpai	パパ先輩	Papa senior
Papa suicchi	パパスイッチ	Papa switch
Papa’s E-hon Raibu	パパ’s 絵本ライブ	Amateur band
Papakai	パパ会	Papa meeting
Pātonāshippu	パートナーシップ	Partnership
Pongashi	ポンガシ	Machine that makes popped rice
Pure papa	プレパパ	Pre-papa, expecting father
Raifu	ライフ	Life, private circumstances outside the workplace
Riji	理事	Director
Rijikai	理事会	Board meeting
Saibōzu kabushikigaisha	サイボウズ株式会社	Cybozu, Inc.
Sarariiman	サラリーマン	Salaryman
Sengyō shufu	専業主婦	Full-time housewife
Shakaijin	社会人	Independent adult who earns their own income
Shibu	支部	Branch
Shinguru fazā	シングルファザー	Single father
Shitsureishimasu	失礼します	“Excuse me”
Shōshika	少子化	Declining birthrate
Shōtengai	商店街	Traditional shopping districts
Shufu	主夫	Househusband
Shufu no Tomo	主婦の友	Magazine “Housewife’s Friend”

Sōshokukei danshi	草食系男子	Herbivorous boy
Soto	外	Outside or out-group characterized by formality
Sūpāpapa	スーパーパパ	Super papa
Sūpāsutā	スーパースター	Superstar
Taigā Masuku Kikin	タイガーマスク基金	Tiger Mask Foundation
Tobi zubon	鳶ズボン	Baggy trousers commonly worn by construction workers
Tokubetsu kyōsan	特別協賛	Special sponsor
Tokutei hieiri dantai	特定非営利活動法人	Specified Nonprofit Corporation
Toriaezu san nen	とりあえず三年	“For now, three years”
Tsukiai	付き合い	Friendship based on spontaneity
Tsunagari	繋がり	Interpersonal connections
Uchi	内	Inside or in-group characterized by intimacy
Undōkai	動会	School sports day
Usu	臼	Large wooden mortar
Uwabaki	上履き	Indoor shoes
Vijuaru kei	ヴィジュアル系	Visual kei, a genre of Japanese music
Wāku raifu baransu	ワークライフバランス	Work-life balance
Waratte iru chichioya wo fuyasō	笑っている父親を増やそう	“Let’s increase the number of smiling fathers”
Warau	笑う	To smile, to laugh

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Dedication

To my family: Margaret, Steven, Andrew, Ellen, and Hisako. Thank you for your constant support.

Introduction: Investigating the Era of the Involved Father in Japan

Section 1: Societal Changes Affecting Men's Performances of Fathering in Twenty-First Century Japan

In contemporary Japan, the meaning of Japanese fatherhood is changing in the performative and discursive space opened by the general population's greater awareness of gender issues; mounting demographic shifts, such as the low birthrate and a rapidly aging population; the needs of heterosexual, married parents of young children; and nonprofit organizations' outreach efforts. Because of these shifts, and partly because of their own desires for stronger familial bonds, growing numbers of Japanese men are expressing egalitarian gender ideologies and performing masculinities that engage selectively in practices and values associated customarily with women (Mizukoshi, Kohlbacher, and Schimkowsky 2016). Once content to fulfill the role of the distant primary provider, men shifted toward greater emotional investment in their families in the 1980s (Ishii-Kuntz et al. 2004), and the Japanese government began to encourage fathers to participate in home life in the 1990s (Roberts 2002). The government recognized that societal and familial changes were necessary because Japan's *shōshika*,¹ or declining birthrate, could lead to the nation's social and economic decline (Creighton 1994; Suzuki 2008).

Concerns over Japan's population problems are not new. The "1.57 shock" of the 1990s—indicating a total fertility rate below the 2.08 births per woman necessary to maintain

¹ 少子化 (shōshika).

population levels (Central Intelligence Agency 2018)—elicited similar alarm (Allison 2013). The shock prompted the government's 1994 Angel Plan and other attempts to alleviate the burdens of child care through state-sponsored day care, counseling, and other infrastructure (Goodman 2002; Roberts 2002). The Angel Plan and its newer incarnations operate under many assumptions, including the attribution of Japan's rising age of first marriage to Japanese women's rejection of the constraining social expectation attendant on marriage and motherhood (Borovoy 2005; Creighton 1996). Despite higher levels of education and increased work opportunities, women are keenly aware that marriage and childbirth entail greater sacrifices for women than they do for men. Women inclined to build families may therefore attempt to control the size of their families and the timing of childbirth in order to establish their careers (McDonald 2006). Recognizing this fact, the Japanese government developed policies that openly attempted to raise the birthrate by making marriage more palatable.

The 2010s witnessed renewed societal panic over Japan's rapidly aging population and low birthrate, which fell to 1.43 births per woman by the end of the decade (The World Bank 2019). Reaching the conclusion that fathers' involvement in their families could help raise Japan's fertility rate, the Japanese government launched efforts to encourage men's participation in child rearing. According to Japanese research, men's contributions to child care combined with women's greater participation in the workforce have the potential to reverse the country's demographic decline (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare 2013a; Sakatsume 2007). Research suggests that the positive effects of Japanese fathers' participation in unpaid labor on fertility not only hold true for a second child (Nagase and Brinton 2017), but also for a third child (Kato, Kumamaru, and Fukuda 2018).

These findings are not unique to Japan. In Sweden, Italy, the United Kingdom, and the United States, studies similarly suggest that men's greater participation in home affairs has the potential to improve fertility rates, thereby halting or reversing the declining birthrates faced by postindustrial societies (Esping-Andersen and Billari 2015; Goldscheider, Bernhardt, and Lappegård 2014; Pinnelli and Fiori 2008; Schober 2012; Torr and Short 2004). In contrast, some studies in such European countries as Germany and Norway found that men's involvement in domestic labor has a different or nonexistent effect on fertility rates (Cooke 2004; Dommermuth, Hohmann-Marriott, and Lappegård 2015) or that the discrepancy between women's expectations for their husband's domestic participation and the unpaid labor that men actually perform is more important than the division of labor (Aassve et al. 2015; Goldscheider, Bernhardt, and Brandén 2013).

Structural and cultural barriers—both inside and outside the home—have tempered the effectiveness of Japanese government initiatives to raise the birthrate. Two incomes are necessary to maintaining most households' quality of life, so most women work part- or full-time (Poole 2016). Nevertheless, Japanese society pressures women to serve simultaneously as the primary caretakers of children and often as the caregivers for elderly family members (Charlebois 2014). For their part, men divide their loyalties between their workplaces and their homes (Taga 2016); as this dissertation explains, fathers are caught in the middle of conflicting expectations regarding their participation in the home. Not only are these expectations produced by men's changing personal values, but they are also societal and spousal.

The Role of Nonprofit and Local Organizations in Encouraging Japanese Men to Perform Engaged Fatherhood

Recognizing and filling these gaps in policymakers' knowledge about gender disparities are nonprofit organizations like Fathering Japan,² which identifies and raises awareness about the obstacles to creating and maintaining healthy, happy families. Fathering Japan and other groups in what I term *Japan's parenting movement* attempt to tap into parents' lived experiences by soliciting feedback about challenges related to child care, thus generating insights to use in seminars and workshops aimed at the general population. I developed the phrase *parenting movement* to illustrate how nonprofits are part of a complex web of cultural factors stretching across multiple levels of society that is pulling open personal, private, and public spaces not only for engaged fatherhood, but also for working mothers and egalitarian spousal relationships characterized as “partnerships.”³

In addition, to promote engaged parenting, Fathering Japan lobbies to change government policy, publishes social media posts, and makes use of traditional media in order to influence public discourse. Fathering Japan not only attracts men predisposed toward paternal involvement, but it has also influenced previously uninvested fathers to change their perspectives on the family. Participants in Fathering Japan's sphere of influence expressed to me their desire to become more active in their children's lives.⁴ In stark contrast to the distant father figure of

² ファザーリング・ジャパン (Fazāringu · Jyapan).

³ パートナーシップ (pātonāshippu).

⁴ Since I am primarily concerned with parent-child interactions and relationships that take place under the same roof, I use the word “children” to refer to ages 0-18, or newborns to high school students. College students often move away from their parents. Additionally, the Japanese parenting movement does not deal with college students except in very specific situations, often addressing college students in their capacity as future parents rather than as children. Legally, the age of adulthood in Japan is currently set at 20, but in 2022 it will be lowered to 18.

previous generations, these Japanese fathers see their children as intrinsic to their identities and as changing their reason for living.

Fathering Japan and its affiliated groups also encourage men to get involved in local gatherings of parents. If nonprofits operate at the national and regional levels to exert influence on societal attitudes toward men's participation in child care, then neighborhood-based associations attempt to address concerns specific to particular communities. Fathering Japan hopes that by organizing around residences and children's schools, the fathers of those will become more attached to their families and learn the value of paternal involvement. In practice, many of these groups lose sight of this purpose and start to exist for the sake of developing relationships with other men.

A Note on “Smiling Fathers”

The first part of this dissertation's title, “Raising Smiling Fathers,” arose from the motto of my collaborator Fathering Japan: *waratte iru chichioya wo fuyasō*,⁵ or “let's increase the number of smiling fathers.” The infinitive of *waratte iru*, *warau*,⁶ most frequently translates into English as “to smile” or “to laugh.” I have chosen the translation “smiling” instead of “laughter” because “laughter” more directly implies a trigger than “smiling,” and “smiling” aligns with the general spirit of the phrase. “Smiling fathers” or “smiling dads” is also the translation chosen by other academics and the media (Goldstein-Gidoni 2019; 2020; Maruko 2014; Schimkowsky and

⁵ 笑っている父親を増やそう (*waratte iru chichioya wo fuyasō*).

⁶ 笑う (*warau*).

Kohlbacher 2017; Vassallo 2017). I have opted for “fathers” over “dads,” equating the more formal *chichioya*⁷ with “father” and the more humble *chichi*⁸ with “dad.”

However, it is also important to note that depending on the context, the connotations of Fathering Japan’s motto can be more expansive than this translation indicates. Fathering Japan intentionally allows the meaning of the strategically worded phrase to remain vague; according to a member of the nonprofit’s board of directors, the listener or reader must interpret the motto’s implications. Broadly, *waratte iru* can also mean “enjoying.” In this sense, the motto may be paraphrased as “let’s increase the number of fathers who enjoy fatherhood”; Fathering Japan’s website features this meaning in the description of the organization’s mission (Fathering Japan 2021).

While acknowledging that Fathering Japan’s motto can have multiple interpretations and that one must consider sociolinguistic context when interpreting the catchphrase, I have chosen to include in my title the translation “smiling fathers” for four primary reasons: First, as the following chapters will explain, Fathering Japan and other like-minded organizations are pushing men to be more expressive fathers in positive ways. They argue that that men should learn to communicate their emotions more readily and that children benefit from seeing happy fathers. Of course, one of the most obvious ways that people can signal happiness is by smiling. Second, the phrase “smiling fathers” contrasts with traditional characterizations of men who came of age during the Shōwa era (1926-1989), who are and were stereotypically stoic and taciturn. The men in Japan’s parenting movement juxtapose their preferences and behavior with those of Shōwa

⁷ 父親 (chichioya).

⁸ 父 (chichi).

fathers, whom my informants—mostly sons of Shōwa fathers—characterized as men who limit their emoting to outbursts of anger. Third, as mentioned above, “smiling fathers” is the preferred English translation within academic works and the popular media. Finally, “smiling fathers” is the translation adopted by Fathering Japan itself: for example, a caption on the back of its publication *The New Father’s Book* reads in English, “Fathering is the Greatest Job on Earth. Have fun being a father. Fatherhood is a life-changing experience. If you have fun and smile a lot, Mom and Kids will smile a lot, too. Everyone likes smiling fathers!” (Fathering Japan 2013).

While Japanese men’s pivot to prioritizing their families over or as much as their jobs is partly the product of immense societal shifts and Japan’s demographic needs, men’s awareness of their own desire for personal growth and richer, more intimate relationships with their family members has also changed men’s priorities. Fathers of young children appear to find Fathering Japan’s empowering message about smiling particularly attractive. According to one of Fathering Japan’s directors, fathers smile when they “independently” decide to involve themselves in child care and subsequently become capable of experiencing child care as “difficult but enjoyable.” The key point, according to this director, is that no one forces the men to perform child care and smiling; instead, these acts are volitional. Of course, this emphasis on men’s choices highlights the facts that Japanese cultural norms push mothers but not fathers to perform child care and that social sanctions and castigation can follow a mother’s failure to perform adequately her familial duties. Nevertheless, in a society that my informants themselves occasionally characterized as restrictive and serious, fathers’ smiling within and around their families appears to signal that those fathers are choosing their own ways of engaging with their children. In her comments about smiling fathers, the director implied that men’s contributions to

the shared happiness within their nuclear families likely affords fathers a sense of agency and that those contributions lead to further smiling. Smiling promotes contentment within the family, and a happy family prompts smiling.

As this dissertation will show, many men at the nonprofit and in Japan's parenting movement see themselves at the forefront of a societal shift toward more expressive, family-oriented masculinities that participate in the joys and burdens of child care. When possible given their personal circumstances—including the demands of work and family situations—Fathering Japan's members act upon their philosophies in the discursive and performative space opened up by the nonprofit, which increasingly insists that men's active parenting is both acceptable to contemporary society and gratifying. Moreover, the nonprofit's members not only share parenting information with one another, but they also try to persuade other men to attend the nonprofit's events. Many such exchanges happen in informal settings, such as at the drinking party that I attended following a Fathering Japan papa school aimed at the fathers of young children. As my fieldnotes indicate, this casual gathering in the fall of 2016 allowed fathers of young children to ask each other personal questions and to expose their own insecurities:

The setting: a back-alley izakaya or casual bar. The occasion: the so-called "after-school" portion of a five-session course promoting paternal involvement and held every other week for two-and-a-half hours at a time. Approximately 15 men sit on wooden benches at two tables arranged in a dimly lit room. The organizer asks the assembled men if any of them wants a drink other than beer. After a pause, one man raises his hand and requests oolong tea. This provides the impetus for three others, including myself, to request oolong tea. This small exchange

immediately differentiates the gathering from work *nomikai*⁹ or drinking parties, where attendees are expected by their coworkers and bosses to drink alcohol regardless of their personal preferences.

The beer arrives, and the men do a *kanpai* (cheers),¹⁰ clinking their glasses together before downing a good portion of their alcohol. When the oolong tea arrives in a pitcher, the remainder of us do another *kanpai* with our neighbors. The customary self-introductions, or *jikoshōkai*,¹¹ begin. Because we are mostly strangers to one another, we wear nametags. Tellingly, the men in this group do not introduce themselves by occupation or place of employment—standard pieces of information in *jikoshōkai*—but by their children’s ages and genders. Appropriate to the purpose of the papa school, they prioritize their identities as fathers over their identities as workers.

The speaker who directed the earlier lecture and workshop is present at this *nomikai*. One man interrupts the moment of silence following the first gulps of beer, posing a question to the lecturer. He claims that he was unable to ask this question until after he had some alcohol in his system, laughing in an embarrassed manner and ducking his head as he inquires, “How can I have sex with my wife when my children get in the way?” The lecturer responds to the man’s concerns, using humor to diffuse some of the awkwardness felt by the questioner and potentially by others in the room, who have laughed at the question. Soon other men begin to chime in, asking how to be discerning about child care information on the Internet and discussing how to rock babies to sleep.

⁹ 飲み会 (*nomikai*).

¹⁰ 乾杯 (*kanpai*).

¹¹ 自己紹介 (*jikoshōkai*).

The group conversation fragments, and people begin to broach other topics of interest with the people sitting next to them. Among my neighbors, my presence as a foreigner creates the opportunity for us to discuss cultural differences in parenting practices and the issues that affect those practices. We compare the frequency with which American workers take paid vacation with that of the Japanese, who, they claim, never take paid vacation.¹² This exchange segues into the subject of how Americans perceive the phenomenon of *karōshi*,¹³ or death from overwork. Later, we examine the phrase *kawa no ji* (literally “river character”),¹⁴ which refers to the Japanese co-sleeping pattern in which an infant lies between the parents as if he or she is the middle line in *///*, the Japanese character for “river.” Incidentally, some researchers cite *kawa no ji* as one of the factors contributing to the low levels of sexual intimacy between married heterosexual couples in Japan (Moriki, Hayashi, and Matsukura 2015). According to the lecturer from the Fathering Japan course, parent-child co-sleeping patterns can continue into the fifth year of elementary school, when children are between the ages of 10 and 11.

Soon, people begin to shuffle around the room in search of new conversation partners. Goto-san,¹⁵ a man in his forties who looks much younger than his age, purposely makes his way toward me and sits down. He immediately requests a high-five. (This is not the first time at this event that someone has asked me for this type of greeting. Apparently, the Japanese think that people from the United States high-five all the time.)¹⁶ Goto-san is a little tipsy, as evidenced by his speech, bubbly mood, and slight lack of coordination. He asks me whether I have a Japanese

¹² Japanese workers do take sick days (Ohnuki-Tierney 1984).

¹³ 過労死 (*karoshi*).

¹⁴ 川の字 (*kawa no ji*).

¹⁵ “-san” is an honorific affixed to both surnames and given names. As is common in Japan, I refer to individuals by their surname and, when providing their full name, I place their surname before their given name.

¹⁶ I probably gave out more high-fives in one year of living in Japan than in 10 years of living in North America.

girlfriend or wife—not an uncommon question at my field sites. Then Goto-san speaks about himself: not only is he an engineer, but he also dabbles in aromatherapy as a hobby. More importantly, he runs a nonprofit with his wife that is attempting to spread familial happiness. He does not detail anything about this nonprofit's operations, but he alludes to the family issues it tries to address: as if imitating a balance scale, Goto-san positions one hand higher than the other, explaining to me that when a member of a married couple places their own wishes or needs above those of their partner, the marriage becomes imbalanced and will eventually fall apart. He then asserts that when partners recognize and appreciate each other (clasping his hands together), the marriage will last. Goto-san admits that he is participating in Fathering Japan's course to learn but also to network so that he can grow his nonprofit. He asks for my help in spreading his message, and we exchange business cards and shake hands.

I then speak with Takahashi-san and Inazuka-san, fathers with whom I have interacted at other Fathering Japan events. Short in stature, Takahashi-san has spiky hair and an easy laugh. Soft-spoken Inazuka-san possesses a calm demeanor, and he always wears his black-rimmed glasses and a white button-down shirt. Takahashi-san reminds me about the advantage of *nomikai*: men can say things that would not be appropriate during the course proper, as demonstrated by the first question asked at this evening's drinking party. We swap information on acquaintances at Fathering Japan, and I inquire about why Takahashi-san and Inazuka-san continually show up to presentations on the same set of topics; the information available does not significantly change from event to event. Inazuka-san says he is primarily interested in meeting people. Takahashi-san adds that he is able to remember the nonprofit's lessons only after listening to information repeatedly. Looking back, I would later realize that these two statements

were some of my first insights into Fathering Japan's ability to foster social networks and disseminate information and ideas to receptive parents.

Someone asks Inazuka-san to wrap up the event, so he stands and gives a little speech. We pay the bill and gather outside in a loose circle. By this time, Goto-san is red-faced and clearly drunk: instead of helping to form the circle, he is standing squarely inside it. Following the instructions of an individual rapidly nominated by the group, we clap our hands once simultaneously and split into two groups, each group heading to a different station. From start to finish, in the gathering's practices and flow of the events—but not in the way that it foregrounds private and family circumstances—Fathering Japan's after-school event does not significantly differ from the typical Tokyo nomikai.

Section 2: Methods, Research Questions, and the Researcher's Place at the Field Site

Questions That Guided the Research

By attending nomikai and other events, I gradually gained a clearer picture of how a new generation of men in Japan is constructing identities and a sense of self-worth through fatherhood. I also wanted to understand the organizational structures facilitating the groups that promote engaged fatherhood as well as to grasp the impact of these groups on Japanese men and on public discourse. The following questions guided my research:

1. How and why are Japanese men redefining their masculinities—their configurations of gendered practices normatively associated with men—in order to reconceptualize child care as a set of practices in which men can engage legitimately in the eyes of Japanese society?
2. In what ways do large nonprofit organizations and small community groups focused on engaged parenting by men promote or fail to encourage these family-focused masculinities? How have members of both types of organizations responded to these groups' messages and efforts?
3. In what ways does Fathering Japan, a prominent national and regional actor in Japan's parenting movement, promote rhetoric and behavior that influences and differs from that of local fathers' groups and of individual families?

To investigate these research questions, I attended events hosted by Fathering Japan, its affiliated organizations, and local unaffiliated groups for fathers of young or school-aged children. These events covered topics ranging from workshops on the art of reading picture books to children, to seminars on scolding children, to panels that adopted a public stance against the excessive overtime expected by Japanese corporations that prevents many men from spending time with their families. I spoke with hundreds of individuals, and this dissertation uses a pseudonym for each interlocutor except when referring to the following public figures: Ando-san, Aono-san, Hayashida-san, Kawashima-san, and Kozaki-Sensei. Although I focused primarily on the Greater Tokyo Area because of the greater trendsetting influence of its parenting organizations—particularly Fathering Japan—I also traveled to other areas, such as Kansai, to collect data.

During 12 consecutive months of fieldwork in 2016 and 2017, I collected more than one thousand pages of field notes at more than 90 gatherings sponsored by Fathering Japan and other groups concerned with parenting issues and children. In addition to attending events that were open to the public, I conducted 33 interviews with Japanese parents currently raising children; 24 of these in-depth exchanges were with men, 8 were with women, and one was with a couple who asked to be interviewed together. These interviews ranged from one to four hours in length. I used transcription software to process my interviews.

In addition, during my fieldwork in Japan, I conscientiously acquired copies of publicly available documents, such as handouts from presentations, that various groups involved in promoting involved parenting had produced since 2013. I collected these documents that the groups' leaders and lecturers distributed to their audiences, but I ceased to accumulate documents

after leaving Japan in mid-2017 to set a clear cutoff point for the never-ending flow of data and promotional materials. I used the documents collected to supplement my understanding of various groups' official rhetoric and the context in which the discourse on changing Japanese parenting practices is taking place.

Methods That Helped to Establish Rapport at Field Sites

When I first met the many fathers who attended events sponsored by organizations in the Japanese parenting movement, they would ask me questions to discern why I was interested in their activities. Upon discovering that they were farther along a heteronormative life path than I am—a single man without children—they positioned themselves as senior men, often giving me unsolicited and at times slightly paternalistic advice. During my fieldwork, I was a student who likely appeared nonthreatening to these fathers; in other words, I was not qualified to judge their lives or their family dynamics based on personal experience. While my position as a researcher remains a privileged one, the fathers seemed to situate me as a learner. This perception probably contributed to parents' willingness to open up to me and to express curiosity about my status as an interesting oddity: I was an American who had bothered to travel all the way to Japan in order to gain insights into parenting.

Over time, I became a fixture at Fathering Japan events. Many informants were highly amused when I showed up at meetings across Japan, laughing as they remarked that I had become a “celebrity” because of my constant presence and unusual interest in the parents' and organizations' routines. This reputation persisted. When I returned to Japan in 2019 to speak at Fathering Japan events about my research findings, one board director announced my

presentation by sending an email to the nonprofit's mailing list, commenting that "at that time—of course in Tokyo, but also in Kansai and Kyushu—Evan would always appear whenever there was a Fathering Japan event. Without a doubt, he had the No. 1 attendance rate." In short, my regular presence at events increased people's willingness to talk to me: I was a familiar face.

The Relevance and Irrelevance of the Researcher's Ethnicity on Research in Japan

I identify as a biracial individual from California who is half-European descent and fourth-generation half-Japanese descent. My White heritage derives from ancestors who immigrated to the United States from the United Kingdom, Ireland, and northwestern Europe. All four of my paternal great-grandparents emigrated from Japan to the United States in the early twentieth century. They and their children, including my two paternal grandparents, who were each born in the U.S., spent World War II in U.S. internment camps for people of Japanese descent.

In most situations, I do not label myself "American" because recently the tag seems to carry nationalistic undertones and because I want to recognize that people from Central and South America also identify as "American" (i.e., from American continents). Instead, to distance nationality from self, I tend to say that I am "from California" or "from the U.S."

However, the description "half-Japanese, half-White" describes my ethnicity inadequately because two halves do not add up to an ethnic whole. Rather, they mix in novel, unexpected ways. My strong identification with Japanese culture further complicates my situation. As I was growing up in an area where Asians are a minority, both of my parents made

an effort to expose me to my Japanese heritage. Further supporting my inclination toward Japaneseness was the fact that other children perceived me as Asian.

Today, the reverse is true: most North Americans tend to assume that I am either White or of an indeterminate ethnicity. My Japanese informants likewise saw and treated me as a White American who happens to possess a Japanese surname, although they preferred to call me by my given name. Seldom if ever was my Japanese heritage referenced or even implicitly invoked. Instead, lecturers at events often called on me to give accounts of parenting practices in the United States or Canada; people commonly assumed that I am Canadian based on my university.

While I often wish that my interlocutors placed greater value on my Japanese heritage, I recognize that the way people made sense of my ethnicity carried some advantages. Explaining the origin of my surname may not have significantly changed how people treated me, but it sufficed as a quick answer to the commonly asked question of why I am interested in Japan—and most individuals were not interested in hearing the full set of reasons. At the same time, being perceived as a White American by Japanese informants meant that when I inquired about common-sense practices and ideas, people would explain their thoughts without relying on unspoken assumptions and cultural understandings.

This Dissertation's Structure

After reviewing in my first chapter the academic literature informing my investigation into engaged fathering in Japan, this dissertation's subsequent chapters cover the three components of Japan's grassroots parenting movement:

- Nonprofits that operate nationally and regionally, with an emphasis on Fathering Japan as the most influential and successful organization in shaping government policy and popular discourse.
- Community or local groups that address the particular needs of fathers in specific neighborhoods.
- The gender ideologies, practices, and family situations of individuals.

My division of Japan's parenting movement into national and regional efforts, local endeavors, and individual and familial practices is a slightly artificial but effective means of analyzing distinct gender performances in what are separate but overlapping spheres of influence. Throughout its presentation of findings, the text investigates the connections among the movement's different constituents to argue that Fathering Japan plays an important role in encouraging shifts in gender ideologies and performances at multiple levels of society. However, because the expression of masculinity in Japan remains so deeply rooted in workplace norms, even Fathering Japan struggles to disassociate the performance of masculinity from conventional ideas about men's patterns of thought and practice. For most Japanese men—and even for those who see great value in Japan's parenting movement—the fun, active fathering that the nonprofit promotes has yet to become the new, enjoyable way of relating to one's family, to local communities, and to wider society.

Chapter 1: Situating an Analysis of the Current Japanese Parenting Movement within Studies of Gender and of Social Activism by Nonprofits

Section 1: Background

My analysis of Japanese fatherhood encompasses explorations of masculinities, women's roles and femininities, and the nonprofit organizations that promote engaged parenting. This chapter begins by considering key ideas in academic research on masculinities, such as the problematic but still useful concept of hegemonic masculinity. These key ideas also include complicit masculinity, marginalized masculinities, and alternative masculinities, all of which have influenced existing research on Japanese masculinities.

Because masculinities exist not only in relation to each other but also in relation to femininities, a consideration of Japan's parenting movement must examine the changing social position of women in Japan. Further, gendered statuses draw influence from *gender ideology*, a term this dissertation uses to refer to the totality of values, beliefs, and assumptions concerning men and women's similarities and differences. Rounding out this chapter is an account of Japan's third, or nonprofit, sector, which differs from the third sectors in many Western societies in that it does not directly oppose the government and its policies. Ultimately, this chapter sets the foundation for a three-tiered examination of contemporary Japan's parenting movement: analyses of the overlapping realms of Fathering Japan, the nonprofit that promotes engaged fatherhood; local fathering groups that encourage community engagement and homosocial networks; and the dynamics within individual families and those families' relationships with employers.

Section 2: Research on Masculinities That Resonates with Research on Japanese Fatherhood

Nonprofits in Japan's parenting movement aim to support working women and reform men's perspectives on their roles at home by addressing prevalent ideas about masculinity that serve as an obstacle to engaged parenting. While they rarely reference the term *masculinity*¹⁷ in public presentations, nonprofit directors and speakers are actively thinking about these discursive positions, configurations of practice, and patterns of thought associated with men. Additionally, many researchers are active in Japan's parenting movement, and these scholars bring to various nonprofit organizations their knowledge of gender and masculinity.

Studies of masculinity and of fatherhood often deal with the key issues of gender equality, privilege, cultural constraints, and performance anxiety. At the same time, there is a tendency in masculinity studies to develop ever more nuanced gender categories, which researchers then use to characterize subjects' actions and perspectives. Unfortunately, by constantly problematizing these categories and pushing newer concepts that often overlap significantly with preexisting ones, scholars lose the explanatory power and broader applicability of their arguments. To avoid following this trend and reducing my interlocutors' gender performances to a typology of masculinities, and to refrain from artificially imposing order on the diverse practices at my field sites, I do not offer categories by which to assess the behavior of fathers whom I observed. Instead, this section presents constructs for identifying issues of men's power and privilege in the complex field of gender relations.

¹⁷ マスキュリニティ (*masukyuriniti*).

Hegemonic Masculinity: Theory and Criticism

Hegemonic masculinity, characterized as “the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy” in a given society at a given historical moment (Connell 2005, 77), remains a problematic but useful concept for analyzing the expectations surrounding manhood and maleness in societies around the world.

Within the gender hierarchy, hegemonic masculinity is the construct against which other masculinities must define themselves.

The idea of hegemonic masculinity is a product of theoretical developments in the 1980s, when scholars moved their research focus from an understanding of masculinity as a single concept to an acknowledgement of the existence of multiple masculinities. Far from fixed characteristics embedded in the physical bodies of men, these different masculinities revealed themselves as fluid and context-dependent. Researchers recognized that individual men not only perform different masculinities across their lives, but they will also vary their performances across different social situations. These revelations sparked academic attempts to locate distinct configurations of practice within the field of gender relations.

The notion of hegemonic masculinity was initially proposed by Kessler et al. (1982) in a study on Australian high schools. One of the study’s co-authors, Connell, later refined the concept in order to critique sex role theory, which, among other things, insufficiently accounted for power and blurred the boundary between behaviors and norms (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Hegemonic masculinity produces a cultural ideal that few can fully achieve but to which men nevertheless aspire. Even so, most men still benefit from the *patriarchal dividend*—such as higher incomes or better access to education than women—due to sociocultural power

differentials between men and women. Theoretically, men can contest hegemonic masculinity as a pattern of practice, especially when changing societal conditions give rise to new conditions to which the construct must adapt. However, whether men can succeed in such an effort is the subject of debate. At the risk of losing the ability to preserve patriarchy, hegemonic masculinity must overcome constant challenges to its authority (Connell 2005).

Precisely due to the broad, explanatory power of the theory of hegemonic masculinity, the concept has received its fair share of criticism. For example, Whitehead (2002) suggests that hegemonic masculinity's focus on structure renders the subject invisible, effacing actual people by devoting excessive attention to systemic factors. Moreover, according to Whitehead, the concept fails to explain adequately why and how a minority of (heterosexual) men can reproduce their dominance over women as well as over other men. He recommends a focus on the discursive construction of gender identity in order to re-center attention to individuals and their acts of agency.

Wetherell and Edley (1999) argue that scholars have offered insufficient theories about why men attempt to conform to an ideal that most cannot realistically embody. To remedy this scholarly deficiency, Wetherell and Edley propose a focus on *psycho-discursive practices* that “construct a psychology in the sense that through the momentary and more sustained use of these procedures men acquire a vocabulary of motives and a character with particular emotions, desires, goals and ambitions” (1999, 353). Psycho-discursive practices can help to explain the existence of men who simultaneously appear both hegemonic and nonhegemonic, such as the British students in Wetherell and Edley's study who self-characterized as nonconformist but drew upon the hegemonic values of autonomy, courage, and determination to make their case for

nonconformity. Through psycho-discursive practices, men construct hegemonic norms and their own subjectivity, as did my interlocutors, who clearly positioned themselves as engaged fathers against the Japanese corporate culture that discourages paternal involvement but who expressed their parenting philosophies using work metaphors and values.

Demetriou (2001) argues that scholars should make a sharp distinction between *external masculine hegemony*, or men's dominance over women, and *internal masculine hegemony*, or one group of men's dominance over other men. Connell's tendency, he maintains, is to emphasize the former at the expense of the latter, neglecting the role of nonhegemonic masculinities in constructing and buttressing hegemonic masculinity. Demetriou subsequently suggests that Connell's formulation of hegemonic masculinity presents a false binary between the hegemonic and nonhegemonic. Instead, Demetriou proposes the notion of a historic, hybrid, "hegemonic bloc" of masculinity that "unites practices from diverse masculinities in order to ensure the reproduction of patriarchy" (2001, 337). Demetriou maintains that whereas Connell sees the inclusion of non-White and nonheterosexual masculinities within hegemonic masculinity in Western societies as compromising the integrity of hegemony, diversity actually helps to explain the adaptability of this inclusive bloc in response to societal changes. Conceptualized in this manner, the *hegemonic bloc* can appropriate the progressive and counter-hegemonic, pressing them into the service of patriarchy's reproduction. For example, in explaining *gay visibility*, Demetriou says that mainstream movies, music, and fashion have commodified elements and practices of male gay culture, thus furthering patriarchy and capitalism but failing to contribute to any sort of liberation for gay men. In their writings, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) have since affirmed Demetriou's notions of external and

internal hegemony, incorporating them into a reformulated conceptualization of hegemonic masculinity.

Despite continued scholarly debate, hegemonic masculinity remains a relevant concept in masculinity studies. Recent studies have examined hegemonic masculinity as the basis for bullying among middle school boys in the United States (Rosen and Nofziger 2019), the prevalence of hegemonic masculinity values in Western outdoor education (Kennedy and Russell 2020), and the Korean Protestant Right's redefinition of hegemonic masculinity to incorporate traditionally feminine traits (N. Kim 2016). Other studies have examined the way hegemonic masculinity in the corporate cultures of the United States and the United Kingdom excludes women from positions of power and creativity (Gregory 2016), how Osama bin Laden's rhetoric constructed a "jihadist global hegemonic masculinity" (Messerschmidt and Rohde 2018), and how the postsocialist Chinese state media promotes a hegemonic masculinity consonant with neoliberal and patriarchal values (Luo 2017). In addition to such studies, hegemonic masculinity continues to provide the backdrop against which scholars conceptualize accounts of complicit, marginalized, and alternative masculinities.

Complicit, Marginalized, and Alternative Masculinities

Complicit masculinities exist outside or on the periphery of the hegemonic bloc. Men who engage in complicit masculinities benefit from the patriarchal dividend, but they neither challenge patriarchy nor make any active contributions to its upkeep (Connell 2005). Such dividends may include more prestigious positions and higher salaries than those received by women. However, as the term itself suggests, complicit masculinities are not neutral. According

to scholars who use this term, by failing to take a stance against patriarchy, men exhibiting complicit masculinities are culpable in perpetuating systems of gender inequality (Cleland, Pope, and Williams 2020; Matlon 2016). As in the case of hegemonic masculinities, class and race impinge upon an individual's ability to perform complicit masculinities (Torres 2007). For example, middle-class privilege allows some men to act in ways that parallel but do not completely conform to hegemonic masculinity. As Javaid writes, "middle-class, White men who 'help out' at home, respect women, and avoid violence benefit from the broader system of gender inequality whilst not appearing to be its primary enforcers" (2019, 45). In this dissertation, I make this same argument about middle-class Japanese men who do not fully commit to engaged fatherhood. Working-class men, on the other hand, lack access to middle-class cultural and economic capital and cannot as easily enact hegemonic configurations of practice. They are more likely to ascribe to *protest masculinities* (discussed below), which are more conspicuously heteronormative and more insistent on a patriarchal social order than are the complicit masculinities of many middle-class men.

In contrast to complicit masculinities, *marginalized masculinities* threaten hegemonic masculinity owing to their divergence from what a given society considers good and proper for men (Cheng 1999). Hegemonic masculinities and gender identities derive legitimacy from societal assumptions about the natural and the normal. Hence, any gender performance that calls into question dominant societal discourses reveals hegemonic conventions as fictional constructs open to subversion (Butler 2006 [1990]). Here, *marginalized* refers to "the position of individuals, groups or populations outside of 'mainstream society,' living at the margins of those in the centre of power, of cultural dominance and economical and social welfare" (Schiffer and

Schatz 2008, 6). For example, men adhering to marginalized masculinities may include gay men as well as men with physical and mental disabilities. Even marginalized masculinities that primarily exist as discursive constructs, such as Japan's *sōshokukei danshi*¹⁸ or herbivorous boys, generate great societal unease when they trouble common sense notions about gender and sexual orientation. Uninterested in sex (asexual) or lacking the drive to pursue (heterosexual) sex actively, herbivorous boys challenge the Japanese notion that men inherently possess insatiable sexual appetites (Koike 2013). Women's magazines initially hailed the herbivorous boy as the next accessory for self-confident women. However, public opinions about herbivorous boys quickly shifted to scorn when the mainstream media violently reacted to what it saw as the feminization of young men, pathologizing *sōshokukei danshi* as performers of a "diseased form" of masculinity (Luschmann 2019, 144).

Like marginalized masculinities, *alternative masculinities* are, according to Carabí, "those masculinities which question hegemonic and dominant male behavior and embody more egalitarian forms of manhood. Those 'alternative' masculinities are characterized by being not sexist, not racist, not homophobic, not classist, etc." (Carabí in Seidler 2014). Sumpter (2015) groups three kinds of masculinities proposed by other researchers under the *alternative* category: *natural masculinities*, *protest masculinities*, and *hybrid masculinities*.

Significantly, the word "natural" in *natural masculinities* is not an attempt to essentialize gender constructs. Rather, according to Il'inykh, it refers to "life in accordance with a male habitus in which there is a lifting of various kinds of limitations that have been imposed by hegemonic masculinity" (2012, 22). It is a movement from the "real man" to the "natural man"

¹⁸草食系男子 (*sōshokukei danshi*).

who is not only in touch with his emotions, but who is also open to overturning the gender dichotomy whereby men work in paid employment and women watch over the home.

A key example of natural masculinity in North America is the Promise Keepers, a Christian movement originating in the United States in 1990 that seemingly takes a stance against toxic masculinity's sexist and macho values yet maintains that men should remain the heads of household. Heath (2003) suggests that men in the Promise Keepers movement self-portray as ascribing to a "different but equal" notion of gender equality. However, Bartkowski (2001) points out two key leaders in the organization who advocate very different values, including male toughness, male decisiveness, and fundamental differences between the sexes. Likewise, Dean Allen II (2001) highlights the greater nuances and complexity of ordinary members' views when compared to the more straightforward messages espoused by leaders.

Heath further argues that Promise Keepers members prove willing to express their emotions, to get in touch with their "natural" selves, often in a way that would be "marked as homosexual or gay by a heterosexist society" (2003, 437, 440), despite the movement's clear rejection of same-sex marriage and gay liberation. As I will suggest, the Promise Keepers' philosophy bears some similarities to Fathering Japan's message about "smiling fathers" and about men's need for greater expressivity. However, Fathering Japan's focus on structural gender-based issues contrasts with the Promise Keepers' inattention to systemic inequality.

In particular, the Promise Keepers organization sees racism as the product of individual practices rather than as forms of discrimination embedded in the core of society (Dean Allen II 2001; Heath 2003). Additionally, members of Promise Keepers strive to be better husbands and fathers, but the focus of the organization's message is highly personal (Claussen 2000; Williams

2001). Men flock to the Promise Keepers movement precisely because, at its heart, the movement is not truly radical (Heath 2003). The Promise Keepers' philosophy does not substantially challenge the structural advantages that men enjoy under patriarchy. Promise Keepers men not only change their lifestyles while retaining leadership positions within their families, but they also selectively appropriate noncontroversial rhetoric from the feminist and civil rights movements. For example, the members make efforts to form friendships among men of different racial backgrounds, while setting aside any salient criticisms that would challenge White men's dominance. White Promise Keepers men claim that they are "color blind," thereby sidestepping the issue of White privilege (Heath 2003).

Therefore, I would argue that we can better conceptualize natural masculinities as complicit masculinities and that natural masculinities' openness to gender equality is an empty claim in many contexts, including when Japanese men's efforts to "beauty up" serve merely to attract women into entering otherwise heteronormative relationships (L. Miller 2006). Sumpter's classification of natural masculinity as an alternative masculinity based on natural masculinity's seeming egalitarianism (2015) fails to problematize significantly the underlying dominance sustaining patriarchy. In effect, natural masculinity contributes to the hegemonic bloc's flexibility in response to new circumstances. Reacting to the rise of feminism, natural masculinity allows the hegemonic seemingly to concede to demands for gender equality, such as greater paternal involvement and participation in domestic affairs; nevertheless, as with the Promise Keepers, this nod to gender equality—defined in the organization's own convenient terms—is merely a means for men to reassert their authority by appearing sympathetic to feminism's goals.

Like natural masculinities, *protest masculinities* attempt to reject hegemonic masculinity (Connell 2005) and patriarchal figures (P. S. Y. Ho, Jackson, and Lam 2018). Like marginalized masculinities, protest masculinities often originate in individuals' childhood senses of helplessness based on their marginalized positions—sometimes because of race or class—within their societies. In response, these individuals compensate by acting out gendered traits that they and their societies perceive as powerful, thus covering up their insecurities and genuine lack of access to resources (Sumpter 2015). For instance, fathers grappling with feelings of powerlessness may lash out violently at their families and simultaneously harbor deep feelings of guilt at their own inability to fulfill the cultural ideal of the primary provider (Bourgeois 2003).

Those who study protest masculinities identify multiple traits associated with men—often working-class men—who perform such masculinities to express their dissatisfaction with power structures in their respective cultures. For example, men who adopt protest masculinities often display physical aggressiveness, participation in competitive sports, impulsiveness, and excessive alcohol consumption (Broude 1990; Elliott 2018). Nonetheless, protest masculinities can be flexible about appropriate gendered behavior, as Rai (2020) points out in a study of male migrant workers in rural western India who craft hypermasculine identities as a way to reject elite men's ownership of their labor and bodies. While spurning “women's work,” these male migrants raise no objection to working alongside female migrants in cotton fields because picking cotton generates greater income than other forms of seasonal labor do. In an earlier publication, Walker (2006) also points to nuances and complexity within the category of protest masculinity. He argues that scholars have incorrectly treated protest masculinity as a homogeneous category, positing instead two distinct types of protest masculinities: the

destructive “anomic protest masculinity,” encompassing potentially dysfunctional displays of machismo among working-class men, and the “disciplined protest masculinity” that promotes solidarity among its practitioners, such as by cultivating a class consciousness among working-class men.

Hybrid Masculinities

In the same way that the categories of protest and other masculinities have proven flexible or expandable, the concept of hybrid masculinities takes its cue from Demetriou’s point that “the form of masculinity that is capable of reproducing patriarchy is in a constant process of negotiation, translation, hybridization, and reconfiguration” (D. Z. Demetriou 2001, 355). Hybrid masculinities are “the selective incorporation of elements of identity typically associated with various marginalized and subordinate masculinities and—at times—femininities onto privileged men’s gender performances and identities” (Bridges and Pascoe 2014, 246). Hybrid masculinities incorporate the concept of *inclusive masculinity*, an idea formulated to explain the purported decrease in cultural levels of homophobia in the West and the move toward “softer” masculinities that permit a greater diversity of acceptable heteromasculine behaviors, especially performances previously stigmatized as “gay” (E. Anderson 2009). According to Tamagawa, inclusive masculinities do not have a strong presence in Japan, where “softer” masculinities remain stigmatized and society tolerates alternative sexualities “as long as they stay in their place on the society’s margin” (2020, 2).

The scholar de Boise (2014) takes issue specifically with inclusive masculinity, arguing that the concept adds little to Connell’s theory of hegemony and power in gender relations, that it

uses an ahistorical account of “homohysteria” to justify its existence, that Anderson applies the concept to cases that are neither new nor representative of a “softening” of masculinity, and that inclusive masculinity relies on a naive conclusion that homophobia in society must have decreased generally because homophobic speech is less overtly prevalent in public discourse.

As Bridges and Pascoe (2014) point out, research on hybrid masculinities tends to focus on White heterosexual young men often residing in the United States. Theoretical considerations surrounding hybrid masculinities are driven by questions about the degree to which hybrid masculinities have proliferated and whether they represent a step towards greater gender equality. While most scholars agree that hybrid masculinities are far from unusual, most argue that hybrid masculinities exemplify how systems of inequality can adapt flexibly in order to preserve the integrity of the status quo while obscuring the process by which power reproduces itself in new forms (Bridges and Pascoe 2014). Therefore, when we understand hybrid masculinities in this sense, we can see them as part of the hegemonic bloc.

Most scholars therefore interpret hybrid masculinity as a take on hegemonic masculinity that eventually reinforces or benefits from the latter’s position of authority within gender relations. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) have challenged Demetriou’s understanding of hybridization (2001), arguing that the masculinities identified by scholars as hybrid—such as those adopted by White working-class teenagers who assume a Black hip-hop style—cannot ever be truly hegemonic beyond the local level. However, other studies have demonstrated satisfactorily how men who would otherwise fulfill the conditions for hegemonic masculinity (e.g., White, straight, middle- or upper-class) seemingly queer their gender performances in ways that nevertheless perpetuate gender and sexual inequality (Bridges 2014; Eisen and Yamashita

2017; Pfaffendorf 2017). Men whose practices would otherwise fall squarely into the hegemonic are often freer to experiment with hybrid masculinities, yet these men still benefit from patriarchy's dividend precisely because multiple levels of privilege protect them (Barber 2016). The Japanese businessman who appears progressive because he uses makeup to improve his appearance for online video meetings (C. Tanaka 2021) is only able to do so because he operates from an entitled position.

Moreover, studies such as barber and bridges' account (2017) of Western satirical marketing campaigns—which parodically place hypermasculine bodies in feminine positions to sell products that men would normally be hesitant to buy, such as “fluffy” Greek yogurt, “zesty” Italian dressing, and Old Spice grooming products—popularly associated with older men until the 2008 “Swagger” campaign—suggest that hybrid masculinities are capable of reproducing patriarchy. Specifically, hybrid masculinities in advertisements present only the appearance of progressiveness, yet the advertisements continue to use as the basis for parody the gender stereotypes that they highlight unproblematically. The marketing campaigns fail to challenge fundamentally the masculinity of male models and the feminine nature of the products marketed. The seeming sexual objectification of men's bodies in parodic displays, in both Japanese and Western advertisements and performances, is also wholly different from the systematic and disempowering sexual objectification of women's bodies: advertisements featuring hybrid masculinities are a celebration of male sexuality.

Fatherhood-Based Masculinities

The practice of fatherhood is a subject highly conducive to the exploration of changing masculinities, both in Japan and around the world. A gender identity that lends itself to political, economic, social, cultural, and moral analysis, fatherhood is a constantly changing configuration of practices that scholars can trace and compare across space and time. As Björk states, “New practices establish new discourses of masculinity and fatherhood” (2013, 234). Fathers’ practices are also a major area of research in time-use studies, which often overlap with masculinity studies in examining the extent to which men’s activities, relationships, and ideology hinder or contribute to gender equality.

Gender ideology and experiences in their families of origin play major roles in men’s performances of fatherhood in such countries as the United States and India. For example, among stay-at-home dads in the United States, men with higher levels of self-reported egalitarian gender ideology are more likely to become *caregiving fathers* who report not working for pay because they are either engaged in child care or lack the desire to work. In contrast, for *unable-to-work* men—who attribute their unemployment to disability, illness, or an inability to find jobs—gender ideology has a comparatively minimal effect on their stay-at-home dad status (Kramer and Kramer 2016). Men in the United States who are close to their fathers are more likely to stress the nurturing role’s importance, whereas men who do not have strong, positive relationships with their fathers mainly see themselves as providers (Forste, Bartkowski, and Jackson 2009). Similarly, childhood experiences shape most strongly the fathering ideologies in India; however, Indian men also incorporate other influences, such as media images and the examples of friends, into their patterns of practice (Sriram and Navalkar 2012).

Even with a progressive gender ideology, a father's engagement in caring practices and household responsibilities may, despite their best intentions, subvert gender norms only partially or temporarily because "the legacy of patriarchal and structural arrangements, men's power and 'choices' cannot be erased from contemporary debates or experiences even if there is a desire to do so" (A. Kim and Pyke 2015; T. Miller 2011, 1105). Change comes slowly: in Euro-American countries, fathers' contributions to child care have increased at various rates in different societies depending on education's influence on gender ideology and on the presence of family-friendly social policies that free up time for men to participate in home life, with Nordic fathers "setting the bar" for paternal involvement (Altintas and Sullivan 2017). A gap continues to exist between shifting cultural attitudes toward fatherhood and the reality that actual fathering practices in North American and many European countries have not significantly changed over the past decades (Glorieux et al. 2015; Sullivan 2004; LaRossa 1988).

Other studies argue that in contemporary Euro-American and Asian contexts, the proliferation of diverse models of fatherhood carrying different, often contradictory, sets of values has generated confusion among men about what is expected of them by their families, society, and themselves (Hoang and Yeoh 2011; Forste, Bartkowski, and Jackson 2009). Mixed messages abound, such as within widely circulated English language picture books that continue to represent fathers as largely absent (D. A. Anderson and Hamilton 2005). However, when fathers are present in these storybooks, they are not substantially less likely than mothers to behave in a nurturing manner toward children; they are, however, less likely to express identifiable emotions (M. Adams, Walker, and O'Connell 2011).

In many Western and in some Asian societies, definitions of fatherhood increasingly incorporate caregiving as a key component, requiring men to adjust their identities as they attempt to strike a balance between work and the home. Learning intimacy calls upon men to embrace or redefine such values as equality, democracy, reciprocity, fragility, commitment, and communication (Dermott 2008). On the other hand, American men who perform hegemonic masculinity in the workplace and adhere to the traditional division of labor in the home continue to receive a “daddy bonus” in the form of increased earnings, attributable both to fathers’ increased effort and work hours following childbirth originating in feelings of financial responsibility for their newborn and to employers’ interpretation of fatherhood as an indication of dependability and loyalty (Hodges and Budig 2010). Indeed, in many contexts, fatherhood pushes men away from the home and toward the workplace. Governments around the world—including those of Japan, Sweden, and Canada—attempt to redress this phenomenon with policies, such as paid paternity leave (Featherstone 2009), and propaganda that uses state and public discourse to insist that “real men” are involved fathers (Canuto et al. 2019; Duvander, Haas, and Thalberg 2017; Bergmann and Schiffbänker 2016; Ishii-Kuntz 2013). Such discourse “mobilizes norms of masculinity and fathering that have been associated with White, class-privileged, married men for decades and selectively incorporates expectations for stereotypically feminine parenting practices into disadvantaged men’s paternal identities” (Randles 2018, 535). However, the desire to become an engaged father is often evident even among men who face enormous obstacles (Fantus and Newman 2019). For example, despite the way that government policy and legislation, the legacy of colonialism, and a lack of role models conspire against Indigenous Canadian fathers, they still demonstrate a willingness to become involved parents

(Ball 2009). Even men in positions of privilege continue to face pushback as they attempt to negotiate new ways of relating to their families. For example, fathers in the United States who prioritize their families often receive negative performance reviews and lose opportunities for promotion (Brumley 2018; Sallee 2012). As a result, mothers in the United States, Japan, and other countries around the world continue to perform most unpaid labor.

Men who cannot fulfill their culture's expectations surrounding the primary provider role are more likely to redefine masculine success to accommodate their inability to live up to a gender ideal. Some of these men may have experienced failure in their careers (Roy 2004; Roy and Dyson 2010), while others may never have cared about their careers or else changed priorities after their children were born (Deutsch 1999). In addition to their employment status, economic class moderates the ways in which fathers interact with their young children: middle-class fathers are prone to reproducing gender norms, while working-class fathers are often involved with their children in ways that "undo gender" because their already highly masculine jobs render unnecessary the use of family relations to secure their masculine identities (Shows and Gerstel 2009). At the very least, working-class fathers are less likely than middle-class fathers to micromanage their children's growth according to dominant societal discourses on properly structured education (Gillies 2009). Further influencing men's involvement with their children are such factors as their partners' work schedules (Norman, Elliot, and Fagan 2014) and "maternal gatekeeping," or "the beliefs and behaviors that discourage or restrict father involvement in childcare (i.e., by setting high standards about how childcare tasks 'should' be completed, or otherwise maintaining control over childcare)" (Beitel and Parke 1998; Meteyer and Perry-Jenkins 2010, 383; Doucet 2006). Finally, deeply embedded gender expectations in

workplace culture exert a strong influence on how men perform as fathers, including by discouraging fathers from taking advantage of paternity leave through negative evaluations that could affect men's ability to provide for their families (Haas and Hwang 2019; Miyajima and Yamaguchi 2017).

However, in a widely cited article, Christiansen and Palkovitz (2001) take issue with the dissociation of men's work from their home life. These authors argue that researchers have mostly ignored the importance of the income-provider role, which not only remains essential to the family, but which also needs to be reconceptualized as a form of paternal involvement. Scholars frequently treat the provider role as a one-dimensional social position and conflate it with the worker role (the individual-as-employee), yet the provider role and the worker role are distinct, albeit intertwined (Christiansen and Palkovitz 2001). In fact, many fathers view the provider role not as an escape from family entanglements, but as a way of actively contributing to their children's lives (Cazenave 1979; Dollahite, Hawkins, and Brotherson 1997)—a viewpoint that I will offer illustrations of in my case studies. Moreover, Christiansen and Palkovitz (2001) maintain that if mothers' unpaid labor is invisible because women work in private and society devalues that work, then father's paid labor is invisible to and taken for granted by the family because it often occurs outside the home in places where family members do not witness the sacrifices that paid labor entails. Scholars therefore narrowly define paternal involvement in a way that fails to take into account the perspectives of fathers, a pitfall that this dissertation explicitly endeavors to avoid.

Additional psychological and sociological research problematizes the involved fathering paradigm. In contrast to the cultural expectations attendant upon motherhood, male privilege and

cultural expectations allow fathers to choose the kinds of care work in which they involve themselves. Historically, recreational activities are a major avenue for fathers to connect with their children (Beitel and Parke 1998; Such 2006), and they are easier to navigate than the more stressful, detailed, and unseen aspects of child care. Involved fathers therefore may be merely those men whose parenting practices are publicly visible and include such activities as picking children up from school or taking children to the park (Brumley 2018). Certainly, I witnessed Japanese fathers' penchant for choosing publicly visible, recreational activities in a manner that is consistent with Fathering Japan's and local groups' promotion of the fun aspects of fatherhood.

The Dangers of Discourse About Alleged Crises of Masculinity

In this dissertation, I attempt to avoid what Inhorn and Isidoros label the “hackneyed” men-in-crisis trope (2018, 322),¹⁹ a turning point or set of conditions that forces men to change the way they value, perceive, and perform gender roles. Certainly, I find it tempting to view Japanese men's redefinition of fatherhood as a crisis of gender identity. However, masculinities have been in flux throughout history and across cultures (Connell 2005). Masculinity is always in a state of crisis (MacInnes 2001) in every contemporary society because hegemonic masculinity always exists in an uneasy state of tension with other gender constructs (Connell 2005). For this reason, hegemonic masculinity must constantly reinvent itself in order to maintain its position of dominance within its respective society.

The crisis-of-masculinity trope is compelling precisely because it possesses strong explanatory power, applicable to the mobilization of political parties in the United States and

¹⁹Inhorn and Isidoros also categorize the concept of hegemonic masculinity as “hackneyed.”

Europe defending patriarchy from feminist values (Marx Ferree 2020) to the violence and unrest of male workers disenfranchised by China's post-Mao reshaping of the working class (Yang 2010). Some scholars also apply the crisis-of-masculinity trope to Japan: for example, while acknowledging that now is a time of increased tensions for Japanese men, Tanaka argues—in a book aimed at a popular audience—that the current “era of despair” provides a long-awaited opportunity for men to “live freely” and “take a new step together” (2015, 17).

Less optimistically, Kimmel (2011) documents how the current crisis in American masculinity originated with the advent of the Self-Made Man, who decoupled manhood from property ownership or a trade and instead situated his masculinity in the volatile marketplace. As a result, men had to prove their masculinity constantly instead of inheriting it, and this necessity made uncertainty, insecurity, and eventually anger central parts of American manhood. Men's monopoly on the public sphere further weakened when minorities and women began entering the workplace. In response, White men began to retreat into the private sphere with the creation of men's lodges and the Boy Scouts, which feature, among other things, camping trips in which fathers teach their sons how to be “real men” (Kimmel 2011).

Similarly, postwar Canada faced a crisis of masculinity among middle-class White men (M. L. Adams 1997; Gleason 1999). The major reasons for this “crisis” were the influx of women into the workforce, the purported feminization of what was previously seen as men's labor, and the belief that sedentary labor enervated men, rendering them unfit to work (McPhail 2009). While commentators understood work as a refuge for men from the growing feminization of the suburbs, even work was now apparently compromised. At the same time, Canadian “experts” also legitimized men's place in the home by warning that children with absent fathers

were at risk for developing “homosexual tendencies” (Gleason 1999), thus conflating gender with sexuality. Like psychologists in the United States, Canadian psychologists believed that a dominant father could counteract the negative influences on sons of his less “mature” wife, who was also perceived as at greater risk of developing pathological “abnormalities” (Gleason 1999).

Criticism of Omissions in Studies of Masculinities

Any consideration of fatherhood cannot ignore negative critiques of the academic study of masculinity. In addition to the problems posed by the ever-proliferating categories into which scholars classify men and their practices, debate exists about the degree to which researchers and policymakers are unnecessarily optimistic about the effect of changes in men’s behavior and ideology (Edley 2017; Luyt and Starck 2020; Mun and Brinton 2015; Waling 2020). O’Neill contests the way that inclusive masculinity presents “a new, more hopeful, and optimistic era in masculinity studies,” which she argues is welcomed by academics and the popular media but that “both reflects and reproduces a postfeminist logic in which sexual politics is consigned to the past” (2014, 114, 115). O’Neill further suggests that scholars of masculinity have failed to interrogate how societies reproduce the logic of patriarchy in newer and subtler forms. Siegel calls this “preservation through transformation,” referring to situations where social forces generate the appearance of great change in systems of inequality and the discourses (re)producing these systems, when, in reality, society “continues to distribute material and dignitary privileges (‘social goods’) in such a way as to maintain the distinctions that comprise the regime” (1996, 2184). In response to the issues raised by O’Neill, my discussion of Japan’s parenting movement recognizes that late modern societies around the world are far from

postfeminist. Additionally, I attempt to balance my cautious optimism with the understanding that societal shifts in Japan could simply amount to a “preservation through transformation.”

Waling (2018) takes issue with how scholars continue to portray masculinities as static constructs, despite these scholars’ avowed attempts to portray the fluidity of gender performances. She cautions against many explanatory pitfalls, including the way in which scholars continue to theorize that masculinities are oppressive and constraining to men, as well as how researchers often resort to categorizing men into different masculinity “types.” Waling subsequently encourages scholars to view masculinity as the effect of men’s social relationships rather than as a cause that influences men’s ways of being in the world. I take Waling’s concerns to heart, providing descriptions and narratives of how men change their gender performances to incorporate fatherhood as a crucial, potentially liberating component. As stated earlier in this section, I also avoid attempting to categorize my interlocutors according to the different “types” of masculinities.

Finally, in a diatribe aimed at American masculinity studies, but one that extends to studies of masculinities in general, Traister (2000) accuses scholars of recuperating alternative masculinities through a sympathetic focus on their marginalization relative to hegemonic masculinity, but in a way that fails to challenge adequately the masculine position of power. He asserts that the scholarly focus on masculinity results in the following:

Men themselves—whether they be your hard-dicked, corporate-crushing, breast-ogling, Republican-voting neanderthals, or your sensitive, artistic, politically aware, diaper-changing, liberal milquetoasts, or your benefits not-sharing, adoption-denied, tax-

discriminated, organization-bashed, lifestyle-reviled, non-reproductive Abba fans—become not merely potential posterboys for even the most aggressive forms of anti-patriarchal theorizing but ‘equal’ players within the domain of gender studies (Traister 2000, 297).

In other words, Traister contends that—despite scholars’ professed commitment to unraveling masculine privilege—American masculinity studies reproduce masculine dominance because of the narrow academic focus on “equally anxious” and “totalizing models of agonistic masculinity” and because of the inadequate contextualization of diverse masculinities within a matrix of subject positions, including gender, class, ethnicity, and sexual orientation (2000, 297). Although the levels of intersectionality that Traister suggests are outside of the scope of my study, this dissertation keeps in mind Traister’s concerns about the dangers of overly sympathetic, monolithic portrayals of masculine “types” in modern society.

Ultimately, as my review of masculinity studies and its critiques demonstrates, many scholars spend too much time and space developing categories for different masculinities that in the end, all reproduce patriarchy. On the other hand, researchers who lean towards the possibility of genuine change may be accused by other scholars of being too optimistic or not analytical enough about how deep patriarchy runs. Masculinity studies has a long way to go before it catches up with the theoretical richness of feminist studies (Waling 2018).

Section 3: An Overview of Research on Japanese Masculinities

Research on Japanese hegemonic masculinity has waned in recent years; there is a greater scholarly focus on men who are not able or willing to conform to heteronormative lifestyles. Nevertheless, hegemonic masculinity remains the touchstone for studies exploring less socially sanctioned configurations of gendered practice. If Japanese hegemonic masculinity has lost some of its dominance in the social landscape, the Japanese public still views as desirable the relative stability and predictability conferred by hegemonic masculinity, which is normatively tied to white-collar work.

The Japanese Salaryman as Both Worker and Construct

Scholars studying Japanese masculinities have used the concept of hegemonic masculinity to explain the social and cultural dominance of the white-collar *sarariiman*,²⁰ or “salaryman,” during the postwar period from 1945–1985 (Dasgupta 2003; Hidaka 2010; Thomas 2017 [1993]). Hegemonic masculinity has provided the key to understanding why salarymen became the gold standard to which young men aspired as they relentlessly studied for university entrance examinations in order to attend prestigious universities and then to achieve stable, salaried positions at reputable companies following graduation.

The term *sarariiman* can variously refer to a specific kind of worker or the gender construct to which the former is intimately bound. The two meanings are distinct: not all white-collar workers live up to the gendered salaryman ideal, but one cannot aspire to the salaryman

²⁰サラリーマン (*sarariiman*).

construct without first finding employment as a company employee. Researchers continue to regard the salaryman construct as Japan's hegemonic masculinity par excellence, even though its position of dominance within the gender hierarchy gradually began to weaken after the collapse of Japan's economic bubble in 1991.

Popularly characterized as workaholics who display an unyielding commitment to their companies (Dasgupta 2003; Takeyama 2010), salarymen received public credit for Japan's post-war "economic miracle," or the nation's economic recovery from the ashes of the Pacific War to become the second most affluent economy in the world by the 1980s.²¹ The values associated with the salaryman construct include strength, perseverance, loyalty, and self-sacrifice (Thomas 2017 [1993]). Further, Japanese society, using a clear comparison to Japan's revered samurai, hailed the salaryman as a *kigyō senshi*, or "corporate warrior," who did battle through business deals (Dasgupta 2017).

Family interpersonal relationships were and are secondary considerations for men who approximate the salaryman ideal (Hwangseok 2017); paid work takes precedence, although these men often prioritize work to better fulfill their primary provider role (Imai 2018). During Japan's period of economic prosperity in the 1980s, the stereotypical (male) employee's constant presence in the workplace and his corresponding absence from the home led scholars at the time to characterize Japanese families as "fatherless" (Doi 2014 [1981]; Ishii-Kuntz 1992). Japanese workers benefited from socially conservative welfare and corporate policies, many developed during the Pacific War, that privileged single-income families during the second half of the twentieth century (Gottfried and O'Reilly 2002; Kasza 2018). Drawing a family wage, salarymen

²¹ Japan currently has the third highest GDP (gross domestic product) in the world (The World Bank 2020).

partnered with *sengyō shufu*,²² or “professional full-time housewives,” whose responsibilities included domestic labor and raising the children who were the socially expected product of marriage (Dasgupta 2000). By shouldering the burdens of the domestic sphere, the *sengyō shufu* facilitated the ability of the salaryman to devote his time and energy to work. Women’s support was and is an essential yet unacknowledged factor in Japan’s economic success (Allison 1994; Borovoy 2005; Nemoto 2016).

Women were and continue to be indispensable to the salaryman in an additional way: marriage and children became virtual requirements for company promotion beyond a certain level. Company superiors often made it their responsibility to find suitable partners for their subordinates (Hendry 2012) since company management assumed that male employees worked harder when placed in the position of primary provider. Moreover, (male) bosses once played significant roles in the marriage ceremony itself, and they also served as surrogate fathers to their subordinates in the workplace (Kondo 1990).

As the nation recovered from the Pacific War, Japanese society further extended to the entire company this metaphor of the workplace family, as many businesses operated and continue to operate under the maxim that the companies were families (Fruin 1980; Kondo 1990). The fact that many spouses first met each other at their workplace further reinforced the idea of company as family. However, immediately after marrying, women usually retired from their positions as *OL* or “office ladies” who performed “pink-collar” clerical or secretarial work so that they could raise the couple’s children. Additionally, some corporations provided company

²² 専業主婦 (*sengyō shufu*).

housing where the families of their workers lived (Rohlen 1979), so even the nuclear family was embedded within the company family.

In part due to the financial security and stable life paths of the salaryman-housewife dyad, pre-1991 postwar society presented such families as the pattern for all families in Japan (Guarné and Hansen 2018), leading researchers to overlook groups that fell short of this ideal even though many other variations in family patterns existed (Rohlen 1979; Nakane 1972). The concept of *complementary incompetence* helps to explain the ways in which the salaryman and his housewife relied upon each other, yet defined themselves against one another, albeit in an unequal status relationship (W. Edwards 1990). This relationship was—and is—learned early and reinforced throughout childhood, despite government and educators' espoused efforts to modify these expectations of gender roles through such methods as training teachers to make fewer distinctions between boys and girls (Uchimizaki and Ikeda 2012). Aiba (2020) illustrates this continued gender dynamic in her study of cheering squads' heteronormative masculine and feminine performances during a high school's annual sports festival. She notes that boys self-portrayed their bodies as powerful, cool, and capable of leading the girls in the dance. In contrast, the girls self-portrayed their bodies as cute, glamorous, and—in the case of one cheering squad—sexy. Aiba argues that the clothing choices (trousers and skirts) as well as the types of bodily movements performed restricted expression in a way that effectively excluded students with other gender and sexual identities. As a result, the cheering squads naturalized heteronormativity as the only legitimate relationship between unproblematic male and female bodies.

The Decline of the Salaryman as Idealized Worker and Construct

At the end of the twentieth century, the salaryman began to lose his respected role as a member of a workplace family, and the salaryman construct began to lose its appeal as an icon of Japanese industry. Before the bursting of Japan's economic bubble in 1991, companies guaranteed the jobs of male employees up to the age of 55.²³ This pre-recession policy of permanent employment, the enterprise unions that worked hand-in-hand with management, and the practice of determining wages according to seniority were known as the “three treasures” of Japan's economic miracle (Song 2014). However, after the onset of the Lost Two Decades, or the Lost Two Decades, from the 1990s to the 2010s, companies had to lay off employees and were not always able to maintain their policies of permanent employment, especially for newly hired employees (Ono 2010), or their ideal of company as family. Moreover, companies that fired their workers in response to market fluctuations were unable to continue claiming—at least convincingly—that they valued their employees as family members.

Just as Japanese companies lost their benevolent image, the salaryman construct did not emerge from the 20-year recession unscathed. Public discourse now frequently depicts the salaryman, no longer a valorous samurai, as a worn, isolated figure commuting between the office and home. This characterization was already present in popular culture (Skinner 1979), but it gained increasing primacy during the Lost Two Decades. Less a corporate warrior and more a reluctant wage slave, the salaryman appears in popular media as excessively servile to work

²³ The age of retirement is now 65. However, because Japan's rapidly aging population is putting pressure on social security costs, the Japanese government has recently begun to encourage companies to raise the age of retirement to 70 (The Japan Times 2020).

superiors, as inept at relating to women, and as lacking hobbies or significant nonfamilial relationships outside the home (Dasgupta 2013; Kelsky 2001; Yau 2018).

As hiring freezes for tenured white-collar positions took their toll, the era of irregular work arrived, and at its forefront were the individuals called *freeters*, a word combining the English word *free* and the German *arbeiter* or “worker.” Defined officially by the government as unemployed individuals or part-time workers between the ages of 15 and 34, these freeters are characterized by flexible lifestyles and work schedules that now often belie a hand-to-mouth existence (Honda 2006; Slater 2010; Yoshitaka 2005). Male freeters earn more than their female counterparts, but their employment status renders them unable to fulfill paradigms of productive adult masculinity, which include a full-time position and marriage (Cook 2014; 2013).

Although freeters effectively function as a reserve pool of labor that industry can redistribute according to its needs, the media and Japan’s general population castigate freeters for their supposedly deficient work ethic. However, many freeters are merely youth who received inadequate support from Japan’s institutional frameworks, which for earlier generations had provided a seamless transition between school and the workplace (Brinton 2010; Okano 1993). The Lost Two Decades may have ended officially in 2010, but stable life paths for the Japanese continue to evaporate. As a result, contemporary workers—both male and female—experience increased precarity in their lives compared to Japanese individuals who came of age during Japan’s postwar economic recovery (Allison, Baldwin, and Allison 2015; Kawaguchi and Ueno 2013).

The Masculinities of Japanese Men Unable to Fulfill the Salaryman Construct

As the salaryman construct lost its luster, researchers pivoted to studies of such nonhegemonic masculinities as herbivore boys, who had merely lost their lust. These nonhegemonic masculinities that seemed to proliferate during the Lost Two Decades had already existed beneath the notice of scholars. Although scholars have since produced excellent studies on nonhegemonic masculinities, and although men's practices are always in transition, this research has defined many types of Japanese masculinities relative to socially sanctioned forms of employment (Fukuda 2020; Sun 2019). So deep is this connection that scholars often frame masculinities in Japan in terms of occupation; for instance, the salaryman and the (male) freeter are terms for precise categories of worker.

Takeyama's research (Takeyama 2010; 2016; 2005) examines *hosts*, young men who work by selling their companionship to women willing to pay for their attentions. Hosts distinguish themselves from salarymen—using hegemonic masculinity as a reference point in the manner theorized by Connell (2005)—and from Japanese men in general, whom hosts claim are insensitive to the needs of women. However, the economically predatory relationships that hosts cultivate with their clients do not significantly challenge gender power dynamics. Finally, as entrepreneurs who invest in their own bodies in order to craft a seductive appearance that sells, hosts frame their lifestyle in terms of the neoliberal value of independence and choice, despite the exploitation of host-club owners who extract large portions of the hosts' profits as fees for renting club space.

In contrast to Takeyama's descriptions of the superficially female-friendly masculinities of young men working at Japanese host clubs, Frühstück's account (2007) of men in the Japanese

Self-Defense Forces (SDF) foregrounds gender constructs that wield an implicit, albeit state-sanctioned, potential for violence. This state-legitimized potential for violence differs from domestic violence (Borovoy 2005; Ozaki 2017) or violence in sports (K. Itō 2019). Frühstück argues that, ironically, both male and female SDF members initially don their military uniforms out of a desire to participate in humanitarian missions abroad, such as disaster relief. Another significant motivation for individuals' enlisting is a desire to escape the monotony of white-collar work, but again—ironically—male SDF members intersect with the salaryman construct when their promotion trades field operations for desk work.

Roberson (2002) examines working-class men who, like male SDF members, also position themselves against salarymen. Working-class men lack access to the prestige and social legitimacy of white-collar businessmen, yet they are nonetheless influenced by middle-class standards set by the salaryman and his lifestyle. In an account that speaks to Demetriou's distinction (2001) between external and internal masculine hegemony, Roberson shows how blue-collar workers at Shintani Metals Company held onto the basic assumption that heterosexual men should perform as the primary providers for their families. Yet despite acting in ways that reproduced the patriarchal dividend, Roberson's interlocutors were increasingly accepting of women in their own workforce, as evidenced partly by mixed-gender after-work socials, which contrasted with the largely homosocial world of the salaryman (Allison 1994; Castro-Vázquez 2018; Sedgwick 2018).

If Roberson (2002) acknowledges the slowly shifting gender performances of working-class men, then Yuen even more fully addresses Waling's (2018) criticism that scholars tend to portray masculine performances as static. Yuen (2018) discusses how Japanese female-to-male

(FTM) transgender people attempt to emulate hegemonic masculinity. Yuen also offers a complementary interpretation: sometimes still considered women by their companies, FTM individuals often try to distance themselves from the office-lady paradigm, the female workplace equivalent of the salaryman. Yuen discusses how they refuse to put on lipstick; attempt to exude a “male aura” through hair style, dress, and deportment; and switch between male and female bathrooms depending on the circumstances and company. Yuen (2020) further examines drinking parties organized by and for FTM people. She argues that in contrast to other arenas of life, such events provide an opportunity for FTM people to share openly the anxieties, tensions, and challenges of “passing” at work (Yuen 2020, 93).

Finally, popular culture fandom is rife with examples of alternative masculinities that, like FTM individuals, are also pathologized by wider society—albeit for different kinds of perceived deviance (Galbraith 2019; Kikuchi 2015). For example, academics have extensively examined the masculinity of male participants in the otaku subculture, or “a constellation of ‘fannish’ cultural logics, platforms, and practices that cluster around anime, manga, and Japanese games and are in turn associated with a more generalized set of dispositions toward passionate and participatory engagement with popular culture and technology in a networked world” (M. Itō 2012, xi). Since the 1990s, the otaku fan has taken on a more positive image as an enlightened consumer; nevertheless, Japanese society continues to associate otaku subculture with antisocial, perverse tendencies. A “grotesque incident” involving the “kidnapping, rape, and murder of several young girls” by a single individual between 1988 and 1989, tainted the otaku image as Japanese society and the mass media uniformly condemned the subculture (Azuma 1994, 4).

Galbraith (2019) characterizes male otaku as men who self-consciously choose to live at the margins of what Japanese society considers normatively acceptable; this lifestyle may include an immersion in fictional settings instead of so-called “reality” and an attraction to *bishōjo*²⁴ or “cute girl” characters. Other scholars argue that we may define otaku by the (hetero) sexual desire that they direct toward these fictional images and objects (Saitō 2000 in Tagawa 2009), a rhetoric faintly echoing the public discourse stigmatizing otaku as sexually deviant and socially dysfunctional. However, Galbraith (2019) argues that such characterizations are not only overly simplistic, but that they also ignore the queering potential of otaku:

If, as queer theorist Jack Halberstam argues, success in contemporary, heteronormative, capitalist society is often equated with achieving reproductive maturity, then there are those that struggle against ‘growing up.’ In their perceived failure, such people imagine and create “other goals for life, for love, for art, and for being” (Halberstam 2011, 88). (Galbraith 2019, 64).

Also taking popular culture as a point of departure for gender identity, Okabe (2012) describes how Japanese female cosplayers²⁵ (costume players) attempt to perform an idealized, beautiful masculinity by cross-dressing as male manga and anime characters, receiving acclaim from fellow cosplayers if they conform to community standards. McLeod (2013) looks at the androgynous, hybrid gender performances of cross-dressing male musicians in *visual kei*,²⁶ a

²⁴ 美少女 (bishōjo).

²⁵ コスプレイヤー (kosupureiyā).

²⁶ ヴィジュアル系 (vijuaru kei).

genre of Japanese music characterized by excessively showy displays. McLeod contends that visual kei images and performances permit a gender flexibility that is potentially liberating for both heterosexual and homosexual men as well as empowering for female fans, who sexually fantasize about and project themselves onto the androgynous bodies of band members.

Theoretical Considerations Drawn from Previous Studies of Japanese Masculinities

In examining the salaryman construct, researchers acknowledge the fraught nature of hegemonic masculinity in Japan (Gill 2002), but they pay less attention to the existence of a hegemonic bloc or the internal diversity within cohorts of salarymen (Allison 1994; Dasgupta 2000; 2003; Hidaka 2010; Skinner 1979; Vogel 2013 [1963]), with some exceptions (Matthews 2002; Ishii-Kuntz 2002; 2018). Studies of nonhegemonic masculinities both explicitly and implicitly show how other configurations of practices define themselves in opposition to the salaryman construct (Satō 1998; Frühstück 2007; Takeyama 2010). In such studies, the salaryman construct retains its preeminent position within the gender hierarchy in Japan, as nonhegemonic masculinities prove unable to mount a significant challenge to the dominance of the salaryman construct.

Building on this body of research, my study further problematizes the seeming cohesiveness of Japanese hegemonic masculinity. By pivoting to their roles in the home, the men in my study—primarily but not exclusively employed as salarymen—opened their gender practices and ideologies to new possibilities potentially conducive to greater gender equality, but in the process they sometimes faced marginalization for perceived inadequate in their workplace performances. Still, even if such practices and ideologies become more widespread in Japan,

they may not necessarily reshape the landscape of Japanese gender relations. Despite efforts by nonprofit organizations to promote gender equality and men's participation in the child-raising process, social forces within Japan may yet conscript into the hegemonic bloc these seemingly progressive configurations of parenting practice, ensuring some men's continued dominance over women and other groups of men.

Additionally, my ethnographic research contributes to anthropological and scholarly understandings of how Japanese men are attempting to decouple masculinity from paid employment. Berdahl et al. (2018) suggest that in Western cultures, individuals feel the need to prove that they are “real men” in the workplace, and the resulting “masculinity contests” are a primary reason why progress toward gender equality apparently has halted. While highlighting Japanese men's movement away from the workplace, I suggest that masculinity contests in Japan have, in many cases, merely shifted to new locales. Moreover, this dissertation explores how men are capable of pivoting from the workplace to the home and the local community by virtue of their gender and (usually) their class privilege, a process that simultaneously undermines and contributes to their professed goal of greater gender equality in Japan.

Research Focusing on Fathers of Young Children in Twenty-First-Century Japan

The gender ideology underlying Japanese fatherhood has witnessed significant changes since the turn of the twenty-first century, when men fulfilled their responsibilities as parents by acting as sympathetic primary providers (Matthews 2002; Shwalb et al. 1997, 509). Increasingly, men express the desire to connect with their families, locating their *ikigai*,²⁷ or “reason for

²⁷ 生きがい (ikigai).

living,” within their families rather than within their jobs (Nagano 2018). Nevertheless, fathering practices have changed little over the past few decades, and few models exist for men to imitate (North 2012).

Ishii-Kuntz has written extensively on the changing situation of fathers in Japan, addressing issues of concern to both masculinity studies and time-use studies. Her research examined the Ikujiren organization, a forerunner to Fathering Japan founded in 1980 that advocated for reducing parents’ work hours and for fathers’ increased involvement in child care (Ishii-Kuntz 2002; Ikujiren 2010). She argues for expanding the definition of *marginalized masculinities* to include salarymen who hold alternative values but who would otherwise ascribe to hegemonic masculinity, and she has advocated for changes in company policy to accommodate men’s alternative practices of parenthood. Ishii-Kuntz’s research also shows that men’s and women’s gender ideologies do not have a significant effect on father’s participation in child care (Ishii-Kuntz et al. 2004). However, higher levels of paternal involvement in Japan are associated with such factors as the number of family members in a household, the age of the youngest child, men’s time availability, and women’s employment status (Ishii-Kuntz et al. 2004). She cites campaigns by the Japanese government and the increase in working women as responsible for the emergence of diverse fatherhoods (Ishii-Kuntz 2018), but she points out that women are still largely responsible for care work and that progress toward greater gender equality is slow (Ishii-Kuntz 2019).

Nakazato (2018) traces societal shifts toward men’s familial involvement. In the 1970s, fathers rarely appeared in Japanese parenting manuals, but experts in the 1980s began to maintain that men had a role to play—albeit different from that of mothers—in child care and

housework, particularly in dual-income families. The late 1990s saw government support for a more gender-neutral view of parenting, but shifts in cultural attitudes and government legislation did not translate into changes in practices until the 2000s. Working mothers, laws mandating parental leave policies, and the influence of social movements led to an increase in the number of men who take paternity leave.

In their study of fathers of preschool-age children, Matsuda et al. (2016) distinguish between high, medium, and low levels of paternal involvement. They find that “fathers with long working hours, a conventional gender attitude, and closed negotiation with their partners were least involved in rearing children. . . . In contrast, fathers with an egalitarian gender attitude, work efficiency to avoid working overtime, and commitment to family were most involved in childcare and in household chores” (Matsuda et al. 2016, 110). Overall, paternal involvement has increased in Japan: contemporary fatherhood now incorporates child care as a key component.

In her study of *Fathering Japan*, Gidoni-Goldstein (2020) similarly concludes that there is a slow-moving but emerging trend toward fathers who balance work with family responsibilities. She points to persisting obstacles, particularly traditional attitudes at work, despite government attempts to reform work practices (Goldstein-Gidoni 2019). She cautions however, that her study’s interlocutors did not represent the general population because many were unemployed or irregularly employed. Finally, she also highlights the ambivalent attitudes of women toward paternal involvement when they as mothers receive criticism for perceived missteps in parenting, while their husband receive praise for small displays of child care (Goldstein-Gidoni 2020).

Ho and Lam (2018) concur that younger fathers in particular are becoming more involved in their families, pointing to the influence of media representations and grassroots movements.

Like other researchers, they add that egalitarian gender ideology does not automatically entail changes in practice. Additionally, Ho and Lam indicate that mothers act as gatekeepers; women who are uncomfortable with or critical of their husbands' parenting practices may deter fathers' greater involvement in child care.

***Ikumen*: A Problematic Buzzword for Describing Engaged Fathers**

Recently, the word *ikumen*,²⁸ meaning “active fathers,” appears often in studies of Japanese fathers. Ishii-Kuntz notes the term's phonetic similarity to *ikemen* or “handsome men.”²⁹ In contrast to fathering practices in the pre-2000s, when men were embarrassed to be seen caring for children, “*ikumen* conveys a more positive image of fatherhood in which child caring is considered a ‘good-looking’ activity” (Ishii-Kuntz 2019, 177). She notes the government's *Ikumen* Project aimed at promoting paternal involvement and the experiences of *ikumen*, and she points to the publicity gained from the word's nomination as the 2010 Buzz Word of the Year in Japan.

However, the optimism surrounding the term *ikumen* has clashed with the pessimism of mothers, who have failed to see substantial changes in the home in recent years (Goldstein-Gidoni 2019). Gidoni-Goldstein (2019; 2020) cites the Japanese consumer, advertising, and lifestyle research company Hakuhōdō as having coined the term in 2006. She makes the word *ikumen* and the so-called *ikumen* movement advocating paternal involvement her central units of analysis. Nonetheless, she quotes a 2014 lecture by Ando-san—the president of Fathering

²⁸ イクメン (*ikumen*).

²⁹ イケメン (*ikemen*).

Japan—in which he remarks that the term’s trendiness has declined since the word first appeared. Indeed, recent scholarship mentions only in passing the existence of *ikumen* as a concept or as a government initiative (H.-Z. Ho and Lam 2018; Nakazato 2018; North 2012; Taga 2016).

My research project initially set out to document the existence of *ikumen*. However, I quickly discovered that the term is highly problematic—more so than previous scholarship acknowledges. Specifically, the word *ikumen* holds an ambiguous place within the vocabulary of fathers in the parenting movement, and many differing—and at times clashing—opinions surround its use. Many fathers in the parenting organizations who hope to increase the number of *ikumen* in Japan see the term *ikumen* as an inappropriate designation for their own identities and behavior. On the one hand, corporations have marketed to fathers various goods branded *ikumen*, and the term’s buzzword status in public discourse helps attract attention whenever nonprofit organizations strategically deploy the term in event advertisements. On the other hand, many of my male interlocutors strongly reject the label, occasionally launching into a diatribe against men who self-identify as *ikumen*.

Fathers whom I interviewed offered various explanations for their negative reactions to the label *ikumen*. Some suggested that identifying as an *ikumen* is essentially claiming that one is good at child care; in other words, it is bragging about one’s prowess. One interlocutor illustrated this point by comparing claims of being an *ikumen* to proclaiming that one looks cool or handsome: the media frequently promote an image of *ikumen* as young, “hip” men pushing designer baby strollers. Men in other studies have similarly criticized the “caring father” as a trendy category into which society pigeonholes them (Henwood and Procter 2003). Another man in my own study expressed disdain for the characterization of *ikumen* as heroes saving the

country from its low birthrate—referencing the government’s and Fathering Japan’s argument that by splitting unpaid labor with their partners, ikumen lighten the burden on women, who are consequently willing to have more children.³⁰

Other men in my study remarked that taking care of one’s own children is only “natural,” so the very existence of the word *ikumen* signals a problem. For these interlocutors, a special term seems unnecessary to single out a group of people who should not appear unusual, and the men hope to see a day when the word becomes obsolete. *Fake ikumen*³¹ draw particular ire from men in Fathering Japan who see themselves as fathers actively participating in child care. On many occasions, I heard men in the parenting movement criticize fake ikumen—especially those who loudly proclaim their ikumen status—who fail to follow through on their professed *ikuji*,³² or child care. Some individuals even maintained that people should assume that anyone who describes himself as an ikumen is not an ikumen and that only one’s partner can accurately make this assessment.

Notably, not everyone whom I spoke to has a negative view of ikumen, and alternative perspectives on ikumen certainly exist. Participating in Fathering Japan events for the first time, a handful of men identified themselves to me as ikumen; these interlocutors embraced the term because they had not yet encountered the pervasive criticisms of the term that were familiar to members of the nonprofit. Oda Emi-san, the wife of the Fathering Japan member Oda Ken-san, defined *ikumen* as men who take “responsibility” for *kosodate*,³³ or child rearing. She said that,

³⁰ In Japan’s postwar economic recovery, popular discourse also featured “save-the-country” rhetoric in describing the role of the salaryman in Japan’s postwar economic recovery.

³¹ 偽イクメン (nise-ikumen).

³² 育児 (ikuji).

³³ 子育て (kosodate).

in contrast, men who are not ikumen do not share this responsibility. Instead, they see their wives as the responsible parties and themselves as “helpers” when necessary. Because of their more active involvement in kosodate, ikumen share a relationship of trust with their children and an “absolutely better” relationship with their wives than do men who are not ikumen. When asked how ikumen’s spousal relationships are “absolutely better,” Emi-san replied that mutual respect and cooperation characterize these partnerships.

In contrast to the opinions of many others who participate in Fathering Japan and community-based fathering groups (see Chapters 5 and 6), Ando-san had a slightly different opinion of ikumen. While he appeared to hold fake ikumen in low regard and questioned the gap between what they think of themselves and what they actually do, he gave fake ikumen a pass if their partners are convinced that their lack of domestic involvement—presumably due to prioritizing income-earning activities—is for the best.

Additionally, my interview with Ando-san revealed that as the president of Fathering Japan, he believes that the organization should no longer focus on the concept of ikumen. Even if Fathering Japan does not speak to the topic of ikumen, the number of men who match the term’s definition will “naturally” multiply. Recognizing that growing numbers of Japanese women are entering the workplace and seeking to maintain their careers after marriage and childbirth, Ando-san argued that women will increasingly “select” men who are willing to share household responsibilities. As a result, Japanese women’s priorities will pressure young men into shifting their values if they hope to get married and have children. Conversely, those men who are unwilling to embrace a more equal role in the home will gradually disappear.

While Ando-san's theory optimistically promises the inevitable proliferation of egalitarian gender ideology throughout Japan for men's self-interested reasons, this argument relies on many assumptions that require examination. First, Ando-san's reasoning assumed that gender ideology remains consistent across life stages, an assumption that previous research discredits by linking certain (heteronormative) life stages, such as parenthood, with a decrease in levels of egalitarian gender ideology (Deutsch 1999; Kolpashnikova and Koike 2021; Vespa 2009). Second, he assigned gender ideology a privileged position, when, as already mentioned, gender ideology related to the division of labor does not match actual practice. Men's best intentions may run up against nonnegotiable structural and cultural barriers (T. Miller 2011). For this reason, Japanese men's gender ideology has a minimal effect on the amount of housework they perform (Ishii-Kuntz et al. 2004). Third, Ando-san's theory assumes that the heteronormative life path will remain normative, even though Japanese women increasingly are avoiding marriage. Because many young Japanese women view marriage as constraining, this trend may not necessarily reverse even if men adopt a more egalitarian gender ideology (Rich 2019a). Women in Japan have also outpaced men in educational attainment (Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development 2018a), but they expect their prospective partners to have attained higher levels of education than they have, resulting in a discrepancy between supply of and demand for potential husbands (Hasegawa 2019). Additionally, many young men have difficulty meeting the marriage requirement of stable employment in an era of increased precarity (Allison 2013).

Finally, the language used by Ando-san during our conversation echoed the vaguely linear evolutionary scheme according to which Fathering Japan sometimes articulates arguments

about gender equality, even as the nonprofit trumpets an extremely narrow notion of diversity usually restricted to diversity in parenting and work styles. This evolutionary scheme moves from traditional to progressive as exemplified by an imaginary and idealized West, particularly the Nordic countries. Given that Japan's demographic crisis has developed over decades and shows no signs of improving soon, one might view Ando-san's argument and Fathering Japan's efforts as overly optimistic. Japan's conservative tendency to preserve its culture and national identity by promoting superficial policy changes clashes with attempts by the government and nonprofit organizations to move Japanese society toward greater egalitarianism in the workplace and in the home. This ideological conflict appears unresolved. Moreover Japanese society continues to ignore other possible solutions to its falling birthrate, such as making it less stigmatizing to have a nonmarital child or increasing immigration quotas and redefining *Japanese-ness*—the characteristics of Japanese identity. If Japan continues instead to bank on robots' potential to fill labor shortages in some understaffed industries (Hurst 2018; Lee 2019) then perhaps the Japanese people really will go “extinct” in the year 3766, as numerous English-language websites proclaimed sensationally in 2016 (Nagesh 2016; Weller 2016). More certainly, if Japanese women cannot rely on Japanese men for significant assistance with parenting, the population of Japan will dwindle over the coming decades.

Because most of my interlocutors treated with ambivalence the concept of *ikumen*, this dissertation reconceptualizes more broadly what Gidoni-Goldstein (2019) calls the “*ikumen movement*” as Japan's twenty-first-century *parenting movement* focused on changing society by redefining parents' activities and relationships with other parties. Emphasizing parenting rather than the problematic word *ikumen* also expands the scope of my analysis to include other groups

that are under Fathering Japan's influence or several degrees separated from Fathering Japan but that do not specifically focus on fathers. These groups include mothering organizations, local parenting groups, nonprofits that aim to educate college students about parenting, and other assemblies that pursue various missions, including empowering children and addressing the Tokyo area's deficiency of preschools to allow parents greater leeway to work. I see these groups collectively as part of a decentralized network promoting greater egalitarianism in Japanese society.

Nevertheless, this pursuit of gender egalitarianism must contend with what scholars have variously identified as hegemonic masculinity, the hegemonic bloc, and the various alternative masculinities sustaining Japanese patriarchy and its institutions. On the one hand, such seemingly progressive men as *ikumen* perform a wide assortment of behaviors that fail to provide a concerted challenge to the status quo. On the other hand, the press and the Japanese public—both men and women—increasingly express support for greater gender equality, as well as outrage at the sexist remarks often made by politicians and other public figures (Gunia 2021; The Guardian 2021). At the very least, the public's attention to systemic sexism indicates that people are aware and willing to speak up about what, twenty years ago, would have remained unacknowledged and unvoiced.

Section 4: Gender (In)equality and Women's "Place" in Japan

The Persistence of Systemic Gender Inequality

My research on Japan's parenting movement took place in the context of many shifting sociopolitical contexts. One of the most significant of these developments is the gradual educational and workplace gains made by Japanese women despite systemic inequality and pervasive cultural expectations that still privilege men over women. However, overattention to these gains runs the risk of obscuring persistent inequalities, such as the high proportion of working women who have only part-time or low-paying jobs.

Japanese women have long exceeded Japanese men in tertiary educational attainment. In 2008, 59 percent of women completed a tertiary degree compared to 52 percent of men; in 2018, these numbers rose to 62 percent and 59 percent respectively (Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development 2019a). However, they are underrepresented in the higher levels of tertiary education. Although Japanese women constituted almost two-thirds of students beginning short-term tertiary programs in 2017, they composed just 45 percent of first-year undergraduates and less than one-third of graduating doctoral students (Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development 2019a).

Moreover, the economic returns for women with a postsecondary degree remain 13 times lower than for similarly educated men (Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development 2018b), and the educational levels of married Japanese women, both with and without children, have no bearing on their housework participation (Kolpashnikova and Koike

2021). In 2016, Japanese women at all levels of educational attainment who had at least one child under age six spent 454 minutes per day on domestic labor, 225 minutes of which were devoted exclusively to child care; Japanese men with a child or children under age six performed 83 minutes of domestic labor per day, 49 minutes of which were child care (Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office 2019).

Aware of this disparity, Japanese women have expressed in surveys and media reports their dissatisfaction with the relatively small amount of housework performed by their husbands. In the twenty-first century, this workload discrepancy has become a common point of conflict in dual-income Japanese households (Kobayashi et al. 2016; Tsuya et al. 2005). However, gender discrepancies in time-use must be contextualized within Japanese gender ideology concerning roles in the household. Qian and Sayer (2016) found that the household division of labor does not correlate directly with Japanese women's levels of marriage satisfaction because Japanese women normalize their disproportionate share of housework; they are aware that their duty to fulfill societal expectations for women's household labor is part of the "marriage package." Additionally, the gap between cultural expectations and practice plays a major role in women's level of satisfaction with their husbands' domestic labor (Qian and Sayer 2016). At first glance, it may appear paradoxical that Saga Prefecture in Kyushu—home to stereotypically conservative, macho men (see Chapter 2)—should sit at the top of the national ikumen rankings conducted by the major home manufacturer Sekisui House and that two other prefectures in Kyushu follow Saga Prefecture on this list. However, the low expectations of Kyushu men and women about paternal involvement are precisely the reason why minimal amounts of child care by fathers automatically qualify Kyushu men for ikumen status (Fujimoto 2020).

Despite the amount of domestic labor they shoulder, growing numbers of Japanese women are choosing to advance their careers for reasons that include both financial need and personal fulfillment. The following table illustrates changes in Japanese women’s employment between 2005 and 2018, using figures from Statistics Bureau Japan (2020):

Table 1.1 Labor Force Participation Rate in Japan by Gender and Age

	Women's Labor Force Participation Rate (Percentage)			Men's Labor Force Participation Rate (Percentage)	
	2005	2018		2005	2018
15-24 (Years Old)	45.0	48.3	15-24 (Years Old)	44.4	47.1
25-34	68.3	80.2	25-34	95.1	95.1
35-44	66.7	77.4	35-44	97.0	96.3
45-54	71.2	79.3	45-54	96.1	95.5
55-64	50.8	65.7	55-64	83.0	88.5
65+	12.7	17.6	65+	29.4	33.9

As these statistics show, more women remain in workforce after marriage and childbirth. The greatest gains in Japanese women’s employment have occurred among women in the two groups spanning the ages of 25 to 44. Married women in these age groups normatively become mothers during this life stage, and they are actively involved in raising children while working. The continued employment of women in the 35 to 44 age category contrasts sharply with the status of Japanese women a generation ago, when young unmarried women were known as “office flowers,” or “decorations” who performed menial tasks, such as serving tea and making copies of documents (Creighton 1996; Ogasawara 1998). Japanese society expected women to marry and then to retire after giving birth, effectively ensuring that a new batch of freshly cut “office flowers” would replace the old ones. Most women leave the workplace at least

temporarily: in 2017, 83.2 percent of women took maternity leave, as opposed to 5.14 percent of men who took paternity leave (Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office 2019). Shockingly, these low figures for men belie the fact that Japanese law allows both men and women a generous 12 months of parental leave (Rich 2019b; Siripala 2020). However, parents only receive two-thirds of their base salary for the first six months, which is then reduced to half of their base salary for the remaining six months (Turner 2017). Such statistics support my interlocutors' claim that contemporary society still frowns on fathers' involvement with infants if it comes at the expense of their paid work, despite the fact that almost one-third of the men surveyed by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (2018) support the development of a system for encouraging fathers to take parental leave.

Despite the increase in women's participation in the labor force, female Japanese employees remain concentrated disproportionately in low-paying jobs. Further, the percentage of working women who have full-time jobs compared to the percentage of those with part-time jobs has declined over the last few decades. In 2018, 43.9 percent of female employees were employed full-time, while 44.2 percent of working women filled part-time positions that allow them more flexibility if they become mothers. In contrast, in 1985, 67.9 percent of Japanese working women had full-time positions, and just 28.5 percent were part-timers (Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office 2019). In short, the proportion of working women in regular employment has decreased since the 1980s. As for Japanese working men, 77.8 percent of male employees worked full-time in 2018, and only 11.5 percent worked part-time. In 1985, an even more astonishing 92.6 percent of Japanese working men were employed full-time, while only 3.3 percent of working men were employed part-time (Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office

2019). Clearly, there has been a shift to greater levels of part-time and other forms of nonstandard employment among working men, but most working men aspire to regular employment that will help them fulfill the role of the primary provider.

Finally, Japanese working women continue to face unequal treatment in the workplace, including a gender wage gap. In 2019, Japanese women earned 23.5 percent less than Japanese men, an amount representing the greatest gender pay gap except for that of Korea out of the 37 OECD countries surveyed (Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development 2019b). Additionally, men are much more likely to receive promotions to positions of authority in the Japanese workplace, while women are passed over for management positions when they inevitably find it difficult to strike a balance between demanding family responsibilities and upward career mobility (Nemoto 2016; Yuasa 2005). In 2017, women held just 10.9 percent of director positions and 18.4 percent of section chief positions in private industry. The situation is similar in the national civil service, where 4.9 percent of directors and 25 percent of section chiefs are women (Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office 2019).

While such statistics illustrate the continued existence of structural inequalities privileging men over women in Japan, they also demonstrate contemporary women's growing challenge to the previous ideal of the *senkyō shufu*, or professional housewife, which epitomized Japan's *emphasized femininity*. According to Currier (2013), *emphasized femininity* is a reaction to hegemonic masculinity that is "emphasized" rather than "hegemonic" because femininities by definition can never be hegemonic, or dominating. More specifically, Connell defines *emphasized femininity* in this way:

The pattern of femininity which is given most cultural and ideological support at present . . . [includes] the display of sociability rather than technical competence, fragility in mating scenes, compliance with men's desire for titillation and ego-stroking in office relationships, acceptance of marriage and childcare as a response to labour-market discrimination against women. . . . Like hegemonic masculinity, emphasized femininity as a cultural construction is very public, though its content is specifically linked with the private realm of the home and the bedroom. (Connell 1987, 24).

As Japanese femininities branch out to incorporate work as a component of their performance, Japanese masculinities shift too. As Kimmel writes, "definitions of masculinity are historically reactive to changing definitions of femininity" (1987, 14). However, the purpose of this study is not to examine whether femininity or masculinity is the prime mover of recent fluctuations in Japan's gender landscape; instead, this study understands that gender constructs influence one another, and they influence the ways in which individuals raise children.

The Japanese Government's Flawed Push for Women's Participation in the Labor Force

Attempts to address gender inequality in Japan have a checkered history and are often motivated by international attention to women's issues, such as the United Nations Decade for Women (1975–1985), or by such economic considerations as maintaining the size of the workforce. The Japanese government passed an ineffectual Equal Employment Opportunity Law in 1985, creating a two-track system that enabled women to opt either for a career or for the traditional role of "office flower" temporarily decorating the workplace (Creighton 1996; L. N.

Edwards 1988). Societal pressure on mothers prevented many women from taking full advantage of this law; Japanese society still expects women to perform most housework and child care tasks (Borovoy 2005; Kato, Kumamaru, and Fukuda 2018; Shirahase 2007) and to act as primary caregivers in their families (Allison 1994; Goodman 2002; Tokuhiko 2009), making it nearly impossible for them to pursue a career at the same time. Japanese women therefore continue to struggle with a “double shift”: they work part- or full-time outside the home because most families require two incomes to maintain quality of life (Hochschild and Machung 1989; Poole 2016),

Another obstacle to women’s participation in the labor force is the excessive number of work hours demanded of full-time employees by corporate culture. As explained above, women (mothers) therefore tend to gravitate toward positions that allow them some flexibility and a way to balance their work lives with their families’ needs. This preference leads to a discrepancy in men’s and women’s working hours, as indicated in the following table taken from the OECD Family Database (2019c):

Table 1.2 Japanese Adult Employees' Paid Working Hours Per Week in 2017
According to Gender

	1-19 Hours/Week	20-29 Hours/Week	30-34 Hours/Week	35-39 Hours/Week	40 Hours or More/Week
Percentage of Males	3.8	7.6	5.9	6.2	75.6
Percentage of Females	11.4	25.0	10.0	9.6	43.1

More recently, among employed men between the ages of 35 to 44—an age range during which child raising is perhaps the most intense—employed men worked an average of 199.2 hours per month during July 2019, while women in the same category worked 142.9 hours per month (e-Stat 2019). Tellingly, men do not face a choice between work and home: employers and society assume that men will pursue their careers even if these careers come into conflict with other areas of life.

All these factors effectively force women to choose between having a career and having a family (Creighton 1996), pushing women out of the workforce until their children are old enough to enter elementary school (Nishimura 2016) or until the children are older than the age of three (Osawa 2010; Shirahase 2003). This last practice reflects entrenched Japanese beliefs regarding the mother's central, irreplaceable role in the development of children (Borovoy 2005). As a result, women also tend to choose jobs that are geographically close to home, allowing them to

return home early in the workday (Tsuya et al. 2005): Japanese women spend an average of 33 minutes per day commuting to their workplace in contrast to the 54 minutes per day spent by men (Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development 2021).

Nevertheless, in recent years, the Japanese government initiated attempts to encourage more women to work. Under “Abenomics,” an economic plan launched in 2012 and associated with former Prime Minister Abe as a solution to Japan’s economic woes, a set of policies called Womenomics promoted women’s participation in the labor force and aimed to create a “Japan in which women can shine” (C. Tanaka 2019). However, the policies failed to recognize that “shining” is not the same thing as gender equality. Womenomics has not only exemplified and highlighted male policymakers’ again determining women’s best interests, but it has also revealed Japan’s lack of day-care services and society’s entrenched beliefs about appropriate gender roles (Dalton 2017).

The Japanese government has shifted its stance on working women partly in response to the declining size of the labor force and the subsequent decrease in tax revenue. Despite the government’s recent focus on making paid work more appealing to women, those women who choose to have children while pursuing a career may still face *matahara* (maternity harassment),³⁴ or workplace discrimination against pregnant women by coworkers and peers (Castro-Vázquez 2017; D. Demetriou 2018).

Moreover, Japanese women’s stances toward employment are not always positive or unmediated. Married women who worked outside the home were once primarily motivated by economic necessity (N. Ogawa and Ermisch 1994). Even today, many unmarried Japanese

³⁴ マタハラ (matahara).

women have expressed a desire to become professional housewives (Cook 2017), though this position of *sengyō shufu* is now considered a luxury due to the difficulty families face in achieving financial stability on a single income. On the other hand, mothers can find the experience of raising a child on their own extremely alienating, especially if the women have moved to a new location for their husbands' jobs and find themselves without their social support networks (Jolivet 1997). Finally, Japanese women who pursue careers and promotions may lack female role models and must work to construct identities that provide meaning to their struggles (S. L. Ho 2018), and they must further strive to position themselves socially vis-à-vis their male colleagues and subordinates, who may not always appreciate women's authority (Inoue 2006).

Section 5: Defining *Gender Ideology*

Use of the Term *Gender Ideology* in This Dissertation

Researchers studying different cultures across the world use various terms to describe individuals' stances toward the division of labor in the household and to designate the relative allocation of time to work and to the home by each partner in a heterosexual couple. These terms include *gender attitudes*, *gender roles*, and *gender egalitarianism* (S. N. Davis and Greenstein 2009). However, this dissertation will primarily use the term *gender ideology* to refer to the totality of values, beliefs, and assumptions concerning men and women's similarities and differences. In the context of Japan, this definition includes any support—or lack thereof—for the breakdown of the complementary incompetence that during Japan's postwar period found its apotheosis in the salaryman (primary income earner) and full-time housewife (homemaker) dyad.

In contrast to the term *gender ideology*, *gender egalitarianism* is a less holistic and less neutral term because it is already weighted towards the belief that men and women should be equal. The phrase *gender attitudes* also carries narrower and more individualized connotations than does *gender ideology*, which points to philosophies and notions that can manifest at the individual, group, and society level. Additionally, an ideology, as opposed to attitudes, is intrinsic to social, political, and economic structures. Finally, gender ideology can subsume views on *gender roles* (Lorenzini and Bassoli 2015), but by itself the concept of gender roles proves problematic because it “falsely reifies certain social ideologies into concrete realities or objective templates” (Jackson 1998, 51).

The word *ideology* incorporates more comprehensively the normative values, systems of belief, and unconscious assumptions flowing through and between the individual and multiple levels of society. Certainly, the word *ideology* is not without its problems, such as the concept's historical connection to Marxism's false consciousness and a potentially ambiguous connection between patterns of thought and actual practice. However, the phrase *gender ideology* allows me to describe more comprehensively the gender-related worldviews of my study's interlocutors.

Long-Term and Short-Term Changes in Japanese Gender Ideology

Multiple theories help to account for widespread changes in Japanese gender ideologies—particularly in the last decade—since the postwar society preceding and immediately following the collapse of Japan's economic bubble in 1991. Given that my interlocutors often cited generational differences as a major factor accounting for varying gender ideologies among the Japanese populace, the cohort effect in Japan may prove similar to the one that scholars have documented in other OECD Countries. Namely, the research finding that younger generations, possessed of more liberal views than previous generations as a result of “fresh contact” with their cultural heritage during changing sociohistorical circumstances, will eventually replace more traditionally minded cohorts (Brewster and Padavic 2000; Brooks and Bolzendahl 2004; Mannheim 1970). While cohort replacement theory may help to account for how gender ideology changes over many decades, a much shorter period requires different theoretical explanations for changes taking place at the individual level. The two primary arguments offered by feminist scholars for progressive changes in gender ideology within a

cohort are *interest-based explanations* and *exposure-based explanations* (Bolzendahl and Myers 2004).

Interest-based explanations suggest that individuals are more likely to adopt a gender ideology when it is in the best interest of their specific circumstances. For example, numerous studies have shown that women display greater support for gender equality than men because they would more directly benefit from greater equality in the distribution of household labor and income (N. J. Davis and Robinson 1991; Kane 1998; Kulik 2004; Nordenmark 2004). However, interest-based explanations operate for men in situations in which they would benefit indirectly from the financial effect on their spouses' work lives of greater gender equality (Carrim 2017; Ericksen, Yancey, and Ericksen 1979; Huber and Spitze 1981).

Exposure-based explanations argue that individuals shift their gender ideology when they come into contact with new values and situations. For example, according to many scholars, individuals' levels of education greatly contribute to gender ideology. Given the importance of parents to children's socialization, it is unsurprising that working mothers with higher levels of education influence children's gender ideology in the direction of egalitarianism (S. N. Davis 2007; Fan and Marini 2000). Similarly, numerous studies have documented that higher levels of men and women's education are associated with gender ideologies allowing for increases in men's housework and corresponding decreases in women's housework (Bergen 1991; Berardo, Shehan, and Leslie 1987; Carriero and Todesco 2018). One exception to this trend is Japan, where the educational attainment of married women has no effect on their housework participation levels (Kolpashnikova and Koike 2021).

Although researchers often treat interest-based explanations and exposure-based explanations separately for analytical purposes, interest-based influences and exposure-based influences tend to operate simultaneously on individuals to produce shifts in gender ideology. In the case of participants in Japan's parenting movement, a conjunction of personal circumstances (such as the need for dual-income households and the desire for stronger interpersonal family relationships) and contact with egalitarian gender ideology push individuals to revise their stance regarding the gendered division of labor and the perceived fundamental differences between men and women. In many cases, Japanese fathers of young children encounter egalitarian gender ideology from outreach efforts by nonprofit organizations focused on parenting and from fellow fathers who find self-satisfaction in parenting.

Section 6: Nonprofit Organizations in Japan

Nonprofit Organizations and Volunteers in Japan

The term *NPO* is broadly used in the Japanese language to refer to not-for-profit organizations that do not aim to generate profits for their stakeholders, who include donors, board members, and even the people involved in nonprofit operations. In its narrowest sense, *NPO* indicates Specified Nonprofit Corporations,³⁵ or incorporated nonprofit organizations, under the 1998 Law to Promote Specified Nonprofit Activities. However, in common parlance, the abbreviation *NPO* refers both to organizations incorporated as legal entities and to those without formal institutional status. This dissertation uses the word *nonprofit* primarily in the former sense because most of the nonprofit organizations with which I worked are Specified Nonprofit Corporations.

Nonprofit organizations may be run by both paid staff and unpaid volunteers. However, the English loan word *borantia*,³⁶ or “volunteer,” carries different nuances in Japanese than in English. In Japanese, volunteering generally refers to nonobligatory contributions to society. However, many Japanese people still associate the term with disaster relief or with religious organizations, such as with Christian groups that distribute food to the needy; this meaning appears to be expanding, particularly among the younger generations and people active in the third sector. Because *borantia* is a relatively recent addition to the Japanese lexicon, many individuals participating in volunteer endeavors do not realize that their activities could be

³⁵ 特定非営利活動法人 (tokutei hieiri katsudō hōjin).

³⁶ ボランティア (borantia).

considered volunteering (Okada et al. 2017) in both the English and, increasingly, the Japanese senses of the word.

Volunteers are an important asset for nonprofit organizations. Significantly, nonprofit members' motivations and shared identity as volunteers greatly affects volunteer retention and the success of the organization that gave birth to it (Vantilborgh and Van Puyvelde 2018; Garner and Garner 2011). However, the leaders of nonprofit organizations face constant volunteer-related challenges, such as the recruitment and mobilization of willing individuals and the identification of best places or projects to use volunteer labor for the greatest gains (Nesbit, Christensen, and Brudney 2018).

The Beginning of Volunteerism in Japan

Imada (2003) estimates that volunteering and citizens' movements began in Japan around the late 1980s, mostly related to issues of the environment, international cooperation, care work, and community development. Nonprofit activities and volunteer work received a boost from the concept of corporate citizenship, a concept that Japanese company leaders imported from the United States in hopes of emulating what they perceived as America's strength: its civil society. For example, the One Percent Club consisted of companies that devoted 1 percent of their earnings and of individuals who donated 1 percent of their discretionary income or time to the betterment of society (Imada 2003).

Yet Japanese volunteerism did not come into its own until the Great Hanshin earthquake of January 1995 (Okada et al. 2017), also known as the Kobe earthquake, which saw more than one million individuals travel to the disaster-affected areas. Volunteers flocked to the disaster-

struck areas to aid in feeding, housing, and providing for the psychological well-being of victims. The nonprofit response was far from perfect, but the Japanese media's presentation and the public's reception of nonprofit work were highly positive. In stark contrast, the Japanese government received criticism for its slow reaction and general lack of organization (Nakamura 2009). Specific critiques included a delay in the deployment of Self-Defense Force assistance, the absence of any attempt to combat the fires that sprang up in the earthquake's aftermath, the lack of a system for distributing supplies to residents, and the local government's inability to coordinate the more than 14,000 registered volunteers (Deguchi 2001).

However, despite the Japanese nonprofit sector's startling adaptability in the absence of government guidance, grassroots organizations ultimately confronted legal barriers that they could not easily overcome. First, the absence of an institutionalized system for Japanese nonprofits to raise donations effectively, including such provisions as a tax-exemption system, meant that organizations had difficulty raising additional money once emergency funds were depleted (Imada 2003). Second, excessive bureaucracy meant that donations to certain nonprofits made their way into government coffers, so dispersals to victims were inefficient. For example, local governments required individuals to hold a city-issued certificate of earthquake damage before receiving financial aid; acquiring this certificate involved lining up in front of city hall for hours in the cold February weather (Deguchi 2001). Even six months after the Great Hanshin earthquake, more than 170 billion yen in donations remained in an aggregated fund instead of distributed or spent to bring relief to victims.

Recognizing these shortcomings, the public and the government increasingly supported the creation of a legal framework under which Japanese nonprofit organizations could operate.

Several scandals involving nonprofits also made a case for greater government oversight of nonprofits. These scandals included bribery, fraud (Deguchi 2001), and, most notoriously, the 1995 Tokyo subway sarin gas attacks by the cult Aum Shinrikyō, which was registered as a religious organization (Hanada 2013).

After incremental steps toward strengthening government oversight of nonprofit activities and patching over legal gaps, such as the lack of pathways to incorporation for certain categories of nonprofit organizations, the Japanese government finally enacted in 1998 the Law to Promote Specified Nonprofit Activities (Deguchi 2001). The law outlined 12 different categories of nonprofit organization; every nonprofit must fit into one of the specified categories in order to qualify for incorporation, with the prefectural government in which the prospective nonprofit is based serving as the arbiter of whether the organization's activities fit a category's criteria. The Law to Promote Specified Nonprofit Activities remains in effect today.

The Current State of Nonprofits in Japan

Some older research on Japanese nonprofit organizations portrays the third sector or civil society in Japan as powerless based on the assumption that Japanese civil society must fulfill the same role as Western ones (Ando 2014). In the mid-twentieth century, Uchida (1953) claimed that Japanese civil society was “immature,” while Ogawa (2010) suggests that the nonprofit associations that constitute part of civil society are “quasi-government[al]” institutions that possess only a weak potential for political advocacy and that have failed to contribute to democracy in Japan. Pekkanen (2006) characterizes Japanese civil society as lacking a “professional advocacy community” that can challenge government policy (159). Knight (1996)

maintains that Japan has failed to achieve a civil society at the national level, and Serrano concurs that “civil society is a concept alien to Asia. It refers to the self-organization of citizens in contrast to the state or government, and is rooted in the Western tradition and political culture” (1994, 271). This point holds if one views civil society as independent of—and, as many writers suggest, opposed to—the government.

In contrast to these arguments, Osborne’s work (2003) points out that a historical tradition of volunteering originated in Buddhist and Confucian notions of local community. Other studies on the third sector have found that Japanese nonprofit organizations have a much greater potential for introducing change than was previously theorized, particularly when nonprofits effectively cooperate with corporations and local governments to address issues of mutual concern (Okada et al. 2017). Ando (2014) argues that the scholarly focus on whether Japanese civil society is strong or weak is based on ambiguously defined notions of strength and weakness, ignoring crucial questions about what distinguishes Japan’s civil society from civil societies in other countries. However, most researchers still agree that nonprofit organizations are somewhat limited in their ability to adopt radical stances, largely because Japan’s third sector shares a much closer relationship with the government than is common in Western societies. Drawing upon Deguchi’s (2001) account of the Great Hanshin earthquake’s changes to Japanese policy, Osborne writes the following:

The implication of this for the voluntary principle in Japan is that it is very hard to conceive of voluntary action in independence of, or indeed in counter-position to, the

state. Rather, it is dependent upon the state for its legitimacy. This gives local government a key role as the legitimator and regulator of non-profit activity. (Osborne 2003, 27)

Increasingly, the Japanese government is conferring this legitimacy on more and more nonprofit organizations. The number of Specified Nonprofit Corporations in Japan has risen dramatically over the past two decades, from less than 10,000 in the early 2000s to now more than 50,000 nonprofits (Ito and Pilot 2015). City, prefectural, and national governments have also made attempts to better coordinate with nonprofit organizations—with much room for improvement (Hanada 2013; Sakamoto 2012). Specifically, governments hope to work with nonprofit organizations in so-called partnerships that are in practice a means of outsourcing public services in order to reduce costs (Okuyama, Ishida, and Yamauchi 2010). However, in some cases, governments look to nonprofits to use their passion and flexibility to develop ideas and solutions to social problems. This is the opportunity space in which Fathering Japan operates, a point that I pick up in the next chapter.

Chapter 2: Japanese Nonprofit Organizations' Efforts to “Raise Smiling Fathers”

Section 1: Introducing Fathering Japan

The 2017 Fathering National Forum in Oita

In a large, open hall featuring a banner announcing the Fathering National Forum in Oita,³⁷ well over 100 people, including me, sit in folding chairs facing a wooden stage. Approximately 80 percent of this audience consists of men, the majority sporting white or light-blue dress shirts. Joined by journalists who wield an arsenal of large cameras and who line up against the back wall, we watch as Ando Tetsuya-san, the president of Fathering Japan and a “smiling father,” shakes hands with Hirose Katsusada-san, the *chiji*,³⁸ or prefectural governor of Oita.³⁹ Ando-san offers an opening greeting for this gathering, the seventh of Fathering Japan’s national forums, which the nonprofit organization holds every year at a different location in Japan in an effort to fulfill the nonprofit’s mission to “increase the number of smiling fathers” who enjoy active engagement with their children. He is followed by the *chiji*, who promotes Oita as Japan’s *onsen*⁴⁰ (hot spring) prefecture. In truth, the *chiji* scarcely needs to mention this fact because many audience members—including myself—have already availed themselves of the facilities in nearby Beppu city.

With the practice of an experienced politician, Hirose-san continues his welcome, maintaining a constant smile for the assembled media and audience. He explains that he had

³⁷ ファザーリング全国フォーラムinおおいた (Fazāringu Zenkoku Fōramu in Oita).

³⁸ 知事 (*chiji*).

³⁹ Oita is the name of both a city and its prefecture on the island of Kyushu.

⁴⁰ 温泉 (*onsen*).

sought the advice of Ando-san regarding Oita's low birthrate and aging population—issues besetting the entire country of Japan. After the chiji finishes his speech, the master of ceremonies for the opening ceremony calls nine important individuals to the stage, one by one. These include the prefectural governor, the Oita city mayor, and the chairpersons of various committees, including the head of the prefecture's Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Each of the nine is a middle-aged or older man.

These city leaders read aloud from a prepared statement, pledging to actively create workplace environments that are conducive to their subordinates' ability to simultaneously pursue fulfilling work and family lives. In addition, they swear to practice work-life balance personally, to familiarize themselves with the charms and rich natural beauty of their onsen prefecture, and to enjoy life with their families and communities. Soon after, concurrent breakout sessions for registered attendees cover such topics as when and how fathers should become involved in their children's sex education; how companies can encourage male employees to take paternity leave; the relationships among public services, taxes, and child care; and a two-part event that includes both a roundtable discussion on the changing shape of the family and a picture-book storytelling session. Sponsored by the Oita Papa Club, the storytelling session clearly targets fathers who have brought young children with them to the Fathering National Forum.

The most memorable session that I attend during the two-day national forum is organized by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare. Notable for its disconnect with the audience's lived experience, this session contains material that underscores why organizations like Fathering Japan are better suited to public outreach on issues of parenting than is the Japanese government.

During the session, the audience watches a series of videos produced by the government's Ikumen Project.⁴¹ The video alternates between the stories of two salarymen, the clips interspersed with commentary from an expert. However, the two drama-like stories prompt the greatest response from the audience.

In the first video scenario, the protagonist struggles with a catch-22 situation: he is ridiculed by his coworkers and boss when he leaves work early because his family needs him, but he is criticized by his wife when he remains at work because his coworkers are counting on him.



Illustration 2.1 Scene from the Ikumen Project video depicting a coworker commenting on how the protagonist is “lucky” that he can have an early dinner after putting his sick child to bed.

⁴¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GLACghpyuU0>.

After a time-skip, the protagonist sits across the conference table from his boss, who publicly humiliated earlier him for a lackluster work ethic. The boss asks, “You want to take child-care leave? . . . Okay. Rather, please take it.” “Eh?” replies the protagonist as well as the video’s audience. Apparently, expecting to become a grandfather in the very near future, the boss-man magically has come to the conclusion that paternity leave benefits both the company and the worker, so he asks the protagonist to be the employee to set company precedent, making it easier for successive fathers to take *ikukyū*⁴² or child-care leave. Boss-man even apologizes for his previous behavior.



Illustration 2.2 Scene in which the protagonist appears flabbergasted when his boss asks him to take child-care leave.

⁴² 育休 (*ikukyū*).

The boss announces to the workgroup that the protagonist will take ikukyū; the video shows the encouraging responses of the protagonist’s coworkers, who include young female workers. These same women were present during the first part of the story, but they had no speaking parts and only lingered at the edges of the video. The inclusion of these literally and metaphorically marginalized female workers in the second half of the first scenario implicitly equates a family-friendly, nontoxic workplace with the presence of women. The workgroup’s sudden show of solidarity is disconcerting, especially the supportive words of a coworker who had previously mocked the protagonist within earshot as a “househusband.” During the final scenes, the protagonist returns after a year’s absence to applause. The protagonist and his family are shown to be living a happy existence: they play and go on walks with their child, he makes fried rice, she hangs up his work shirts.⁴³



Illustration 2.3 Scene from the first video’s conclusion portraying the protagonist now leading a happy life with his family.

⁴³ These roles remain quite gendered.

In the storyline of the second video, designed to contrast with the first, a workgroup immediately decides to divide work in such a way that their colleague can return home early to his newborn child, despite an important upcoming presentation for a contract bid. The proposition to support the protagonist's *ikuji*⁴⁴ or child care comes from a young female employee, once again linking women with family-friendly workplace policies. Upon hearing her reasoning, the workgroup's boss readily agrees, and all of the coworkers offer their assistance while smiling kindly.



Illustration 2.4 In the second Ikumen Project video, the workgroup agrees to cooperate with each other so that the protagonist can go home early to his family.

Miraculously, the protagonist manages to win the contract, demonstrating to viewers that one can simultaneously be a successful worker and an involved father—one who feeds his

⁴⁴ 育児 (*ikuji*).

children yogurt, does the dishes, and receives a “thank you for everything that you do” from his wife. The ending scene features the coworkers gathered around the father, who is proudly showing off pictures of his child.



Illustration 2.5 The protagonist in the second video shows pictures of his child to his coworkers.

Both videos produce snickers, chuckles, snorts, and “like that would ever happen” smiles from the mixed-gender audience, though everyone still politely claps at the end. Following up on these reactions, after the session ends I inquire as to people’s thoughts, and a group of men whom I query have no hesitation in ganging up on the video with such criticisms as “overexaggerated” and “hard to swallow.”

The rhetorical questions aired at the beginning of the video indicate that the video’s target audience is the ordinary salaryman: “What is your work style? Are you balancing both work and

home life?” However, while these questions suggest the possibility of embracing a more fulfilling lifestyle, the actual content of the skits is disempowering and counterproductive to this proposition. Namely, whether satisfied or unsatisfied, the protagonists can do nothing about their individual circumstances. Their happiness and success is contingent upon the understanding of their boss, coworkers, and in the first scenario, wife. The recognition of people’s interdependence is culturally Japanese; nevertheless, the videos do not encourage people to push for the kind of change that the government-authored video clearly wants and portrays as desirable; they must wait for change to happen. Perhaps the pseudo-drama would be more effective if it not only cut down on the sentimentalism, which led attendees at National Forum to immediately discount the video, but were also retooled for an audience of company management, emphasizing the implicit message of the second video that competent people will be competent regardless of how briefly they work on a contract bid—although this message is also problematic.

Ultimately, the video itself as well as the audience’s responses give the impression that government initiatives designed to address family and work-related social issues are completely out of touch with reality. During all the presentations that I attended during my year of fieldwork, audiences are extremely respectful of the speakers and their material. This session alone stands out as the recipient of barely contained scorn and ridicule. Perhaps this is why the government turns to such organizations as Fathering Japan for their familiarity with the mindset of parents. Certainly, the Ikumen Project, which authored the video, does not appear to be engaged in life-changing outreach efforts. After the session ends, I speak with the Project’s representatives, who reveal their involvement in the annual Ikumen Company Awards, as well as in creating movies and leaflets—but nothing that I can connect directly to concrete societal change.

Fathering Japan's Extensive Influence in the National Parenting Movement

Despite its small size of 500 members, Fathering Japan is the most influential organization in Japan's current parenting movement that promotes engaged fatherhood. Fathering Japan's visibility is immense. It has several Twitter accounts with various levels of activity, from the near-daily tweets and retweets of Fathering Japan Kyushu, to the more monthly tweets of the Fathering Japan account, to an inactive, older account for the Fathering Japan main office.⁴⁵ Additionally, numerous Fathering Japan Facebook groups address specific issues of concern to members, such as a group formed for parents of children with disabilities; the nonprofit makes weekly appearances in news media articles; and high-profile members regularly appear on television segments and radio shows.

Notably, the nonprofit's revenue is immense for its size; it has an annual income of approximately 290,000 to 500,000 USD (Fathering Japan 2016a; 2017a; 2018a; 2019b; 2020a). Moreover, each year the nonprofit reports assets valued between 104,000 to 239,000 USD (Fathering Japan 2016b; 2017b; 2018b; 2019c; 2020b). Compare these numbers to one of Fathering Japan's affiliated organizations, Kojikara Nippon, which in 2017 earned approximately 19,000 USD while possessing 95,000 USD in assets (Kojikara Nippon 2018). Even Florence, another highly active nonprofit that is invited to speak at many of the same events as Fathering Japan—and that aims to create a society in which parents regularly hug their children—only pulled an annual income of approximately 37,000 USD in 2019 (Florence 2020).

Marshalling all these resources and information outlets, Fathering Japan's efforts are some of the most effective and concerted attempts to address a convoluted complex of problems

⁴⁵ Admittedly, none of these accounts tends to generate large numbers of likes and retweets on Twitter. The President of Fathering Japan's account has the most followers: 5,620 as of August 16, 2021.

that not only are the subject of much political and popular debate, but that also carry concrete demographic consequences. For these reasons, although I interacted with other nonprofit organizations during my fieldwork in 2016 and 2017, I decided ultimately to spend most of my limited time with Fathering Japan. Other nonprofits with similar purposes had narrower portfolios, less frequent activity, less extensive networks, and lesser influence.

During my participation in activities sponsored by Fathering Japan, I found the nonprofit to be a warm, welcoming organization in which members made well-intentioned and genuine attempts to correct what they identified as problems in Japanese society related not only to fathers but to the entire Japanese nuclear family. While my first contact with Fathering Japan members took place in a highly atypical setting for the nonprofit, it gave me a glimpse into how fathers in the organization have taken to heart the importance of bonding with their children. My introduction to the nonprofit's activities occurred in early September 2016 at an overnight camp, where fathers focused almost entirely on their children. The following is an excerpt from my fieldnotes on this overnight camp:

In the countryside dotted with forests and rivers, in a villa with a view of Mount Fuji, a group of nine fathers—all long-standing members of Fathering Japan—gather over the weekend with their approximately 14 children for the annual Fathering Japan Tour.⁴⁶ Despite being called a tour, the only sightseeing outside the immediate area occurs on the car ride back to Tokyo. In effect, the trip amounts to a two-day retreat replete with a variety of activities. The men seem to strike a balance between engaging their sons and daughters via hiking and board and smartphone

⁴⁶ FJツアー (FJ Tsuā).

games, and allowing the children to play amongst themselves. While the children busy themselves, the fathers join forces to cook meals. Two women—the wives of two of the fathers—are also present, watching over the children in a capacity not fundamentally different from that of the fathers.

At night on the first evening, everyone gathers outside to set off fireworks—summer has just ended. The children crouch on the ground as they play with sparklers, placing the fizzled-out sticks in a bucket of water. The fathers take charge of the larger fireworks, which emit explosions of light and sound as they erupt skyward, causing people to dart back instinctively. As one tube releases an incredible amount of smoke, the unabashed Yamada-san takes the opportunity to run and jump over the firework mid-launch. As he reaches the other side, he holds his rear as if scalded. Turning to the group of giggling boys and girls, he smiles and remarks, “Don’t copy me.” The stunt is consistent with what I came to expect of Yamada-san, who alternates between moments of extreme levity and more serious displays of incredible thoughtfulness on topics ranging from the discipline of anthropology, to music, to classic Western literature. Nevertheless, his stunt is an unusually masculine performance—flirting with risk for a laugh—during a two-day retreat where I witness men display their nurturing side.

At an organization that typically hosts such events as workshops, seminars, and discussion panels, the Fathering Japan Tour gives me a rare opportunity to observe fathers showing off their parenting skills. Distinct from men’s accounts of their relationships with their own fathers—marked by physical and psychological distance from what they saw as a scary, distant father figure—the two days that I spend on the Fathering Japan Tour make it eminently clear that these children are comfortable around their fathers, and vice versa. At times men hold

or carry around children, at times they merely watch over the children's activities, only interjecting encouragement or caution—such as when a father warns his intrigued sons not to touch a centipede that we encounter while strolling through the forest. I take many notes on minor but telling parent-child interactions: a boy toddling up to his obliging father and demanding, “carry me;” a dad calling out “nice ball!” to his daughter as she hits it with a racket; a boy wandering into the kitchen, smiling at his dad, and receiving an affectionate head pat; a man picking up and comforting his crying daughter, whose ball was just stolen from her by another child; a father halting a hike in order to change his son's diaper in the bushes; a dad applying ointment to his son's bug bite.

Not only are men clearly used to interacting with their own children, but they also prove capable of engaging with each other's children. After dinner, one man carries another father's sleeping son from the table to the sofa. Another dad holds an extended conversation with a girl about the Tsum Tsum mobile game featuring ball-like renditions of Disney characters. When a boy falls on the floor and starts to cry, his father picks him up and Yamada-san proceeds to make gobbling noises while pretending to eat the boy's foot. This quickly converts tears into squeals of delight.

Unfortunately, my ability to witness these levels of father-child interaction at Fathering Japan was limited by the fact that the tour occurs just once a year; far more characteristic of the nonprofit's modus operandi are the workshops, lectures, and after-event socials through which nonprofit members facilitate the development of homosocial relationships⁴⁷ that contribute to

⁴⁷ Homosocial relationships are social relationships among members of the same sex, but the term is especially used in reference to men's social relationships with each other.

their and other participants' well-being and personal growth, in addition to providing peer models for how to parent. Unlike the Fathering Japan Tour, most of these events are held in the evening—when children are having dinner at home, doing their homework, and getting ready for bed—resulting in a surprising absence of children at a group focused on parenting. However, weekend events are more likely to draw child-toting parents, and in some cases the organizers provide a daycare so that parents can focus on learning. Similarly, certain topics are more conducive to bringing children along. Baby-sling wearing participants are more likely to show up for topics geared toward new parents, but discussions about changing workplace culture are not as welcoming to children.

Significantly, I am not the only person who regards as unusual the relative dearth of children at Fathering Japan events as unusual. In an interview, one longstanding, active member unhappily pointed out the lack of children at events, commenting that the presence of children was more common in the past. He connected this decrease in young participants to a general shift in Fathering Japan's topics of concern, as well as to the maturing of the directors' own children; Chapter 4 will discuss these topics and other criticisms by nonprofit members, but this particular observation is worth mentioning here to help explain why my experiences at Fathering Japan events did not commonly involve children. Nevertheless, children were present in the topics of conversation, even if they were not always physically present. At an organization for men who embraced their roles as fathers, children constituted an ever-present reference point and a reminder of the origin of Fathering Japan's overarching goals.

Members' enthusiasm seemed only to increase in the face of their task's monumental mandate: to effect shifts in popular consciousness on such incredibly personal subjects as

parenting and spousal relationships. Broaching these subjects is especially challenging in Japan given the cultural tendency to divide the world into social circles distinguishing “us” from “them” (Doi 2014 [1981]) and the general resistance toward inviting all but the closest of relationships into the “inner” sanctum of the household (Bachnik 1992).⁴⁸ Nonprofit members readily admitted to me that intentionally sparking society-wide change in a population’s mindset is a daunting prospect—although if accomplishing such change were too simple a process, this might prove problematic in its own way.

This chapter examines Fathering Japan’s leadership, structure, goals, and methods. The analysis covers the nonprofit’s rhetoric, noting that principle does not always perfectly map onto practice. It also evaluates the nonprofit’s stance on gender equality, as well as the way in which the community formed in and around Fathering Japan becomes a safe haven for men who hold values at odds with those of their coworkers. Throughout, I endeavor to illustrate how Fathering Japan and its members are attempting to encourage fathers to shift their values and practices, as well as how the nonprofit aims to foment changes within wider society.

At the time of my fieldwork, more than 500 individuals officially belonged to Fathering Japan, to an affiliated organization,⁴⁹ or to one of the nonprofit’s 12 branches (see Section 3). However, many more participated in activities on both a regular or limited basis but did not pay membership fees, which are not a prerequisite for participation, but more of a statement of

⁴⁸ During my fieldwork, I received and accepted several invitations to visit the homes of Fathering Japan members. However, such events were too few for me to draw general conclusions from family life. I have therefore restricted most of my analyses to the actions, practices, and conversations of people in public spaces.

⁴⁹ These affiliated nonprofit organizations include the Taigā Masuku Kikin or the Tiger Mask Foundation (タイガーマスク基金) that supports orphans financially and emotionally; E-hon-uta Asobi-uta (えほんうた・あそびうた), which promotes picture books and traditional songs that the organization deems exceptional; and Magosodate Nippon (孫育て・ニッポン), which aims to create communities conducive to raising children by encouraging the participation of grandparents in the child-raising process.

commitment and a status symbol. This text refers to the former group as “members” and to the latter group as “participants.”

Section 2: The Rockin' Dad of Fathering Japan

Ando-San as the Embodiment of Fathering Japan

Because he is an icon in the parenting movement and embodies the spirit of the nonprofit organization that he heads, perhaps it is most appropriate to begin my discussion of Fathering Japan by looking at one of the key figures of the organization: Ando Tetsuya-san, one of Fathering Japan's founders, the current president, and a smiling father. My first encounter with Ando-san was not what I expected. As the head of a large, influential organization, I anticipated encountering a distant figure who would make me work hard to sell my project. Instead, I was treated to a very different, infinitely more approachable figure.

Ando-san is often the first person you notice when you walk into the room. Maybe it is the way he commands the attention and respect of those around him. Certainly, people vie for his attention as if Ando-san is a superstar. The superstar analogy is not inappropriate given his clothing style: jeans and sneakers matched with a pair of sunglasses almost always perched atop his head. Exhibiting a laid-back demeanor, Ando-san performs the role of a "rockin' dad" in a room often dominated by salaryman suits. With a ready grin appropriate for the Fathering Japan slogan of "let's increase the number of smiling fathers," he greets old acquaintances with a few choice words that elicit laughter and welcomes new guests in a friendly manner. More specifically, his mannerisms and language put his interlocutors at ease, as if they need not stand on ceremony. While Ando-san is clearly used to speaking, his speech patterns can sound as if he is formulating his answers as he articulates them.

Whatever makes Ando-san the center of attention, his presence lends a special something to Fathering Japan that other organizations lack. He is not only a charismatic leader with the ability to identify and then capitalize on emergent topics in public discourse, but also a *guru*—a term that I use somewhat facetiously to highlight the reverence he elicits from his circle of acquaintances in recognition of his knowledge. Ando-san leads with a flair and a vision that have taken Fathering Japan to national prominence. In the words of Hayashida-san, one of the three Fathering Japan female *riji*,⁵⁰ or directors, “he’s a little different from ordinary Japanese people. Other people want to be like him. They realize that they probably can’t be like him, but they still want to be like him. He has many qualities. . . . In a society where the Japanese—where many people live while bound by rules and obligations—isn’t it nice to have someone who lives as if he were an Italian in a previous life?”

Despite the fact that Ando-san has three children,⁵¹ I never met any of his family members. For that matter, I rarely met the families of Fathering Japan’s directors at the events that I attended. I found this situation to be peculiar and ironic: what better way to perform parental role-modeling, touted by Fathering Japan as a way to compensate for the dearth of engaged fathers in previous generations, than by bringing one’s family to events? When I inquired about why participants seldom meet the families of *riji* and see only a few pictures of these families in the introductory slides of lecturers’ PowerPoints, one director informed me that the families of *riji* view Fathering Japan as their parents’ and partners’ workplace. They therefore do not intrude upon this space. I suspect that this claim is only a partial explanation: might some lecturers worry that their parenting performances could fail to live up to audiences’ expectations?

⁵⁰ 理事 (*riji*).

⁵¹ Ando-san’s daughter was born in 1997, his older son in 2000, and his younger son in 2008.

Could some family members destabilize the image that the lecturers have carefully crafted? Certainly, for popular lecturers who travel around Japan giving talks, how much time do they actually spend at home? Unfortunately, I was never able to obtain a satisfactory answer to these questions.

If not quite a contradiction, the virtual absence of *riji*'s families from nonprofit events certainly has the makings of one. While *Fathering Japan* does not advocate collapsing the boundaries between the spheres of work and family, an organization sends mixed messages if it advocates family-friendly policies but the leaders' own families do not make an appearance. At the very least, newly joined nonprofit members may feel that it is inappropriate or else find it uncomfortable to bring their children to events if the nonprofit leaders do not first set an example.

The Restlessness That Characterizes “Ando Disease”

Fathering Japan members sometimes joke about catching *Andō-byō*⁵² or “Ando disease,” a restlessness that tempts one to quit their stable, well-paying job and to find an (often more precarious) occupation that better matches their interests. Ando-san's personal history—narrated to me in an interview and also derived from his talks and online profile—reflects this trend, but similarly omits any reference to his family. Born in 1962, Ando-san came of age when Japan's economy was booming, and he graduated from the prestigious Meiji University.⁵³ He was hired by a publishing company in 1985, but switched companies only a year later. Then, over the next decade, he changed jobs several times, ending up as the manager of a bookstore. These unusual

⁵²安藤病 (andō-byō).

⁵³ One of the top private universities in Japan.

moves would have branded Ando-san as unreliable and not willing to perform as expected of a salaryman or any sort of full-time worker. Moreover, job-hopping is economically disadvantageous, as a salaryman's income and position are based on displays of company loyalty and their length of tenure at a company.⁵⁴

In a separate interview, one individual working in the publishing industry informed me that Ando-san became famous for carefully curating a store in which his recommended books flew off the shelves in an uncharacteristic fashion for Japan. Japanese bookstores rely heavily on sales of magazines, which have a high turnover rate that generates a large portion of their income. For example, nationwide magazine sales in 1996 earned 1.5 times the revenue of books (Hoshino 2018). Yet Ando-san was able to elevate the profit earned from books in a manner that garnered him respect from his peers. Between 2000 and 2004, Ando-san experimented with jobs at various e-book companies, including assuming a position as the senior executive manager of Rakuten Books within the large electronic commerce company Rakuten.

The year 2006 marked Ando-san's foray into the nonprofit sector with the establishment of Fathering Japan. Since then, Ando-san has continued his work in Fathering Japan while writing books and taking additional positions with lesser-known groups. He has served in a number of leadership positions at other nonprofit organizations. Most recently, he was the chairperson of a company that appears to have sprung from Fathering Japan's Men's 100-Year-

⁵⁴ One of my acquaintances, who was in her 20s and still in the process of finding a permanent job, maintained that even today one must spend a minimum of three years working at the same company before switching to another. Failure to do so marks one as fickle, insincere, and ultimately unattractive as a prospective employee. Similarly, the sayings *toriaezu san nen* ("for now, three years") and *ishi no ue ni mo san nen* ("three years on a stone") imply that one must invest three years—or, in the broader sense of the phrases, a long time—into an endeavor before experiencing success. When used in reference to employment, the phrases reflect a popular belief that one must spend at least three years at a job before leaving or even before evaluating whether leaving is appropriate.

Life Project, which—based on the premise that many Japanese men will live to be 100 years old—pushes people to envision how they will lead fulfilling lives postretirement.

In my interview with him, Ando-san's recounting of his life history did not perfectly match the timing of the officially published version of his profile (Fathering Japan 2019a). However, his narrative provides insights into his mindset that his resume does not. Ando-san was quick to realize that the bursting of Japan's bubble in 1991 meant that Japan would face major changes. He felt something change inside himself, and that elements of society were going to decline—"somehow things didn't seem like they would go as well"—which led him to ultimately quit working as a salaryman. Losing interest in climbing the corporate ranks, Ando-san felt that success did not have to come from within a company and that he wanted to pursue his own interests. Eventually, Ando-san's redefinition of what constitutes success would become part of the Fathering Japan ethos: while not denying that promotions and corporate status are rewarding, Fathering Japan members recognize that family and community involvement can also provide a sense of satisfaction and self-worth.

One can see common themes within Ando-san's varied work history. He possesses an unusual ability to switch positions among Japanese companies with seemingly no penalties. In recent decades, Ando-san also appears to have developed a strategy of diversifying his endeavors. Admiration of these feats has led a few men to contract "Ando disease" and to seek to emulate his example.

Ando-san's Role in Guiding Fathering Japan's Marketing and Innovation

A major reason that Fathering Japan is at the forefront of many hot social topics is Ando-san's willingness to allow and even to encourage individuals to present ideas for new projects. For example, the group within Fathering Japan that calls itself the Secret Society "The Househusband's Friend" (see Chapter 4) began when Ando-san asked several Fathering Japan members to develop a proposal related to their status as stay-at-home dads, although the form the subgroup took is a product of these fathers' proclivity for humor and entirely different from what Ando-san likely envisioned.

By crowdsourcing new projects and by discerning the flow of popular discourse, Ando-san is able to pinpoint issues of social concern, allowing Fathering Japan to develop events of interest to the public. For the purposes of discussing Ando-san's methods, *crowdsourcing* means "the act of outsourcing tasks, which are traditionally being performed by an employer or contractor, to a large group of people, often in exchange for micro-payments, social recognition, or entertainment value" (Alonso 2019, 1). Organizations use crowdsourcing to generate fresh insights into problems and ideas for new policies. When crowdsourcing takes place over the Internet, organizations can draw upon populations that may not be confined to a single geographic location. Under the proper conditions, crowdsourcing can even produce solutions that outperform those devised by experts (Brabham 2013). Significantly, many nonprofit organizations around the world employ crowdsourcing, with much academic literature focusing on the use of digital platforms to gather information (Manshadi and Rodilitz 2020; Shem-Tov 2017). For example, governments, nonprofits, and volunteers use Google Maps and other

mapping software to collect data on natural disasters and humanitarian crises (Roche, Propeck-Zimmermann, and Mericskay 2013).

With the goal of inspiring a more family-friendly society, Fathering Japan *riji*, or directors, not only listen to the voices of their members, who bring to the nonprofit issues they face as parents, but also actively solicit members' input through in-person conversations, with mailing-list queries, and with surveys crafted by *riji*, external researchers, and corporations. The results of these surveys not only inform the nonprofit's understanding of issues, but they also make their appearance as data and charts in future Fathering Japan presentations.

By attempting to keep their fingers on the pulse of hot social issues, Fathering Japan is poised to capitalize on topics of concern to the public, coupling member-generated insights with an eye to social and news media. *Riji* discuss transforming these topics into projects when they attend *rijikai*⁵⁵ or board meetings, gatherings that also allow for planning big events, workshopping slogans, and monitoring the status of the nonprofit's branches and various projects. Members who are not *riji* are free to attend the second half of some meetings, but they are unable to vote on initiatives. However, during a specific segment of this second half, members may propose ideas, researchers have the opportunity to (re)introduce themselves, and other interest groups can promote their agendas.

For example, one individual whom I will call Sakurai-san attempted to tap into the profitability of Fathering Japan's IkuBoss Project⁵⁶—an initiative discussed later that aims to cultivate benevolent work supervisors known as *ikuboss*⁵⁷—by unveiling her idea for an *ikuboss*

⁵⁵ 理事会 (*rijikai*).

⁵⁶ イクボスプロジェクト (*ikubosu purojekuto*).

⁵⁷ イクボス (*ikubosu*).

necktie. Sakurai-san had her pitch prepared, revealing that the ties would be made of high-quality silk. As she passed out sample swatches, she spoke about how the neckties' woven patterns recaptured the styles of Edo (the former name for Tokyo); she further linked the ikuboss neckties to Boss's Day in the United States. According to Sakurai-san, Boss's Day is an opportunity for employees to express their admiration for their supervisors through gifts, and an ikuboss necktie could prove a viable option for a similar show of respect in Japan.

The riji Hayashida-san picked up the threads of Sakurai-san's explanation, elaborating on Boss's Day to the assembled room based on her experience living in the United States. Perhaps unknown to the people present, Boss's Day is a source of controversy in the United States because some argue that it unfairly pressures subordinates to provide obligatory gifts to their bosses. One could argue that these are precisely the kind of power relations that the IkuBoss Project, attempting to cultivate middle managers' empathy for subordinates' individual circumstances, should be trying to minimize.

Other people contributed ideas during what became a brainstorming session. One person suggested that a children's version of the necktie would be "cute," while another remark sparked a conversation about gift-giving holiday practices in the United States. The conversation finally ended when Ando-san quipped that everyone should wear the neckties at the next national forum and that even he might wear one; these comments sent everyone in the room into peals of laughter at the prospect of casual Ando-san wearing a tie.

The Main Man Project

In some cases, member-generated insights produce ideas for lectures and workshops that capitalize on larger societal events and concerns. For example, one idea for a series of events was proposed by the Main Man Project.⁵⁸ The Main Man Project is a Fathering Japan initiative run by and for parents of children with developmental disabilities. According to its mission statement, “if papas becomes the ‘main man’ (close friend) of children with developmental disabilities, a kind, smiling, universal society will arise.” Despite this subgroup’s gendered moniker, quite a few mothers also participate in the Main Man Project, which holds meetings exclusively for invited participants at which parents discuss the challenges they and their children face, such as the issue of matriculating at school. In March 2017, I was invited by the project’s leader—the dynamic Watanabe-san—to participate in a Main Man Café. The following narrative describes my experiences at that gathering:

The event begins with a formal round of self-introductions, since the group of participants appears to be fluid and not necessarily members of Fathering Japan, and a consultant’s guest presentation follows. Along the way, there are numerous conversations about participants’ individual family circumstances and children. The Main Man Café appears to function as a support group of sorts: fathers and mothers are vocal about their fears for their children’s futures and about their frustration with society’s unwillingness to accept their children’s perceived differences. They ask for suggestions, give advice, and simply express to one another such concerns as the high cost of hiring an after-school helper, struggles with

⁵⁸ メインマンプロジェクト (mein man purojekuto).

children who dislike being surrounded by large numbers of people, and difficulties with children who do not like to be touched. Gotō-san, a consultant who creates support plans for individuals with disabilities and their families, explains his own inner turmoil via an unusual presentation: a series of still photos accompanied by background music. As the slides automatically transition, he narrates a story, occasionally modulating his voice in order to speak as different people.

As a college student, Gotō-san joined a student group supporting people with disabilities, and he met his future wife there. Gotō-san says that when their daughter was born, he found her “so cute, so cute that I can’t help myself,” and he reports that as a toddler, their daughter said, “I want to marry papa.” (Gotō-san performs a fist pump in front of the audience.) However (cue sad background music), he gradually realized that his daughter was developing more slowly than her peers. His wife said that their daughter’s progress was fine, but . . . (he does not finish this thought). At the time, everyone around Gotō-san reassured him that because he was an expert on living with disabilities, there would be no problem. Yet despite being a so-called specialist, he could not answer any of the questions that tormented him.

Gotō-san bought a lot of books (transitioning to a slide of large book piles) and read relentlessly, but he still could not find the answers that he sought. Then someone told Gotō-san that he should support his family in the way that only fathers can. Gotō-san does not explicitly reveal what this “way” is; instead, he utters a cryptic remark that he became Superman. At the same time, Gotō-san voices a very un-Supermanly sentiment by explaining that he learned to relinquish some control by “occasionally leaving things up to children.”

Gotō-san shows a slide of his wife and remarks, “I love you, I’m glad I married you.” Next, he comments on a slide of his daughter: “I love you. Thank you for being born.” Finally,

he projects a wedding photo of himself and his wife, and he says, “Thank you for everything. I’ll continue to count on your support.” While admittedly part of a dramatic performance, all of the statements are extremely uncharacteristic of Japanese fathers. Men rarely say “I love you” to their families; culturally, it is more appropriate to show love through actions. The “I love you” expression as uttered by a father is usually the stuff of soap operas.

Ultimately, Gotō-san’s presentation receives strong praise from the Main Man Café’s attendees. Gotō-san’s dramatized expressions of vulnerability fit the Main Man Café, which has established itself as a space where both fathers and mothers can share their feelings of unease and uncertainty. While men at Fathering Japan will readily admit their inadequacies as parents when asked, this Main Man Café maintains an atmosphere in which parents initiate conversations about their feelings as parents. More so than at many other Fathering Japan events, the conversations clearly reveal that participants care very much about their children.

Given the focus of the Main Man Project and the numerous events that the project holds on raising children with disabilities, participants were concerned when in late July 2016, the tragic Sagamihara stabbings occurred. A former employee of a care home for elderly people with disabilities returned to the facility at night, murdered 19 people, and injured 26 more. He later turned himself in to the police, and the subsequent investigation revealed that the man had been motivated by the belief that Japan would be better off without people with disabilities (BBC 2020; McCurry 2016). Slightly over a month later, the Main Man Project’s members consulted Ando-san and held an emergency forum addressing the alarm and concerns they shared as parents over the mass murder, asking what they could do to change society so that their children

with disabilities would be safe. Significantly, this event occurred because Fathering Japan members took the initiative to hold a public conversation, which the nonprofit then backed with its resources.

As in the case of the forum following the Sagami-hara tragedy, Fathering Japan gives proactive members—admittedly a minority—space to pursue goals that matter to them. However, as indicated by the stay-at-home dad Tabata-san, one of the founders of The Secret Society “The Househusband’s Friend” and the man with the biggest grin of any member I observed, it makes strategic sense to build a subgroup under the umbrella of Fathering Japan. This method of organizing allows people with specific parenting concerns to avail themselves of the nonprofit’s resources and connections and to avoid many of the administrative, legal, and financial struggles associated with attempting to establish an organization independently.

However, Fathering Japan’s openness to proposed ventures does not mean that those projects or programs are easy to launch. The automated emails about membership renewal inform recipients that Fathering Japan welcomes proposals for new projects, and riji reveal the typical process for advancing project proposals to those who inquire. However, neither Fathering Japan’s website nor any other readily accessible channel delineates the steps for proposing an initiative related to Fathering Japan’s mission. According to an email sent to the membership mailing list, in response to a query, by a riji who formerly served as the head of Fathering Japan’s secretariat, the proposal process begins with members’ preparing a simple written summary of their project’s goals and the problem that it aims to solve. The project’s activities can take any form, including drinking parties and forums. However, the project must not violate any laws or

public order and morals,⁵⁹ and the project must follow from the nonprofit's concept of *fathering*.⁶⁰ This concept is not spelled out in the email, but those familiar with the nonprofit understand that *fathering* refers to both enjoyable and active parenting.

The former head of the secretariat cautioned prospective project leaders that they will be responsible for handling many of the operational aspects of events, such as booking the venues and applying for subsidies and additional funds. Fathering Japan does provide approved projects with an unspecified amount of money, but projects that exceed their funding allotment must look elsewhere for support. The nonprofit will also prepare documents for the project, such as financial statements that must be provided by the secretariat.

The next step in the process of project approval is enlisting a *riji*'s support; the former head of the secretariat suggested that people first aim to recruit a geographically proximate *riji*. If this person proves busy, proposers should then email a *riji* whose interests align with the proposed project. A *rijikai* is held every two months, and the project is formally approved if the majority of *riji* vote in its favor. According to the former head of the secretariat's explanation, the whole process appears to rely heavily on prospective project leaders' initiative and resourcefulness. They, rather than the supervising *riji*, are ultimately responsible for their project's success, a requirement that likely contributes to the rarity of projects led by new members.

⁵⁹ 公序良俗 (*kōshoryōzoku*).

⁶⁰ ファザーリング (*fazāringu*).

Fathering Japan as Shaper of Public Discourse

In a small number of cases, Fathering Japan's projects lay the foundation and set the terms of public discourse in Japan. The most obvious instance of this pattern is the IkuBoss Project, discussed below and in Chapter 4. Often, crowdsourcing identifies long-standing issues, and then Fathering Japan formats those ideas in compelling and easily understandable ways. Fathering Japan's kickoff event in May 2017 for the Men's 100-Year-Life Project exemplified the nonprofit's marketing ability.

Because Japanese men identify so strongly with their paid work, the question of what they might do post-retirement has been a simmering concern for men across Japan, especially because—as Chapter 5 discusses—many men lack hobbies or hobby circles and have few to no close friends. Additionally, this absence of extracurricular activities and interests was a much-discussed issue among Fathering Japan members at the beginning of my fieldwork, and the organization officially addressed the issue in its Men's 100-Year Life Project shortly before my return to Canada in 2017.

Given the lengthy life expectancy in Japan,⁶¹ Fathering Japan's advertisement for the first event of the Men's 100-Year Life Project asks the following: If you live to be 100 years old, and if the mandatory retirement age at most companies is 65, how will you enjoy the remaining 35 years postretirement? If men's lives have three stages (education, work, retirement), how does one make the most of each stage? After asking these questions, the advertisement for the kickoff event promises lectures chock-full of hints and tips. It states that Fathering Japan hopes to

⁶¹ In 2019, the life expectancy at birth for Japanese males was 81.41 years, while the life expectancy at birth for Japanese females was 87.45 years (The World Bank 2021).

increase the number of men who can fully enjoy their lives and demonstrate their abilities in society even after retirement. Small wonder that the event drew a packed auditorium.

To be clear, Ando-san has not been the originator of every new idea at Fathering Japan, but he is at the center of idea development due to his openness to others' ideas and the catchy way in which he frames concepts and expresses ideas. According to the director Hayashida-san, Ando-san's communication abilities make him central to Fathering Japan's efforts:

In short, he's good at gathering everyone's voices and delivering them to the state and the local governments. Also, he knows the way to start a movement. He skillfully uses the media. He's also good at getting people involved. These are things that the state and local governments can't do, also companies, which is why they seek out Ando-san.

Like the 14 other riji, Ando-san is deeply concerned with the direction of Japanese society, and he aims to shift its direction through the nonprofit's activities. As an entrepreneur and at times a maverick, Ando-san was characterized by one long-standing member of the nonprofit as the "heart of Fathering Japan." Although the other riji are also highly involved in furthering Fathering Japan's cause and in performing essential roles, Ando-san stands out most visibly as a person of influence. From Fathering Japan's inception and current trajectory, to how his name frequently surfaces in conversations with nonprofit members, to the way that news articles on Fathering Japan often feature pictures of the president, Ando-san has been the public face of Fathering Japan. Many core members of the nonprofit were personally recruited by or drawn to Ando-san, and Ando-san's casual style influences the organization's operations. Even

though Fathering Japan abides by some of the stereotypical practices followed by Japanese organizations—including long board meetings—Ando-san's willingness to experiment and to adapt ultimately lends the group a flexibility and appeal that have led to its national prominence and success.

Section 3: Fathering Japan's Identity as a Nonprofit That Challenges Established Norms

From Humble Origins to National Trendsetter

When first established in 2006, Fathering Japan was a humble, small affair centered in Tokyo. Fathers learned of and were drawn to the nonprofit through social networking services, and the intimacy of the group ensured that members were generally more familiar with one another than are current members of the now much larger nonprofit. According to one riji, Fathering Japan received a publicity boost from an online test, developed by Ando-san, that measured so-called “papa ability.” Similarly, Fathering Japan’s Papa Examination Committee headed by Kozaki-Sensei, a Fathering Japan riji and a professor in the Faculty of Education at Osaka Kyoiku University, published a book of 200 questions on *kosodate*,⁶² or child raising, titled *The Child-Raising Papa Ability Test: Official Test and Problem Set* (Fathering Japan 2007).⁶³ According to Kozaki-Sensei, this publication also garnered significant public attention. In the “How to Use this Book” portion of the introduction, the authors encourage fathers to take the test by themselves or with their partners. When stumped, the men are to consult their wives or a woman in their lives knowledgeable about *ikuji*; apparently, the committee presumes that most women will have a firmer grasp on the subject. Admittedly, the quality and quantity of resources available to women and mothers in Japan are vastly superior to those available to fathers. In fact, schools and local governments relentlessly push these resources onto women. Additionally, Kozaki-Sensei’s book includes various questions covering the periods of pregnancy

⁶² 子育て (*kosodate*).

⁶³ When discussing with me the popularity of this book, Kozaki-Sensei joked about the public’s complete lack of interest in his more academic publications: “They didn’t sell at all.”

and the stages of children’s development until they enter grade school. For example, questions ask the average birth weight of a newborn infant, the categories of employees who are not allowed to take child-care leave (one of the false answers is “men”), the infectious diseases for which children are legally required to stay home from preschool and kindergarten, and the most popular sports for boys and girls in elementary school.

The Child-Raising Papa Ability Test also includes questions that, at least to me, appear to be off-topic. For instance, the “test” asks what the Mafia title *godfather* refers to in the eponymous movie. Fathers who cannot answer the popular culture test questions are encouraged by the Papa Examination Committee to ask their children, providing the grounds for father-child conversations that form the basis of true “papa ability.”⁶⁴ However, I am not sure how many Japanese six-to-seven-year-olds have seen even one movie in the trilogy of violent three-hour long foreign films about organized crime.

In the past, the *riji* were generalists on topics related to parenting and children; however, over the last decade, Fathering Japan’s leadership has undergone a gradual professionalization with the recruitment of competent and increasingly specialized male *riji*. Women did not join the board of directors until nearly eight years after the nonprofit was founded. Hayashida-san informed me that she had not initially aspired to become a member of the nonprofit’s board. However, in 2012, the Japanese government issued guidelines to private companies, suggesting that women should constitute 30 percent of management. Although these instructions did not target nonprofit organizations, the leaders of Fathering Japan decided to comply, and they elevated three female lecturers at the nonprofit to *riji* status around 2014. These same three

⁶⁴ パパ力 (papa ryoku).

female riji were on the board of directors during my fieldwork, and they continue to sit on the board today.⁶⁵ However, no new female riji have joined the board of directors despite its expansion to a current 15 members; the 30 percent guideline is no longer followed.

Except for a brief one-year period, Ando-san has remained the president, and today each riji speaks as an expert on subjects in which they are personally invested. Eventually, Fathering Japan began to develop large projects, starting with an emphasis on *ikumen* and later proceeding to a focus on life post-retirement and the *ikuboss*, a topic discussed in Chapter 4. Currently, the word *ikumen* occasionally surfaces in lectures and workshops; however, for reasons explained in the previous chapter, members tend to reject the label as a descriptor for themselves and their activities. Overall, the Fathering Japan focus on *ikumen* has waned—the “*ikumen boom*”⁶⁶ that drew public attention to the concept peaked in 2010, and with it Fathering Japan’s interest in the topic. Fathering Japan, always seeking to be a trendsetter, has moved on from the subject of *ikumen*. Instead, it maintains a monopoly on other topics, such as the *ikuboss*, which Ando-san perceives as integral to creating opportunities for engaged fathers to thrive.

Today, Fathering Japan is a large organization that has political clout with the national government and with many local governments. Led by its riji, the nonprofit has strategically branded itself as a visionary organization; responded to and shaped societal trends; and cleverly used the media to disseminate its messages. In doing so, Fathering Japan has placed itself into the center of a number of debates relating to the family, including the changing nature of men's roles in their families and rethinking white-collar workplace culture. As a result, the once close-

⁶⁵ Strangely, during the many Fathering Japan events I attended, I never met one of the three female riji; I was informed that this riji was busy with other activities, but I never found out what these activities were. Like other Fathering Japan riji, her online profile lists her involvement in other nonprofits and freelance work.

⁶⁶イクメンブーム (*ikumen būmu*).

knit group has grown larger and more impersonal with its fragmentation into regional branches boasting a combined 500 official members, as well as many more individuals who attend events but do not pay for membership. As Chapter 4 discusses, some of the original members and leaders have left the group due to disagreements with the direction of the nonprofit, the presence of opportunities to start their own organizations, a lack of interest because their children have grown, and many other reasons.

Expansion Beyond the Greater Tokyo Area to Address Regional Parenting Concerns

As Fathering Japan spread outside of the Greater Tokyo Area, it became necessary to establish branches that could more easily address regional parenting needs and coordinate a more localized membership. Branches vary in their organization and function: some are gatherings of fathers for the practical purpose of mutual support, while others are more equivalent to projects, directed and financially managed by the Fathering Japan headquarters in Tokyo.

Still other so-called branches of Fathering Japan are actually their own legal entities: while the Fathering Japan website lists them under the heading “branches,”⁶⁷ the riji made it clear to me that in these cases the term *branch* is a misnomer. For example, Fathering Japan Kansai is an entirely separate nonprofit organization with its own independent legal status under the Japanese government. However, the president of Fathering Japan Kansai sits on the board of directors of Fathering Japan. Likewise, the heads of other branches also maintain strong ties with their progenitor organization, reporting on their regional accomplishments during meetings of the board of directors.

⁶⁷ 支部 (shibu).

Interlocutors were quick to point out to me that regional branches became necessary due to the different culture and practices of each region in Japan. For example, Ando-san justified the existence of *Fathering Japan Kansai* on the basis that the family structure in Osaka (a metropolis in the Kansai region) is more traditional than that of Tokyo. There is evidence to support Ando-san's assertion: Women in Osaka continue to rely more heavily on men's economic support (Kumagai 2014), in contrast to the ongoing discussion in Tokyo about how to negotiate responsibilities in dual-income families. As my interlocutors maintained, Tokyo draws people from all over Japan, and parents who work in the Greater Tokyo Area are extremely lucky if they live near grandparents who are willing and able to provide *ikuji* or child care. In contrast, according to Ando-san, three-generation households are more common in Osaka. Women in Osaka are more likely to subscribe to a more traditional set of gender values, and mothers and grandmothers may dismiss attempts by fathers to become more involved in child care and house chores.

For *Fathering Japan*, the most challenging of all Japan's regions is the island of Kyushu, which numerous *riji* described as a bastion of traditional notions of masculinity. In fact, one of the likely reasons that *Fathering Japan* chose Kyushu as the location for the National Forum in 2017 was to give *Fathering Japan Kyushu* a boost. While Fukuoka, a major city in Kyushu, is more progressive than are the other cities on the island, Kyushu overall tends to adhere to strict ideas about the gendered division of labor in the family. According to Ando-san, the Kyushu emphasis on separate spheres for men and women is so strong that each gender eats in a separate space—even within the same home. Kyushu also produces the famous *Kyūshū danji*⁶⁸ or

⁶⁸ 九州男児 (*kyūshū danji*).

“Kyushu boys,” men who are stereotypically brave, strong of mind and body, and capable of holding their alcohol. In short, Kyushu boys are manly men. On the other hand, Kyūshū danji are known for being stubborn, quick-tempered, and self-centered. When explaining the obstacles that she faced in changing her husband’s perspective toward child care, one riji often mentioned to event participants that her husband is a Kyūshū danji. Her audience immediately understood, and no further explanation was necessary.

For these reasons, Ando-san postulated that if Kyushu changes, then Japan as a whole can change. A Kyushu where fathers smile along with their families will be concrete proof that Japan has the capacity to remap gender relations even in its most stereotypically macho of regions.

Because of this cultural diversity throughout Japan, Fathering Japan has also found it necessary for its branches to better tailor its messages to specific regional characteristics. In particular, the nonprofit realized the efficacy of home-grown role models in encouraging men to take a more active role in their families. According to Ando-san, if a speaker from Tokyo travels to another region and pushes men to engage in ikuji, his message will be less convincing than if a local speaker who shares his audience’s upbringing delivers a similar message. Lecturers from Tokyo are especially suspect, as some audience members may view the situation in terms of the self-professed urban centers preaching to more distant or rural areas. However, local or regional speakers know their listeners, and they are able to pinpoint and address topics of concern to parents in the area.

Fathering Japan's Events as Third Places for Fathers

Fathering Japan's community is one of its selling points for fathers seeking *tsunagari*⁶⁹ or interpersonal connections with other fathers. As Atsumi's study (1989) of white-collar workers reveals, individuals distinguish between relationships based on a sense of responsibility (*tsukiai*)⁷⁰ and friendships based on spontaneity. While any sort of friendship entails certain expectations about relationship-appropriate conduct, bonds forged at the nonprofit fall squarely into the category of friendship rather than of *tsukiai*. Being a productive member of society—a *shakaijin*,⁷¹ or an independent adult who earns their own income—automatically engenders *tsukiai* through the workplace.

Yet individuals crave relationships other than those developed in the workplace. Indeed, my interlocutors maintained that it was difficult for people to form genuine friendships after graduating from university. Opportunities for forming friendships are scarce—for men in particular—when demanding work schedules preclude hobbies. While members of Fathering Japan do not literally refer to one another as “friends,” they generally consider their relationships at the nonprofit to be based on spontaneity and free association rather than on mandatory *tsukiai*.

In effect, Fathering Japan events provide venues that function as *third places* where relationships among parents can flourish. In any society, third places exist between the home, or the “first place,” and the workplace, or the “second place” (Oldenburg 1999). Public parks and cafes are commonly cited examples of third places (Jeffres et al. 2009; White 2012). According to Steinkuehler and Williams (2006) as well as Wimmer (2013), third places have eight common

⁶⁹ 繋がりに (tsunagari).

⁷⁰ 付き合い (tsukiai).

⁷¹ 社会人 (shakaijin).

characteristics: First, these third places exist as “neutral spaces” where people are free to join and leave at their discretion, unencumbered by significant obligations to others. Second, outside status is irrelevant and participation in the third space does not depend on an individual’s meeting qualifying criteria. Third, conversation is the primary activity of concern. Fourth, the third places are accessible and accommodating. Fifth, a host of regulars set the tone of the venue and initiate new members to the third place. Sixth, a third place is warm and inviting. Seventh, such places are characterized by a playful atmosphere. Finally, a third place acts as a second home—as places of belonging and relaxation.

While Fathering Japan events alternate among different venues in the Greater Tokyo Area, including a few go-to spaces, they otherwise fit the criteria for a third place. The venues are neutral spaces that people may freely enter or exit. On a few occasions, I witnessed a father leaving early because of some issue at home, such as his partner’s health. Additionally, outside status is not irrelevant, but it is less relevant than it would be in another setting. Fathers respect the *riji* and other individuals accomplished in the work world. However, because participants primarily interact with one other in their capacity as parents, equally important is the *papa-senpai*⁷² or “papa senior” who can offer advice to parents with younger children due to his greater experience. In fact, some individuals choose not to identify themselves according to their occupation. Instead of passing out their business cards, they pass out *papa meishi*⁷³ or “papa cards” that include such information as their social media handles, published books (if any), nonprofit affiliations and other parenting groups in which they participate, and occasionally

⁷² パパ先輩 (papa senpai).

⁷³ パパ名刺 (papa meishi).

photos. In contrast to plainer and more professional-looking business cards, papa cards are colorful and creative. In most cases, papa cards are published on cheaper paper and have a homemade feel to them. According to one interlocutor, Japanese men find it difficult to make small talk unaided; however, they are excellent at using business cards to start conversations, hence the utility of papa cards.

Given the prevalence of public and academic discourse on Japanese concepts of *uchi*⁷⁴ (the inside or in-group characterized by intimacy) and *soto*⁷⁵ (the outside or out-group characterized by formality), the second criteria of third spaces—the irrelevance of outside status—is particularly significant. Scholars have described Japanese society as divided into overlapping spheres of belonging radiating out from the self that extend to the family and then to the other groups to which an individual belongs (Bachnik 1992; Meagher 2017; Nakane 1972). Moreover, these spheres are personalized and variable: “Since *soto* and *uchi* are different for each individual, what is *soto* for one person may become *uchi* for a person included in that *soto*” (Doi 2001 [1986]: 29).

The *uchi* to which one belongs is a rhetorical construction of an individual’s positionality (Ashby 2013). It conveys social capital, but in exchange it “requires a person’s total and exclusive commitment” (Takahashi 2009, 58). During the postwar period, women’s *uchi* became the home, and men’s *uchi* became their company division. This situation is the cause of some conflict; from the perspective of women, their husbands’ *uchi* should really be the home. Since without a locus of belonging in the *uchi* “an individual is nothing” (Takahashi 2009, 58), group

⁷⁴ 内 (*uchi*).

⁷⁵ 外 (*soto*).

membership is therefore generally well-defined, which may explain paucity of third spaces for men where group boundaries are more fluid—a state of affairs bemoaned by male *riji* and other male interlocutors.

Fathering Japan events also meet the third and fourth criteria for so-called third places: conversation is the primary activity at events, and those events are accessible to anyone who wishes to attend. Event lectures often leave space for participants to discuss their thoughts with one another, and workshops are specifically designed for people to grapple with issues as a group. Fathering Japan events are held on weekday evenings or on the weekend to allow as many adults to participate as possible (evening events generally preclude children's participation). However, the venue's accessibility depends upon such factors as an attendee's commute from work, commute home, and end of workday. Because the location of Fathering Japan venues rotates, some places will be more accessible for some members and less so for others. Additionally, while some buildings may be inaccessible normally, registering online for the events—always a very easy process—renders the inaccessible buildings accessible. To give a concrete example, tight security policed an event held in collaboration with Google in upscale Roppongi, but people who registered were graciously guided to the skyscraper's elevator after first checking in at the front desk.⁷⁶

In maintaining a welcoming and jovial atmosphere, repeat attendees at Fathering Japan events help to draw in new members who find this camaraderie appealing. In this way, the attendees also help the events fulfill the final four characteristics that define a *third place*. Perhaps most importantly, my interlocutors identified Fathering Japan as a place of mutual

⁷⁶ Technically, Kojikara Nippon hosted this event, but Fathering Japan advertised the meeting, which involved the latter's *riji*.

understanding. Men appreciate the like-minded community that forms in and around the nonprofit, one that values family and whose members aspire to become better parents and spouses. When the more proactive members spoke to me specifically about a shared desire to change Japanese society, they would occasionally describe their fellow members of this fathering community as *nakama*,⁷⁷ a word that has varying connotations including “member of the same social group,” “colleague,” and “companion.”

In contrasting their experiences at Fathering Japan and the larger parenting movement with those outside this community, many of my Japanese male interlocutors said that they feel discriminated against at their companies and even in their neighborhoods for expressing a desire to balance work life with family life. One man told me how, some years ago, he had once put a framed photo of his family on his desk, only to return the next day to find that it was no longer standing upright; instead, someone had moved the photo and placed it face down. He interpreted this act as a clear statement from his coworkers that the workplace was a no-families-allowed space. While other causes could potentially explain the position of his photograph, what matters in this account is the man’s lack of consideration for alternative explanations and his interpretation of the situation as an act of his coworkers that conveyed specific judgment. For those who feel misunderstood, Fathering Japan provides acceptance and understanding. In the words of another father, “I don’t care what my coworkers think, but I want somebody to understand my values” about the importance of family.

⁷⁷ 仲間 (nakama).

Government Influences on Fathering Japan

Judging from my conversations with many of Fathering Japan's riji and members, the men who look to Fathering Japan for camaraderie and affirmation are not always conscious of the role they play in furthering some of the Japanese government's priorities for perpetuating the Japanese nation. Unlike Japan's neoliberal government, Fathering Japan takes progressive stances on gender, and, to a certain extent, on age and class. However, broadly painting the nonprofit as a progressive organization would be an oversimplification. Fathering Japan exists at the intersection of multiple and occasionally conflicting interests because of the role it plays as intermediary among the ordinary parents who make up its membership, the corporations that fund it, and the government that is essential to enshrining social change in law. The nonprofit must therefore negotiate giving voice to concerned workers and citizens and to the larger actors whose professed interest in social change is undercut by bureaucracy and an interest in the status quo—both of which can stymie drastic actions leading to genuine societal change.

Certainly, Fathering Japan develops independently its many lectures and workshop to address the interests of parents, who need advice on negotiating the competing structural demands and relationship challenges in their lives. Failure to speak to these needs and to connect with these parents would render the organization's professed purpose specious, resulting in a decrease in participation, membership, and authority. However, government and corporate interests also shape the interests of Fathering Japan and of Japan's parenting movement as a whole—both at the regional and local levels.

As outlined in the Introduction, Japan's national government is concerned with the specter of a declining population and an accompanying decrease in tax revenue and international

relevance, issues that Fathering Japan addresses. Some prominent members of the nonprofit, including riji, privately confided to me that the low birthrate is now beyond any actor's ability to control and that the issue should have been addressed definitively by the government and society 20 years ago. However, this admission does not stop the organization from using Japan's low birthrate as justification for its activities and from attempting to increase the number of "smiling fathers." According to this argument, explained in the previous chapters, fathers relieve mothers of their double shift when the fathers enjoy and value parenting enough to take on a share of child care and chores that is roughly equivalent to their partners' share. Consequently, women may be willing to have more children—an assertion supported by some research. (See the Introduction.)

When asked about Fathering Japan's role as an intermediary between the parents and the government, Ando-san had this to say:

Well, aren't we doing themes related to policy, national business such as child-care support, the declining birth rate, and gender equality? That's why it's often said that, for example, we're trying to promote paternity leave. But if government offices say similar things—how should I say this—it comes from above. On the other hand, because we're an NPO [nonprofit organization] . . . what we expect from NPOs is to elevate society's mood. If this happens, people will properly understand these policies. . . . I think that this role of livening things up is fine. Since we're an NPO, I think our job is to improve the mood of society.

In other words, Ando-san suggested that the purpose of nonprofits is to raise awareness about social problems, thereby paving the way for government policies designed to address these issues. This role involves a different kind of advocacy than is typical for North American nonprofit organizations, most of which attempt to advance public interests through their activities or by conveying the concerns of interest groups to politicians and policymakers. Run by citizens, albeit often under direct or indirect government supervision, Japanese nonprofits can assume such responsibility because they occupy a lateral position relative to the population that they are trying to influence. In contrast, according to Ando-san, government attempts to sway the “mood” of society are less effective than nonprofits’ attempts because citizens perceive such efforts as impositions originating from on high. A final consideration is that, as in the case of the video shown by the Ikumen Project at the 2017 Fathering National Forum in Oita, government propaganda may be so completely distant from the general population’s lived experience that it misses its mark.

In essence, Ando-san’s description of the role of the voluntary sector reflects the close and collaborative relationship between Japanese nonprofits and the government described in Chapter 1. Instead of opposing the Liberal Democratic Party’s stance on family by lobbying against perceived inadequacies, Fathering Japan instead channels government and public concerns in order to foment societal change at the levels of culture and policy—a move made possible only by the presence of a political opportunity structure (see previous chapter) at this particular historical moment.

Fathering Japan has multiple avenues for influencing both national and local government policy. For example, clever use of the social, electronic, and traditional media puts Fathering

Japan in the public's eye, with positive coverage lending weight to the nonprofit's words. The organization also has both formal and informal connections to government officials, which it further expands by inviting them to speak at events, by holding events that draw public and media attention, and by collaborating with city governments during its annual national summit.

Additionally, Ando-san is an adviser for Japan's Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare's seemingly symbolic Ikumen Project (the author of the video shown at the Fathering National Forum), which once developed the Work-Life Balance Guide and held workshops and symposia but which now mostly limits itself to annual award ceremonies and competitions commemorating ikumen, family-friendly companies, and ikuboss. Finally, based on the opinions collected from its members, Fathering Japan directly lobbies and makes recommendations to national government agencies on such topics as paternity leave and the plight of single-father households.

Goals Shared by Japanese Corporations and Fathering Japan

Like the Japanese government, corporations have an interest in workplace change; however, their efforts to adjust the work environment derive not from an inherent desire to be socially progressive, but from their understanding that employing workers who have successfully resolved the conflicts between work and home will benefit the employers economically. As discussed in Chapter 1, corporations recognize that it is increasingly difficult to compel workers to devote all of their energies to work. According to Miyamoto-san—a friendly man who frequently volunteers to work at the reception desk at Fathering Japan events—work groups today consist of individuals with diverse values; employers are no longer able to maintain a

monopoly on workers' loyalties and time, as was common before the collapse of Japan's economic bubble.

Recognizing that they cannot effectively change conservative company culture through top-down measures, business leaders turn to Fathering Japan to educate middle managers who are able to make decisions sympathetic to their subordinates' varied circumstances. (Chapter 4 discusses the complex interplay between the goals of Fathering Japan and the needs of Japanese corporations.) In order to maintain productive and well-functioning teams, company middle managers must learn how to accommodate *daibāshitei*,⁷⁸ or diversity, which is a term most commonly used to describe divergent work styles rather than such indices of difference as ethnicity, gender, age, or sexual orientation. Letting a father return home to attend his child's birthday celebration is a small price to pay to foster work-group harmony and effectiveness. Speaking on the role that Fathering Japan plays in changing Japanese parenting and work culture, Hayashida-san explained to me the following:

Companies need to change now, and the country also needs to change because of the declining birthrate, but they almost certainly don't know what to do. So they ask Ando-san, they ask the Fathering Japan board of directors because they don't know what to do. The ones who receive consultation are generally like this. There are so many systems in place, but no one takes paternity leave, and relationships with superiors are bad, so what should we do? . . . To address these things, we don't only provide training, we propose systems.

⁷⁸ ダイバーシテイ (*daibāshitei*).

As Chapter 4 discusses in detail, Fathering Japan's membership structure encompasses individuals as well as corporations, thus illustrating the seemingly contradictory interests at stake in Japan's parenting movement. While individual members of Fathering Japan learn to perform a masculinity opposed to the stereotype of the emotionally distant husband and the stoic father, Fathering Japan also features a category of corporate membership and allows companies—who play an overdetermined role in shaping the lives of adult workers—to sign on as sponsors of its endeavors. Corporate interests, and the money that accompanies them, are one of the reasons that Fathering Japan prioritizes the IkuBoss Project over less lucrative projects. While such powerful actors as the government and large companies do not determine Fathering Japan's agenda, they inevitably play a role in shaping it.

Motivations and Characteristics of Fathering Japan's Participants and Members

Despite their white-collar status, many men at Fathering Japan are better conceptualized as a subordinate group within the socially dominant category of the salaryman, as performers of masculinities incorporating elements of both Japanese hegemonic masculinity and femininities, and as a reminder that social identities and categories are never as monolithic as they appear. Broadly considered, male participants are overwhelmingly people who gravitate toward Fathering Japan because of personal interests and individual circumstances. Some men initially attend the nonprofits' events for parents after hearing about a topic that they find compelling. In other cases, women send their husbands with the instruction to “go learn something.” For example, one participant—whom I will call Murai-san—informed me that his wife sent him to

the Fathering Japan event, where I met him for the first and only time. His wife made the reservation for the event and “on the surface, she suggested that I should go, but I feel like I was ordered to attend.” When I asked him about his *kosodate* practices, Murai-san informed me that while he was satisfied with his parenting performance, his wife was not. She wanted him to “aim even higher” as a father and to do more than simply drop their daughter off at preschool, but also to engage with their daughter and keep her company. According to Murai-san, his wife was hoping that the Fathering Japan event would be a good influence on him. He wryly summed up his acquiescence to the perceived demand that he attend: “If my wife is not happy, I can’t be happy.”

The only apparent universal is that everyone enjoys the drinking at local *izakaya* after events. After-event socials provide opportunities for networking, de-stressing, and soliciting advice from other, more experienced parents. Some of the questions asked at *nomikai*, or drinking parties, can be incredibly personal, but the responses are an invaluable resource for men who lack other forums in which to air their concerns, fears, and desires. *Nomikai* are not gender-exclusive—the one exception being the papa school that I attended, which was aimed exclusively at fathers. Most events tend to draw both men and women, although the majority of attendees are men. Some of the women who attend the main lecture or workshop will usually join the after-event *nomikai*, which is unlike the largely homosocial *nomikai* of the corporate world.

In rare instances, children are also present; for example, one of my key interlocutors, the perceptive and slightly cynical Ken-san, brought Keita-kun—his one-and-a-half-year-old son—to the *nomikai* following the board of directors’ meeting. Instead of alcohol, Ken-san ordered orange juice, which he let Keita-kun sip through a straw. As I conversed with Ken-san about

Japanese babies' gestures and the recent 2016 United States presidential election, Keita-kun clambered over his father, and then onto me. He shook the wooden blinds over the window behind us (which made a pleasant rattling noise), played with disposable chopsticks, and then messed around with my smartphone—Ken-san pulled Keita-kun away from my phone just as his son was about to delete my apps, exclaiming “that was dangerous!” Similarly, children were also present at the *nomikai* during Fathering Japan's National Forum in Oita, Kyushu in 2017. Some men had traveled to the island of Kyushu along with their families; the older children mostly occupied themselves during the drinking party.

Repeat attendees find numerous, diverse reasons that keep them coming back to the nonprofit's events. These include the opportunity to socialize with men and women whom they have come to know through Fathering Japan, a sense of community and shared values, an interest in new topics, and a genuine desire to see society shift in a family-friendly direction. In this text, *repeat attendee* refers to someone who often shows up at fathering events, typically those covering a topic or activity of personal interest or concern. Significantly, not all repeat attendees are actually card-carrying members of Fathering Japan; the transition to membership does not always take place.

Individual, noncorporate members of Fathering Japan are primarily male, white-collar workers who are married and have children. Some work part-time or as freelancers, while a small minority are househusbands or are “househusbands as a side job.” I was not aware of any members who were unmarried men or of members who did not have or did not anticipate children in the immediate future.

To my knowledge, I came into contact with only one so-called “single father”⁷⁹ during my 13 months of fieldwork; raising a child on one’s own is not something about which a parent openly speaks. I was told by the people at Fathering Japan that single fathers exist within the nonprofit’s orbit but that they are usually unable to afford the cost of membership (discussed below). In the past, single fathers were a more visible presence in Fathering Japan due to the existence of the now-defunct French Toast Fund,⁸⁰ established in reference to iconic scenes about cooking in the American movie *Kramer vs. Kramer*, which portrays a father (Ted Kramer) who learns to take care of his son (Billy) after his wife (Joanna Kramer) leaves him. Ted’s clumsy attempt to make French toast with Billy at the start of the movie contrasts with the father and son’s tightly coordinated routine for cooking French toast that appears at the end of the film. These juxtaposed scenes foreground Ted’s growth as a parent, and the preparation of French toast becomes a metaphor for the father-son relationship.

The French Toast Fund supported families consisting of only a father and child(ren) by allowing them to apply for financial assistance. It provided a monthly stipend of 40,000 yen (approximately 370 USD) for up to a year to families with children in their third year of elementary school or younger and that had an annual income of less than three million yen (approximately 27,500 USD). However, Fathering Japan ceased accepting applications for this fund in September 2009. According to members of Fathering Japan, the organization terminated this fund in anticipation of the law reform passed in May 2010 by the House of Councillors, the upper chamber in the National Diet of Japan, that extended the coverage of the Child Support

⁷⁹ シングルファザー (shinguru fazā).

⁸⁰ フレンチトースト基金 (Furenchi Tōsuto Kikin).

Allowance to families with single fathers. Now that Japanese law no longer overlooks the existence of single fathers, Fathering Japan has moved on to other issues.

At one point in the past, Fathering Japan created Fathering Japan Student's [sic], a student group that aimed to teach young people about fatherhood. The group held lectures and other events that discussed issues surrounding parenting and work. Students even had the opportunity to witness via homestay the inner workings of families with involved fathers. However, the group had long disbanded by the time my fieldwork commenced, although one of Fathering Japan Student's founders had since joined Fathering Japan's board of directors as one of its youngest members.

Fathering Japan now focuses primarily on employed, married men with children. When asked how the men at Fathering Japan differ from other Japanese men, Hayashida-san replied in this way:

I think that they want to enjoy being fathers. So they think about how they should work and what they should do at home in order to enjoy being fathers. [In contrast], normal fathers have the image of highly valuing their work duties, so they do their jobs first and spend any leftover time with their families. . . . Normal fathers probably identify with their jobs and identify less as fathers.

Hayashida-san did not provide an answer as to why these men wanted to enjoy fatherhood. Nor did my interviewees, most of whom struggled to put their feelings toward their children into words. However, the way that Fathering Japan members described to me their

interactions with their children, as well as the extent to which fathers appeared to consider carefully their children's best interests, made it clear that they considered their own children to be precious. Small wonder that many of these men sought the company of other men who, like them, recognized the importance of being a father instead of completely rejecting such sentiments.

Hayashida-san went on to describe to me men who participate in Fathering Japan as exceptional in their parental involvement but as ultimately "ordinary" in the sense that they occupy a standard position on the heteronormative life path as married fathers working at white-collar jobs. However, within the category of *salaryman*, Fathering Japan members and participants remain unusual entities. Their values and—as mentioned by Hayashida-san—the degree to which they prioritize the relative importance of their identities as "fathers" over their identities as "workers" differentiates them from the stereotypical salarymen. Therefore, we might identify the men of Fathering Japan as the minority in the hegemonic majority.

The abundance of salarymen in attendance at Fathering Japan has led to public perceptions of the organization as one for privileged white-collar workers, although this classification, as a project leader pointed out, comes from people outside the nonprofit who are only passingly acquainted with Fathering Japan. While househusbands, freelancers, and people who work in the third sector make up a segment of the nonprofit's membership, such a portrait has an element of truth to it: many participants tend to be salarymen.

In contrast to the men of Fathering Japan, the small number of women who participate in Fathering Japan's efforts are specialists whose professional interests align with Fathering Japan's goals. Some work as lecturers on topics that Fathering Japan addresses, while others work in

industries related to child rearing. Still others are responsible for dealing with issues of diversity at their companies. Like many of the other women at Fathering Japan, Hayashida-san herself began her career at a job supporting working mothers, but she quickly realized that it was impossible to fully support mothers unless these women's husbands were also involved in family life. This realization eventually led her to contact Fathering Japan, where today she is regarded as a "superwoman" for her work ethic and numerous accomplishments. All evidence supports the awarding of this moniker: the respected Hayashida-san is active in promoting Fathering Japan domestically as well as internationally, thanks to her English-speaking abilities and academic background.

Participants' Reflections on Their Own Possible Roles as Activists

Despite the political and social activity of Fathering Japan, few members see themselves as agents of social change. Because Fathering Japan does not require membership for attendance at its events, joining the organization and paying an annual fee to contribute to Fathering Japan's efforts is a political statement by those who choose to do so. In 2016 and 2017, these fees amounted to 20,000 yen (approximately 185 USD) for the first year, followed by an annual fee of 10,000 yen (approximately 93 USD) from the second year onward. Few, including most of the riji to whom I spoke, saw these fees as trivial amounts. The optional cost can seem especially high for parents who are raising young children.

However, Fathering Japan members contribute more than funds to the nonprofit. Members are resources that buttress, confer legitimacy upon, and direct Fathering Japan. Members not only support the nonprofit indirectly by working behind the scenes (for example,

by setting up venues before an event and cleaning up afterward), but they also lend weight to the organization's cause by attending events. The most active members start and lead projects within the nonprofit, but even the less active members help Fathering Japan navigate public discourse, identifying topics of interest to troubled parents. When asked how new members can contribute to Fathering Japan's mission, Ando-san suggested the following:

To us they are a valuable source of information. There are two new papas at the board meetings, and during those times I want to talk with them. . . . I want to ask [each] newly joined [papa] about topics like why he joined. . . . Those who now have children who are zero years old, I want to listen to talk about what kinds of issues they are facing. 'Oh, I can use that in my next talk.' Newcomers are a treasure box of new material. [Ando-san laughs.]

While the utility of new members is apparent to those running the nonprofit organization, new members' value is perhaps less apparent to the newcomers themselves. These participants' awareness about how individuals can contribute concretely to social change was lower than I expected initially. In my interviews, many members who were not *riji* articulated the belief that Fathering Japan is working to change society, but they did not explain how they personally factor into the equation.

For example, Handa-san, the 46-year-old father of a six-year-old son and seven-year-old daughter, was working as a salaryman at the time I spoke to him. Despite his membership in Fathering Japan for five to six years, Handa-san's stoic appearance and taciturnity stood in stark

contrast to the nonprofit's emphasis on smiling. However, his demeanor immediately became warmer when interacting with children—carrying them around, placing them on his lap, or giving them a marker to play with. At those times, he cracked a smile.

Like many other interviewees, he said that a good father is one who is active in both the workplace and the household. Handa-san explicitly framed such dual participation as *gimu*,⁸¹ an obligation or duty that one acquires as a consequence of living. Additionally, he saw no difference in the roles played by mothers and fathers; he strongly insisted there was fundamentally no point in even making a distinction between the two. Comments like this suggest a different mindset from those of the men in Doucet's (2006) account of Canadian fathers who were primary caregivers at the time of her study. Specifically, Doucet found that while the Canadian fathers may have reconstructed and re-envisioned their masculinities to incorporate caregiving practices, they continued to insist that fathers and mothers are fundamentally different existences to their children, thereby answering the question posed by Doucet in the title of her book "*Do Men Mother?*"

Handa-san found Fathering Japan after searching the Web, and he joined because "it seemed interesting"—not an uncommon response by many of my interlocutors, who initially joined out of curiosity but who later committed themselves wholeheartedly to the organization. When asked why he continued to participate, he bluntly replied that "I don't have any particular reason to leave." Perhaps sensing my dissatisfaction with this answer, he then continued by explaining that affiliating with different organizations outside the workplace is enjoyable, and through such affiliations one can acquire different kinds of information and interact with many

⁸¹ 義務 (*gimu*).

different kinds of people, both of which lead to greater flexibility in the way one thinks. Despite this answer, earlier in our interview he had explained that he was “taking a break” from his local neighborhood association because of all of the social expectations involved.

When I asked Handa-san about Fathering Japan’s expectations for participants and the types of people it hopes to attract to events, he appeared genuinely at a loss about how to respond. Finally, after some thought, he replied that from Fathering Japan’s perspective, events provide opportunities to encourage fathers to make changes in their patterns of conduct and thought. However, Handa-san articulated no expectations—self-imposed or otherwise—attendant upon him or other members who participate in Fathering Japan.

Thus, according to Handa-san, influence at Fathering Japan is unidirectional: members learn from the nonprofit, but they do not significantly affect the nonprofit’s operations, let alone society as a whole. Handa-san expressed his own agency by joining Fathering Japan, and he agreed with the nonprofit’s goals. However, Handa-san had not made any special efforts to further these objectives. Instead, he saw Fathering Japan as a conduit of information and a pathway to personal growth. Many other members also articulated to me this common rhetoric: Fathering Japan offers a road to greater self-knowledge and flexible thinking.

This portrait of the relationship between the nonprofit and its membership contradicts the views articulated by the *riji*, who explicitly maintained that the membership fee is designed to filter out people unwilling to work on behalf of Fathering Japan. (See Chapter 4.) Therefore, there appears to be a disjuncture between many members’ understanding of their own participation and the *riji*’s conceptualization of the members’ roles.

After giving a presentation on my research at a Fathering Japan event in Osaka in 2019, the moderators gave me the opportunity to pose questions to the roughly 30 people in the audience. When I asked the men and women present whether they considered themselves *katsudōka*,⁸² or activists, only three men raised their hands. The first stated that he was attempting to change perceptions of parenting through photography: he takes and disseminates pictures of parents and their children. The second said that he gives books on child care to acquaintances who have become new parents, thereby engaging in educational outreach. The last man replied that he just “somehow” considers himself a *katsudōka*, prompting laughter from the other audience members.

In the English language, the word *activist* sometimes has a broad meaning, leading to disagreement about who qualifies as an activist. For example, some people call themselves activists but limit their activity to a few social media posts, likes, or tweets—a practice that gave rise to the term *slacktivism*, referring to people who support causes online in a way that involves minimal effort or risk. However, according to the *Merriam Webster Collegiate Dictionary*, an activist is “a person who uses or supports strong actions (such as public protests) in support of or opposition to one side of a controversial issue” (2020). In Japanese, a *katsudōka* may be generally defined as “someone who is engaged in a political movement” (The Asahi Shimbun Company 2020).⁸³

According to both definitions, many fathers at Fathering Japan may qualify as *katsudōka*. First, Fathering Japan is part of Japan’s parenting movement, a political movement with diverse

⁸² 活動家 (*katsudōka*).

⁸³ Perhaps the response would have been slightly different if I had used the word *akutibisto*, or “activist,” which has a trendier connotation than *katsudōka* does. On the other hand, *akutibisto* can imply faddishness and superficiality to some.

aims and consisting of mostly decentralized networks that seek to improve societal conditions for the sake of the family. Second, many members of Fathering Japan attempt to spend more time with their families, even though traditional notions of hegemonic masculinity and work culture dictate that they should instead spend most of their waking hours at work.

Men's attempts to spend more time with their families can involve risk, especially if the fathers' superiors and coworkers are not sympathetic to these men's values. Men who attempt to achieve some measure of work-life-balance may be harassed at work, passed over for promotions, awarded undesirable tasks, or even fired. Consequently, any individual who is willing to put their family's livelihood on the line to fulfill their personal values, even if they successfully manage work expectations and face negligible consequences, is implicitly making a political statement via the way they live their lives. This is not to say that Fathering Japan members necessarily face great peril in the workplace; most carefully push the boundaries of acceptable work practices, but their actions involve a degree of risk to their professional advancement. (See Chapter 7.)

Although much of the sociological and political theory on activism originates in research on Western societies, those ideas also apply in some ways to activism in Japan. Like activists elsewhere, the members of Fathering Japan share an identity based on common goals, interests, and a "collective oppositional consciousness" (Taylor 1989, 771; Taylor and Whittier 1992). In this case, the activists position themselves against still-dominant societal beliefs about gender-appropriate parenting, work, and household practices. Similar to my findings at Fathering Japan, the research of McGarty et al. determined that most individuals involved in mass movements in a

Western context would strongly reject the label *activist*, and the authors conclude that “the participants are not so much activists as supporters of that cause” (2009, 845).

Given the characteristics of Fathering Japan’s members, we should adopt a subtler understanding of the nature of activism by members of this Japanese nonprofit. First, my asking the entire audience about their activism may have impeded some individuals from speaking out. Depending on context, *katsudōka* can exhibit selflessness or outspokenness, and a person’s interpretation of activism may differ depending on whether they believe a societal problem needs fixing, or whether they accept the status quo and see activists as making an issue out of nothing. Hence, even at Fathering Japan, individuals may be loath to identify as *katsudōka* without knowing how the rest of the audience would respond.

Further, individuals’ self-identifying as *katsudōka* may not be as important to our understanding Fathering Japan attendees as is our pinpointing accomplishments arising from the attendees’ actual practices. Even if individuals in Japan’s parenting movement do not necessarily see themselves as *katsudōka*, they nevertheless perform as such. They make statements about their beliefs in one-on-one and group conversations, through social media—slacktivism aside, social media is the new frontier for social movements in the digital age (Svensson et al. 2015)—and in the ways they live their lives. The word *katsudōka* may not describe members of Fathering Japan accurately, but members certainly engage in *katsudōka*-like activities.

Kojikara Nippon’s Alternate, Business-Oriented Model for Changing Society

As mentioned earlier, my network at Fathering Japan put me in contact me with many other nonprofits that also cover issues of social concern relating to families. However, time

constraints and these organizations' less central position in the parenting movement as nonprofits led me to prioritize Fathering Japan and also to extend my fieldwork to smaller fathering groups situated in residential communities; Fathering Japan strongly encourages event participants to become involved locally. (See Chapter 5.) Nevertheless, one of the nonprofits with which I had contact bears mentioning: Kojikara Nippon,⁸⁴ or Children's Power Japan, in many ways serves as a foil to Fathering Japan in its size, topics of interest, and business model. Several prominent members of Fathering Japan, including individuals from the board of directors, are members and leaders of Kojikara Nippon. In particular, Kawashima-san—one of the leaders of Fathering Japan's IkuBoss Project—is the head of Kojikara Nippon. For this reason, some events hosted by Fathering Japan are also jointly sponsored by Kojikara Nippon, and Fathering Japan advertises Kojikara Nippon events even when Fathering Japan is not directly involved.

Smaller and less influential than Fathering Japan, Kojikara Nippon hosts a narrower range of activities that only occasionally deal with issues of child care and gender equality. With the broadly defined goal of changing society using the power of children, much of Kojikara Nippon's attention is focused on activities that are only tangentially connected to parenting. According to the affable Miyamura-san, a member of both Fathering Japan and Kojikara Nippon, such activities usually involve letting children take responsibility for business-related projects. The way that Kojikara Nippon structures its activities is similar to the methods of Japan's schooling system, where students are permitted to make choices within a broad framework controlled by teachers (LeTendre 2000). For example, as Miyamura-san reported, Kojikara Nippon members supported a group of children who traveled to Tokyo to sell local products from

⁸⁴ コヂカラ・ニッポン (Kojikara Nippon).

Okinawa. Kojikara members also assisted a group of junior high school students from Akita prefecture in developing a product using lavender.

Proponents of Kojikara Nippon believe that children's imaginations and lack of preconceptions will allow them to change society in profitable ways not considered by adults. Hayashida-san, who is also part of Kojikara Nippon, told me the story of how her son's elementary school collaborated with a company that makes ice cream-filled puff pastries. Students designed the product packages, deciding on the color red. Adults initially suggested that white or light blue would be more appropriate colors because they better suggest the cooling image of ice cream. However, the students insisted on red, and to everyone's pleasant surprise, the product sold extremely well. As this story and many other examples illustrate, Kojikara Nippon links economic profit to its concept of the best way to change society.

In addition to differing from Fathering Japan in ideology and focus, Kojikara Nippon contrasts with the larger nonprofit in that it holds events less frequently, perhaps a result of fewer members and more limited resources. Ironically, despite Kojikara's business-oriented mentality and the fact that members are involved in selling products, the group's revenue stream is insufficient to fund many activities: the money generated is not theirs to keep, but returns to the groups with which Kojikara Nippon works. While he was vague about how the nonprofit does procure its funds, Miyamura-san indicated that a small but inadequate number of individual donations may be used to partially cover Kojikara's operating costs. Miyamura-san struggled to explain why Kojikara Nippon's finances were tight, initially trying to frame the issue in a positive manner. According to Miyamura-san, earning "money [for Kojikara Nippon] is not the objective of the NPO." However, he later expressed contradictory sentiments:

We [at Kojikara Nippon] want our projects to earn a profit in the next three years. Up until now, we've done many different events. We've done events, but we don't have an arrangement for putting money into the NPO. . . . In the case of Fathering Japan, lectures—if we're talking about ikuboss training—people can receive money for the lecturer's fee. But right now, we're just volunteers in the case of Kojikara.

Consistent with Kawashima-san's philosophy, Miyamura-san expressed a desire to run Kojikara Nippon like a business. Under Japanese law, any profits generated by nonprofits' activities cannot be redistributed to stakeholders. However, the law does not prohibit remuneration for nonprofit activities; for example, Fathering Japan's more successful business model allows its lecturers to be generously compensated for giving presentations. Miyamura-san would like Kojikara to be able, at a minimum, to cover transportation costs to event venues. For this reason, he differentiates a paid participant from an unpaid volunteer, with a strong preference for the former.

In contrast to Kojikara Nippon, Fathering Japan receives its revenue from individual and corporate donations, membership fees, local government and private subsidies, lecture and seminar fees, research grants, interest from various bank accounts, and money marked for the express purpose of spreading public awareness about child care. As another individual informed me, Fathering Japan lecturers, including *riji* and prominent members, are well subsidized by the nonprofit for their time—enviably so in comparison to those working at other organizations. Still, only a few speakers at Fathering Japan are able to make a living off their nonprofit

activities. What other income-earning activities these speakers engage in was not a topic of discussion, though some may rely on their spouses, while others appear to work as company consultants.

The philosophy behind Kojikara Nippon appears to be shaped partly by Kawashima-san's belief in business and profit. Although currently the head of Kojikara and a riji at Fathering Japan, Kawashima-san's life path before joining the nonprofit scene is the stuff of salaryman dreams. His resume lists his degree from the prestigious Keio University, his work for the Mitsui conglomerate, his presidency of a company listed on the stock exchange, and his service as an advisor for Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. Born in 1964, Kawashima-san is one of the older members of Fathering Japan's leadership, and he seems to possess a mindset influenced by the salaryman construct, which he nevertheless harnesses in the service of Fathering Japan's goals. In other words, much of his authority in the IkuBoss Project (discussed more extensively in Chapter 4) derives from his having occupied company positions of power that allowed him to enact a form of benevolent paternalism and thus to serve as a benevolent boss. While Kawashima-san is highly respected for his accomplishments, interviewees often implied that Kawashima still thinks and acts in traditional ways that do not consistently or perfectly match Fathering Japan's philosophy. (Unfortunately, I was unable to interview Kawashima-san himself.)⁸⁵ Given the guiding influence of Kawashima-san—someone who formerly thrived in the salaryman culture of Japan—on Kojikara Nippon, it is ironic that the organization is less successful than Fathering Japan.

⁸⁵ Kawashima-san agreed to participate in an interview when I asked him in person. However, he did not respond to my follow-up message.

Fathering Japan proclaims on its now-defunct English webpage, “We are more than just a not-for-profit organization. We strive to be a Social Business Company: constantly battling uphill to change tomorrow for the better” (Fathering Japan 2010). Indeed, Fathering Japan possesses elements of a business that sells services (see Chapter 4), a nonprofit organization that contributes to the public good, and a religion that proselytizes about men’s adopting fatherhood-based masculinities. With various branches, affiliates, and subgroups throughout Japan, Fathering Japan targets regional and niche markets of fathers with young children and expectant fathers, and it encourages them to break with some aspects of hegemonic masculinity. As the next chapter will make clear, Fathering Japan’s emphasis on smiling plays a key role in the nonprofit’s attempts to shift Japanese masculinity toward empathy and expressiveness.

Chapter 3: Analyzing the Philosophy Behind Fathering Japan’s Educational Outreach

Section 1: “Let’s Increase the Number of Smiling Fathers” and Fathering Japan’s Other Catchphrases

How Fathering Japan’s Philosophy Arose from the Playfulness of an Amateur Musical Band

Smiling and the positive expressions of emotion are key elements of Fathering Japan’s message. In fact, Fathering Japan’s semi-mythic origins lie rooted in the art of smiling. Compiling the tale as I heard it from various individuals, I learned that a group of four fathers—including Ando-san—formed the amateur band Papa’s E-hon Raibu (Papa’s Picture Book Live)⁸⁶ in 2003,⁸⁷ which performs children’s songs. The band members read picture books to children during concerts, both as an enjoyable hobby and as a means to make their audiences smile. While some of the members have come and gone over time and between performances, the band was and is precisely what its name suggests: the literal translation of *e-hon* is “picture books,” and *raibu* or “live” is Japanese-made English referring to a “live performance.”

Papa’s E-hon Raibu had a blast strumming their guitars and banging their drums in time with the story’s narration. Eventually, these dads went on tour, their concert halls the local libraries where parents would bring their children to see the four perform. The band members even published a book pairing specific Japanese-language picture books with suggested rock-and-roll music albums that parents could play in the background as they read to their children

⁸⁶ パパ’s 絵本ライブ (Papa’s E-hon Raibu).

⁸⁷ Papa’s E-hon Raibu is also known as Papa’s E-hon Project.

(Ando 2008). For example, the book suggests the following pairings: *Papa Went with the Circus* with Queen's *A Night at the Opera*; *The Robber's Great Escape Plan!* with Journey's *Escape*; *The Man Who Walked Between the Towers* with U2's *The Joshua Tree*; *King Bounce the 1st* with Van Halen's *1984*; *Magic Word* with Earth, Wind & Fire's *All 'n All*; and *Fireboat: The Heroic Adventures of the John J. Harvey* with a Japan-exclusive remastered version of Kiss's debut album titled *Messenger from Hell*.

Soon, Papa's E-hon Raibu recognized a conundrum at their performances. Because they knew that their songs generally conveyed high levels of excitement, the band's members found it strange that occasionally they would spy children in their audiences who did not smile at their antics. According to the band's foundation myth, the members eventually realized that behind every expressionless child were parents who also were not enjoying themselves. The band members reasoned that the mothers were probably tired, stressed, or in conflict with their partners. Because of their own experiences as fathers and sons in Japanese families, the band members also hypothesized that stern-faced fathers fundamentally lacked the ability to express happy emotions, an incapacity they considered a problem. In another version of the story, the fathers of the children in the audiences did not accompany their children to the concerts, but instead they were waiting outside the venues for the duration of the performances.

Based on their observations, the band members developed a theory: smiling fathers—men who enjoy themselves and are able to express this satisfaction adeptly—facilitate smiling families. Conversely, men who do not smile may drag down the mood of their families. Children grow up watching their parents, and when they see their dads trudging through daily life, unable

to enjoy themselves, they may also become adults who are unable to find pleasure in their activities. Their mental health may consequently suffer.

To remedy what they saw as the absence of smiling fathers in Japan, the band members decided to form Fathering Japan, thus creating a place where men could learn how to emote and to parent. I could not ascertain the degree to which the Fathering Japan origin story is an accurate history, an oversimplification, or a founding myth. However, the truth behind the tale does not matter. It is a story that Fathering Japan members tell themselves, and, in doing so, they shape their perception of the nonprofit and its goals. The legend also gives participants purpose, and it influences their practices to a certain extent; smiles and laughter are fairly common during events at the appropriate moments, although more formal events can occasionally have an air of gravity.

The band still performs publicly, and I had the opportunity to see it in action and to witness the members' infectious enthusiasm:

In a wide room normally used for lectures and formal events, the members of the band Papa's E-hon Raibu stand and sit with their backs to a wall-mounted projector screen hanging in a shallow alcove. Within this alcove are also propped an array of children's picture books. Portable speakers and microphones serve as the sound system; bright fluorescent lights provide artificial lighting for the windowless, enclosed space.

I have met all of the band members individually at other Fathering Japan events, but this concert is my first time seeing them perform as part of Papa's E-hon Raibu. Ando-san is on vocals and guitar, wearing a partially unbuttoned white dress shirt and tight black slacks. His sunglasses are, as usual, perched atop his head. As he sings, he bounces up and down to the beat,

occasionally shuffling his feet. To his right is Kawachi-san in a plaid shirt, his body positioned in an s-shape (back hunched over, hips slightly jutting forward) as he strums a ukulele. Sitting at Ando-san's immediate left is Tabata-san, an extremely personable stay-at-home dad who must have the widest grin of anyone at Fathering Japan. Wearing a baggy, short-sleeved shirt and comfortable-looking jeans, Tabata-san holds a picture book, flipping through the pages in time with the song. Finally, rounding out the team is Yamada-san from the Fathering Japan Tour at the forest lodge (see Chapter 2); he is seated to Tabata-san's left, beating a bongo drum positioned on the floor between his legs. Yamada-san wears a slight grin, but he behaves less outrageously than I remember from the tour.

A group of children sits on the gray carpet in front of the band; the boys and girls range in age from toddlers to preschoolers and kindergarteners. The children are dressed in a variety of colorful shirts, skirts, and pants; a few have taken their shoes off. There is almost no space between the musicians and their audience, and several times during the performance the boundary between the two is crossed by boys seeking attention from the band members. Maintaining a much greater distance from their children, parents socialize closer to the back of the room, or else they sit in rows of red plastic chairs observing the show.

I enter the room in the middle of the band's performance of the classic picture book *The Three Billy Goats Gruff* (Asbjørnsen, Moe, and Brown 1965). The song follows the book's basic story, but it has original lyrics that make frequent use of the onomatopoeic words for "with a clatter" (*garagara*)⁸⁸ and "rattling" (*gatagoto*),⁸⁹ as well as *don*⁹⁰ ("bang," "thud").⁹¹ As I watch,

⁸⁸ ガラガラ (*garagara*).

⁸⁹ ガタゴト (*gatagoto*).

⁹⁰ ドン (*don*).

⁹¹ Readers might want to try to vocalize these onomatopoeic words as they are quite pleasant to say and hear.

Ando-san sings, “Three goats went *garagara don* to go eat mountain blades of grass.” His knee bouncing up and down in time with the rhythm, Tabata holds the picture book toward the seated children and points repeatedly and emphatically at the goats on the pages, showing the children where to look and keeping their attention. Ando-san continues the song, “Next, *garagara don* went the medium-sized goat, his legs went *gatagoto* as he crossed the bridge.”

Abruptly, the music stops, and in the silence Tabata-san’s deep voice suddenly rings through the room, articulating the words of a very disgruntled troll: “This is no good! Who is making my bridge go *gatagoto gatagoto*?” “Three, four!” calls out Ando-san in English, and the music resumes as he takes over the role of the troll from Tabata-san, exclaiming, “Who is making my bridge go?” “*Garagara don!*” calls out the rest of the band. “Who is making *gatagoto* sounds?” “*Garagara don!*” call out the band members and the children in the audience. “Who? Who?!” “*Garagara don!*” “I’ll eat you up!”⁹² cries out Ando-san in a shrill voice. “*Garagara don! Garagara don!*” repeats everyone in the room.

The song continues: just like the smaller goat before it, the medium-sized goat negotiates safe passage by suggesting that the troll eat the next, larger goat slated to cross the bridge. Tabata-san turns the page to a depiction of the biggest of the three goats (“oh! It’s the big one!”), and the troll prepares to eat it. However, this encounter does not end well for the troll. Following the same *garagara don* chorus as before, the band switches to a chorus of onomatopoeic words reflecting the biggest goat’s unceremonious dismemberment of the greedy troll: *barabara*⁹³

⁹² 貴様を食べてやる！ (kisama wo tabete yaru!).

⁹³ バラバラ (barabara).

(scattering, dispersal) and *guchagucha*⁹⁴ (pulpy, sippy). At this last chorus, a few boys stand up and dance, hopping from one leg to the other and twirling around in circles.

The story ends with the goats reaching their long-awaited mountain grass. After Ando-san strums a few final chords and calls out “thank you!” first in Japanese and then in English, a few boys swarm forward. Other boys and the girls in the audience remain seated. They attempt to take the book from Tabata-san (who has just finished twirling it in his hands), but the band points them to the books lining the alcove behind them. One boy jumps onto a chair and then onto Tabata-san’s back for a piggyback ride, but the rest line the front examining the picture books. Ando-san makes conversation, speaking as if to the children, but really speaking to Yamada-san. Kawachi-san quickly leaves the front of the room for the back; a couple of fathers come forward to take photos with their cell phones.

Measured by any yardstick, Papa’s E-hon Raibu is simply an amateur band that performs for fun. While clearly practiced and in sync with one another, the members lack the polished musicianship of a more serious or semi-professional band. Yet it is precisely this homemade aesthetic and the band’s performance of simple but catchy tunes—I found myself humming the Three Billy Goats Gruff song for the next few days—that renders the band suitable for an audience of children. Moreover, the band members clearly enjoy performing and conveying their enthusiasm to their audiences.

⁹⁴ グチャグチャ (*guchagucha*).

Toward a Smiling Japan

Capturing the core of its mission, Fathering Japan's motto is "let's increase the number of smiling fathers." The motto echoes the nonprofit's origin story and pervades many of the lessons the nonprofit has to teach. Part of Fathering Japan's goal is to open men's gender performances to include a greater range of emotions and expressivity. The nonprofit accomplishes this principal mission in a number of ways, including by modeling such behavior and by offering lectures explicitly designed to champion the lifestyle and personal benefits of smiling and laughing.

One can see men modeling such emotions from the moment one walks through the door of an event's venue. Regular members gather together, socializing, joking, and enjoying themselves. On some occasions, children are present, and they run rampant around the room. These children freely approach fathers who are not necessarily their own, but whom they know will gladly entertain them. Newcomers—as well as those tired from a long day at work—often sit by themselves, unable or unwilling to mix with regular attendees. However, the camaraderie of regular participants is likely the sort of thing that newcomers desire in their own lives, and it constitutes a selling point for Fathering Japan.

At a Fathering Japan event, one can witness the performances of all kinds of facial expressions and laughter: there are the grins and smirks of individuals who frequently make smart remarks; the laughter of individuals in the middle of making each other crack up; the beaming faces of those discovering that they are genuinely having fun in the company of others; the ready and relaxed smiles of members used to enjoying themselves; the upturned mouth of people who are slightly amused; and the winces of some attendees who may be trying too hard to

move muscles that they are unaccustomed to using. Of course, participants perform their smiles in specific contexts, following the flow of the events. Participants often treat the lecture, workshop, or panel with the seriousness it deserves, although an engaging speaker can rouse the audience to laughter and good humor with jokes and amusing anecdotes. The beginning and end of an event, as well as the after-event *nomikai*, are the times when smiles most proliferate.

“Japanese Men Are Bad at Smiling”

One of the first events that I attended during my fieldwork was a so-called *papa juku*⁹⁵ (cram school) for fathers of young children. One of the topics for the first session was the importance of smiling authentically when parenting children. The following describes my impressions of both the messenger and the audience as I watched this workshop in Tokyo take place:

The speaker—Kozaki-Sensei—is a professor who researches early childhood education, child-care support, and fatherhood. Hailing from Kansai, and he uses his region’s reputation for comedy and expressiveness to promote his message about men’s lackluster smiling skills and their need to improve. The perfect speaker for a lecture on emoting, Kozaki-Sensei has hands that move constantly and sometimes wildly as he talks, and he grins as he cracks jokes at the expense of himself and the audience of approximately 25 fathers. Clearly used to teaching, Kozaki-Sensei is not afraid to reprimand his adult male audience as a Japanese high school

⁹⁵ 塾 (*juku*).

teacher might rebuke one of his students: “Idiot! That wasn’t what I asked.”⁹⁶ Nevertheless, Kozaki-Sensei possesses a charisma that draws responses out of his initially reluctant audience.

Kozaki-Sensei reminds the audience about the performances associated with hegemonic masculinity, although he does not specifically name this concept. He cites the well-known alcohol advertisement that proclaims “real men shut up and drink Sapporo beer” and that features the famous actor Mifune Toshiro, most known for playing samurai and other manly characters in the films produced by the renowned director Kurosawa Akira. By invoking this example, Kozaki-Sensei contrasts stern-faced Mifune with the kind of smiling man that *Fathering Japan* is trying to cultivate. Kozaki-Sensei notes that this silent-man stereotype is not true in the case of men from Kansai like himself, however, because they never stop talking. The audience laughs at this joke.

To drive home his point about Japanese stoicism and masculinity, Kozaki-Sensei attempts to elicit “artificial” laughter from the event’s male participants. During his presentation, he instructs everyone in the room to laugh on the count of three: “3 . . . 2 . . . 1 . . . laugh.” He exerts some effort to prompt people to participate, but after a few false starts characterized by hesitant laughter, people finally follow Kozaki-Sensei’s instructions. After the professor surveys the entire room, silence returns, and he sagely concludes that everyone looked as if they were overreacting; according to Kozaki-Sensei, the audience had snarled rather than laughed.

From where I am sitting at the back of this *papa juku*, I cannot verify Kozaki-Sensei’s observation about participants’ general appearance during their apparently insincere response to

⁹⁶ A performance that aligns with hegemonic masculinity.

his directions, nor can I judge whether attendees had looked as if they were baring their teeth.⁹⁷ Nevertheless, I recognize that the laughter had sounded forced and awkward. Further, the people around me seem to accept Kozaki-Sensei's judgment—whether because he is an expert on a body of research that informs his arguments, because his observation seems observably true, or because his views fit into their beliefs about masculinity.

Kozaki-Sensei continues his line of inquiry, asking the men in the audience if their families perceive them as scary. A few individuals raise their hands, and one by one he asks each volunteer to explain. One man, for example, says that he knows that he appears threatening when he gets angry at his older son for hitting his younger son.

Continuing, Kozaki-Sensei uses an example straight from developmental psychology to underscore the importance of displaying positive emotions to children. He draws on an easel pad an imitation of a seemingly haphazard scribble created by children less than one year old; four circles that represent the “mama, papa, me, and grandpa” of a one- to two-year-old's artwork; and, finally, a big smiley face with tiny, stick-like arms and legs emerging directly out of the head—the work of a three- to four-year-old child. He points out that in the last picture, the head and the body are one and the same because three to four-year-old children are constantly monitoring and imitating the faces of those around them. Expressions are the most important features of the human body to young children, and so if fathers frown frequently or consistently,

⁹⁷ At the time, I was still relatively unknown to Fathering Japan and to the network of organizations through which I moved during my time in Japan, so leaders instructed me to sit at the back during this session. At later events, I was able to sit wherever I wanted, and people began to expect my presence and even to comment about my absence when I could not attend a particular event.

children will immediately absorb their fathers' seeming displeasure. Conversely, if fathers smile sincerely, their children will learn to smile as well.⁹⁸

Here, Kozaki-Sensei—knowledgeable about developmental psychology—uses language and ideas suggesting that he is drawing upon the concept of mirroring: the tendency of people to mimic unconsciously the facial expressions, body language, and postures of the people with whom they interact (Chartrand and Bargh 1999). According to psychologists, humans are to a certain extent hardwired to mimic the nonverbal cues of those we engage with in a way that builds empathy and social rapport (Iacoboni 2009). Kozaki-Sensei argues that smiles are contagious, so if fathers want their children to smile, they should make a concerted effort to smile more often and to smile in a genuine way.

Kozaki-Sensei uses the momentum from his discussion on smiling to ask men some important questions, punctuated by quips that keep his audience entertained. He asks them the following questions: What do your children want to be when they grow up? Who is their favorite fictional character?

Then Kozaki-Sensei gets personal with the audience, asking for a show of hands from fathers who can answer these questions: How tall are your children? (Five men raise their hands.) What are their clothing sizes? (Two raise their hands.) Who is their homeroom teacher? (Eight raise their hands.) How many men are confident that if they say, “Come here,” their children would come flying into their arms?⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Interestingly, mothers' smiles never arose as an issue in Fathering Japan discourse; culturally, the Japanese believe that women are better at emoting than men.

⁹⁹ Kozaki-Sensei does not give his audience time to answer this last question.

The paucity of hands in response to Kozaki-Sensei's questions highlights men's embarrassing lack of knowledge about their own children. Noting the awkward atmosphere, Kozaki-Sensei even comments that there is "a weird vibe" in the room. He concludes his line of questioning by saying, "I understand that you're busy, but try to go all out and play with your kids at least once a week."

From his talk and from later conversations, I discerned that Kozaki-Sensei, who is a *riji* and a regular on the nonprofit lecture circuit, links paternal smiling with child-rearing for two primary reasons. These reasons—the healthy development of children and the cultivation of an enjoyable life for fathers and families—surfaced in the many presentations, workshops, and informal conversations in which I participated during my year of fieldwork in Japan.

Using their children's healthy psychological development as an incentive for fathers to be more open with their feelings, Kozaki-Sensei pushed his male audience to laugh openly and to smile. Laughter and smiling are key characteristics of the masculinities promoted by Fathering Japan and admired by many event participants. As men at Fathering Japan adopt behaviors that today are more closely associated with femininity, they craft new gender identities that problematize the salaryman archetype. Yet it remains to be seen whether such masculinities will mount an actual challenge to the gender status quo, or whether they will ultimately perpetuate existing gender-based power structures by allowing men to engage only in those family-related tasks and performances that they select for themselves.

The second reason for tying smiling to child-rearing—the encouragement of enjoyable activities shared by fathers and children—is part of Fathering Japan's strategy for gently easing men into parental involvement. Characterizing parent-child interaction as enjoyable, endearing,

and smile-inducing sets the bar low for participation in ikuji or child care. When I later pointed out that encouraging fathers to involve themselves in ikuji because playing with kids is “fun” runs the risk of ignoring the stressful and challenging portions of parenting, Fathering Japan members acknowledged this fact but replied that play could lead men to become attached to their children and to eventually find value in less enjoyable actions, such as discipline and labeling school supplies with their children’s names. Fathering Japan thus encourages men to read picture books to their children and to socialize with other fathers in their communities. As I will argue in Chapters 5 and 6, sometimes this strategy works, but sometimes men become too engrossed in having fun, a tendency that often characterizes local gatherings of fathers.

Unlike the overwhelming majority of community-based organizations discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, Fathering Japan does deal occasionally with such serious topics as scolding and child abuse, excessive overtime in the workplace, and “living dead” spousal relationships, or those in which a husband and wife remain together despite having no life left in their relationship. In this way, Fathering Japan tempers its focus on the centrality of fun in parent-child relationships by also attending to social issues of a less frivolous nature, though it does not address these problems as frequently as some members would prefer—a criticism discussed in the next chapter.

Use of Fathering Japan’s Motto and Catchphrases to Engage Fathers

Fathering Japan’s motto of “let’s increase the number of smiling fathers” is effective precisely due to its ambiguity. An increase in smiling or, alternatively, laughing within the Japanese family is a simple, benign goal that most individuals with whom I spoke agreed is

worthwhile. The phrase's intentional vagueness offers the nonprofit organization flexibility in how it will accomplish its stated purpose—and indeed what type of future Fathering Japan envisions. While members often repeat the catchphrase with a practiced cadence that signals conviction and familiarity, the strategies that Fathering Japan implements to achieve its goal, as the next chapter discusses, have led to dissent and occasionally pushed individuals to leave the organization.

As mentioned above, the strong focus on “fun” at Fathering Japan is designed to encourage fathers into getting involved in the child-care process. Reading picture books to children is one of the best entry points, and the musical band that gave rise to Fathering Japan is a prime example of how this tool works. My interlocutors characterized Japanese men as fond of reading silly, nonsensical books to their children and Japanese women as preferring stories that feature a moral or an educational lesson. The interlocutors' distinctions between book choices thus betrayed yet another not-so-subtle assumption about gender differences that permeates even the best efforts of Fathering Japan. However, according to the nonprofit, once fathers begin regularly interacting with their young children in such meaningful ways as reading any type of picture book, there is a high probability that the men's papa switch may flip.

Papa suicchi,¹⁰⁰ or “papa switch,” a term used by Fathering Japan and the parenting movement, refers to the instant that something in a man's mindset changes and he truly realizes that he is a father with all the attendant responsibilities. Like a simple light switch, the connection is open or closed; there is no in-between position. A flipped switch connects to active

¹⁰⁰ パパスイッチ (papa suicchi).

parenting; and therefore much of the discussion at Fathering Japan revolves around how to flip the papa switch, as the methods vary from person to person.

For some men, the switch flips on early: when they see the ultrasound images of the fetuses their partners are carrying, when they feel their soon-to-be-born children kick in their wives' bellies, or when their babies first cry. Kawachi-san of the band Papa's E-hon Raibu, whom I interviewed, said that he "hated" children until the moment he first cradled his child in his arms, and something inside him changed. For other men, the switch is not triggered until later: when their children first call them "papa," or when mothers are absent due to extenuating circumstances and fathers must assume all responsibility for their children—at least for a short time.

"Papa switch" is a term that features in blog posts, news sites, YouTube videos, and government websites. Discourse on the papa switch often echoes Ortner's observation (1972) that cultures around the world perceive women as closer to nature than men. Compared to the "natural" process of becoming a mother, the necessity of triggering a "papa switch" connotes a degree of artificiality. Fathering Japan members suggest that a woman has an embodied experience as the baby grows in her stomach and that the reality of these physical changes causes them to assume gradually the identity of "mother." However, unlike women, men do not experience obvious physical changes that force them to confront the fact that they are or will become parents. Instead, as the papa switch metaphor suggests, men's self-awareness as fathers depends upon an external stimulus. Once the switch is triggered, men become *papa robots*¹⁰¹ capable of doing any kind of parenting except breastfeeding (Oota 2011); the robot metaphor

¹⁰¹ パパロボット (papa robotto).

recalls how the Japanese salaryman traditionally treats his body like a machine that his company can use until it breaks.¹⁰² Japan's papa switch concept also parallels the similar Western tendency of conceptualizing the male body as mechanized, an ideology promoted by such popular culture products as movies and boys' toys (Messner 2007; Varney 2002).

Similarly, another technology-based phrase often used at Fathering Japan is the assertion that fathers need to "update their OS" or "replace their OS." The operating system (OS) refers to men's mindset and self-image about fatherhood. According to Fathering Japan, most men have an outdated OS that limits paternal responsibilities to providing financially for their families. By updating or replacing this OS, fathers increase the scope of what they can and should do for their children and families.

Ken-san on Smiling Fathers

Although no one with whom I spoke took issue with the goal of increasing the number of smiles in Japanese society, Ken-san, a principal interlocutor, objected to how some speakers at the nonprofit conveyed messages about this goal. After one large event in which a riji addressed the audience regarding the importance of smiles, the always analytical Ken-san offered the following perspective:

“[The riji] told us that you ‘should’ smile. If you’re in situation where you can naturally smile, isn’t that good enough? When he says that ‘you should do this’ or ‘doing so is

¹⁰² Interestingly, Japanese popular culture often depicts cyborg bodies as female (Orbaugh 2007).

good,’ when you have to force the smiles out . . . I don’t like it. [Ken-san laughs.] I feel resistance, I think that it becomes harder to do so.”

Here, Ken-san contrasted mandatory, even scripted smiles with “natural” smiles that arise from enjoyable circumstances. He perceived that by directing the audience to smile, the *riji* was actually creating an environment that is counterproductive to the “natural” smile, which Ken-san later described as originating in an inner excitement that uncontrollably wells up. In other parts of his interview with me, Ken-san revealed a general opposition to authority, which perhaps helps to explain his objection to the *riji*’s phrasing. However, he explained his knee-jerk reaction to the board director’s “should” as a product of Japanese culture: a resistance to the imputation of duty or obligation implied in the *riji*’s formal way of saying *beki da*¹⁰³ (“should”), which is more accurately a phrase positioned somewhere between the English words *should* and *must*. In short, Ken-san rejected the *riji*’s assumption of authority over his life as implied by this particular usage of “should.” Notably, he punctuated his entire narrative with laughter at himself for feeling and thinking this way. I sensed that he felt that he was being obstinate and that his laughter was a form of self-ridicule or an attempt to hedge his statements.

However, Ken-san agreed with *Fathering Japan*’s assessment of Japanese men in general and with its broader goals for society:

Japanese men are poor at making facial expressions. . . . They have stiff faces. They always look as if they’re angry. Well, if their facial expressions loosen up, if they can

¹⁰³ べきだ (*beki da*).

naturally make these kinds of (smiling) facial expressions, and if the number of people with breathing room increases, the number of open-minded people will also increase.

Interestingly, Ken-san associated expressiveness with open-mindedness; Fathering Japan certainly views men with narrow ideas about their roles in the family as simultaneously a major obstacle to a family-friendly Japan and as the most coveted targets for conversion to involved fatherhood. In Ando-san's words, Fathering Japan wants to reach dads who play pachinko¹⁰⁴ (a form of Japanese gambling that involves a game superficially resembling pinball) and who value “my time” over family time, a priority that is “extremely disappointing.”

Fathering Japan's Need to Further Encourage Men to Display an Emotional Spectrum

The genuine expression of positive emotions are at the center of Fathering Japan's message. In contrast, the *riji* and members rarely discuss family members' need to express or control negative emotions, and they do so only in designated contexts. For example, one talk that I attended on scolding quickly veered into a discussion about child abuse. The event was attended primarily by women and married couples who brought their children,¹⁰⁵ and it was led by a Fathering Japan *riji* who—as a proponent of the Orange Ribbon Campaign against child abuse—has made it her personal mission to push parents to expand the definition of abuse to any form of corporal punishment.¹⁰⁶ The *riji* had her audience workshop the process by which they

¹⁰⁴ パチンコ (pachinko).

¹⁰⁵ I later heard about another event on scolding that was not hosted by Fathering Japan. Apparently, the event was attended by mothers and couples, but not by individual fathers.

¹⁰⁶ Public conversations about child abuse and domestic violence have occurred for years in Japan, often flaring up in response to particular incidents that receive extensive media coverage.

become frustrated with their children. After clarifying the mechanisms behind parents' anger and the types of emotions and thoughts this anger elicits toward their children, she offered alternative practices and even bodily poses that parents could avoid in order to restrain themselves, such as being self-conscious about not clenching one's fists. She counseled parents to provide context by explaining to children the reasons behind their anger, and she cautioned attendees to avoid becoming the kind of parents who reach toward their children, only to see them flinch. Thus, according to this *riji*, parents do not need help in releasing their anger; if anything, they need to learn how to control it.¹⁰⁷

Finally, on occasion, *Fathering Japan* encourages men to express their sorrow. In his lecture and in private conversations, Kozaki-Sensei criticized how gender performances are taught to children and then policed. For example, he talked about how Kansai boys are taught that "crying is bad." On several occasions, I witnessed Ando-san speak about his negative emotions in front of large audiences. He discussed the grief he felt when he was a child witnessing his father's abusive treatment of his mother. Even when the lecture's topic is conducive to such a discussion and the audience is respectful, it takes extraordinary courage to speak about such issues in Japan or anywhere.

In front of a large crowd, Ando-san also once admitted that he weeps in front of his wife. "It's okay for men to cry," he said to the audience assembled. He further mentioned that his children see his conversations with his wife; thus, in front of his children, he models an emotive masculinity that permits the expression of sadness and frustration in addition to happiness. For

¹⁰⁷ Japanese approaches to child rearing have varied over time and according to social status. In medieval Japan, parents adopted a "hands off" approach to child raising. Even during the Tokugawa Period (1600-1868), parents refrained from scolding their children for bad behavior (Frühstück and Walthall 2017).

obvious reasons, “let’s increase the number of crying fathers” is a less appealing catchphrase than is Fathering Japan’s current motto, but this fact does not preclude Fathering Japan from occasionally emphasizing the importance of expressing unhappy emotions in a constructive manner.

Section 2: Gender Ideology and Equality at Fathering Japan

Background

Fathering Japan's message about smiling is a vehicle for conveying ideas about gender ideology discursively connected to a brighter future for Japan, one in which there are better work opportunities for women, increased levels of intimacy experienced by men, and a greater sense of self-fulfillment for both. Yet for all its talk about enjoyment experienced within the family, Fathering Japan also strives to present itself as a professional organization, a potential partner for the corporations interested in workplace reform, and a key player in Japan's parenting movement. Like other actors and organizations involved in the parenting movement, Fathering Japan must contend with the antiquated structures and cultural beliefs that many corporations play a significant role in perpetuating—including the companies that sponsor and collaborate with Fathering Japan. (Chapter 4 discusses both the intersecting and divergent goals of Fathering Japan and its corporate partners.) Such structures and beliefs are increasingly at odds with the needs and desires of Japanese men and women.

A social movement has a realistic opportunity to achieve its goals only when societal shifts create political opportunities, spurring people to organize, providing resources for mobilization, and aligning interpretations of mobilizers' collective identities and vested interests (Pelak, Taylor, and Whittier 2006). Many elements in Japanese society have certainly shifted to generate social concerns that Japan's parenting movement capitalizes upon, including the nation's low birthrate, a shrinking workforce, and the weakened hold of corporate culture on the totality of employees' lives when compared to those elements in Japan before the bursting of the

asset bubble. These concerns have in turn prompted the allocation of government resources and encouraged the development of policies—albeit still uninformed and highly flawed—that seek to address these demographically driven problems.

As Chapter 5 will detail, we can divide the organizations in Japan’s parenting movement into two general categories: those that mostly operate at the regional or national level and those that move at the local level. Fathering Japan pushes its event attendees to get involved in local activities, and those individuals feed the organization a steady stream of information that the nonprofit elevates to national-level discourse. Nonetheless, the two interconnected levels exhibit many differences, including access to financial resources, personnel, activities, and forms of legitimacy. Moreover, espoused gender ideologies can diverge significantly. Fathering Japan’s officially articulated views regarding gender—which demonstrate an overall consistency despite some variation among individual speakers—often contrast with the views on gender expressed by the men of local, less structured fathering groups.

Fathering Japan’s Official Gender Ideology

At its events and in its literature, Fathering Japan argues that men and women fundamentally possess an equal ability to work, perform house chores, and care for children—with the sole exception of breastfeeding. While recognizing that society teaches men gendered practices and values that both physically and emotionally draw them away from their families, Fathering Japan maintains that the situation could be otherwise. In fact, it is more “common sense” and “natural” to act counter to these social norms. A father should have a close connection to his own offspring. Moreover, a sad state of affairs exists when a man does not want to return

home because he has given up trying to communicate with his family. As Ando-san pointed out, even animals go home to eat, rest, and be healed. What, therefore, is the problem with Japanese men?

Fathering Japan articulates this big message both explicitly and more subtly through advice designed to shift event participants' mindsets. For example, Fathering Japan speakers occasionally caution members about vocabulary choices that subtly convey false impressions about their role as parents. The nonprofit explicitly discourages husbands from describing their domestic involvement as a form of assistance. For example, saying, "I'll help you," to one's partner is *NG* or "no good." Chores and child care should be a jointly shared responsibility, and "helping out" implies that women are primarily responsible for such tasks. However, some members privately let slip this ingrained vocabulary of "helping" their wives when I asked them about a father's contributions to child care.

Another "NG" phrase is *kazoku s̄abisu*,¹⁰⁸ or "family service," which is used to describe one-off occasions when fathers spend time with their families during their hours away from work, such as by going out to eat or by visiting an amusement park on the weekend. In Japanese, the English loan word *service* often denotes situations in which something is included as a favor, such as when a shopkeeper adds an extra item to a purchase—free of charge—in order to establish or maintain a good relationship with a customer. Such gestures effectively attempt to curry favor with the customer, who hopefully will patronize the store again in the future or else convey a positive image of the store to other potential customers. Consequently, implicit to the expression *kazoku s̄abisu* is the notion that in interacting with their families, men go beyond

¹⁰⁸ 家族サービス (*kazoku s̄abisu*).

what is necessary and expected of them in their roles as fathers. The men who use this expression do not view spending time with their families on weekends as their responsibility or priority; instead, they view *kazoku sabisu* as a bonus that they give their wives and children.

Beyond asking event participants to question the division of labor in the household, *Fathering Japan* also pushes its audiences to reexamine how parents' ideas about masculinity and femininity influence their children's growth. During an event with an eclectic panel of speakers and topics, "superwoman" Hayashida-san challenged the audience with an interesting anecdote. She started by speaking on the importance of identity, then presented a slide featuring a picture of "Crazy Hair Day" at an American school to illustrate how a country that claims to value diversity encourages children to experiment with their identity. Showing pictures of her son, Hayashida-san explained that he once asked for pink *uwabaki*,¹⁰⁹ or "indoor shoes." In Japan, after arriving at school, children place their outdoor shoes in a locker and switch to their *uwabaki*. She bought the pink shoes after checking with her son and verifying, "Are you sure?" Her son's friends teased him, telling him that pink was "lame," and he returned home and complained to Hayashida-san. The teasing continued for half a semester, but the next year he again asked for pink shoes. His friends made fun of him for a week this time, but then they left him alone. The next photo in Hayashida-san's slideshow featured her son holding his *uwabaki* and smiling.

To provide context for Hayashida-san's story: Japanese school regulations in the past specified gender-appropriate colors for school-mandated items. Across Japan, boys were to carry black backpacks and girls to carry red backpacks (Benjamin 1998); children were also required

¹⁰⁹ 上履き (*uwabaki*).

to purchase gender-specific indoor shoes, such as shoes with green linings or blue toecaps for boys and red linings or red toecaps for girls (Cave 2007; Tsuneyoshi 2001). The teacher-initiated movement to allow children to choose the colors of their school supplies began in the late 1990s; the Japanese government revised the national curriculum to place a greater emphasis on gender equality in elementary school and junior high school in 2002, and in high school in 2003 (Tsuneyoshi 2001). Nevertheless, allowing grandparents, parents, and children to select the colors of their school supplies did not mean that gendered preferences suddenly changed or disappeared. Many boys still carry black backpacks, while girls still carry red.

Yet despite gender color preferences, Hayashida-san was willing to allow her son to express himself via a highly unconventional color choice. She asked the audience the following: If your son wanted a pink backpack, could you respect his request? If your son wanted to wear a skirt to school, or if your daughter wanted to wear trousers, could you accept this preference? Parents think that they can accept anything about their children, but within them as a parent, something resists. One man with whom I spoke after the event remarked that Hayashida-san's questions were thought-provoking, but he did not comment on whether he thought himself capable of such acceptance.

Members' Conversations Revealing Entrenched Gender Ideology

Publicly, most members of Fathering Japan stop short of pronouncing that men have something unique to bring to the table as parents. Yet privately in conversations that took place during my fieldwork, individuals displaced gender differences onto parenting roles, which they

described as *bosei*,¹¹⁰ or “motherhood,” or as *fusei*,¹¹¹ or “fatherhood.” While the former often connotes a nurturing and warm caregiver who accepts everything about their child, the latter implies a caregiver who teaches a child about society, morality, and how to form relationships with other people.

The concepts of *bosei* and *fusei* fit cultural notions about how Japanese society divides into concentric circles of varying intimacy (Bachnik 1992; Kondo 1990) and how the boundaries between *uchi*, or “in-groups,” and *soto*, or “out-groups,” are distinguished and policed. The *fusei* role lends itself conceptually to operating as the bridge between *uchi* and *soto*, while the *bosei* role is situated squarely in the most *uchi* of *uchi*, the home.

My interlocutors maintained that it is unnecessary for fathers to exemplify *fusei* and for mothers to represent *bosei*. Both roles are important to a child’s psychological growth, but the parents’ genders do not predetermine who performs which role. More importantly, each parent needs to assume one role so that their children have one parent who provides a refuge from the unfamiliar, confusing, and potentially hostile outside world and one parent who is responsible for showing children how to become a functioning member of society.

Yet according to my interlocutors, even if each parent prioritizes one role, there will be times when each performs that role’s complement. For example, parents in dual-income families each present separate images of what a working adult looks like, and, in this way, they display forms of *fusei*. This duality of roles is a good thing: the more models children have to compare, the more equipped they will be to decide eventually their own roles in society.

¹¹⁰ 母性 (*bosei*).

¹¹¹ 父性 (*fusei*).

Even so, my interlocutors acknowledged that bousei and fusei remain highly gendered roles in Japan regardless of Fathering Japan's efforts to diminish gender disparities. Only in rare cases will most men exemplify bousei and most women exemplify fusei. Combined with other messages conveyed at Fathering Japan, such as Hayashida-san's discussion of gender-appropriate colors and apparel, the nonprofit's expressed beliefs about bousei and fusei appear to have problematized but not overturned common cultural assumptions about gender. Interestingly, Fathering Japan members' continued insistence on the existence of a duality of roles has produced a displacement of gender differences onto concepts that continue to link to mothers and fathers, women and men, thus preventing them from moving away from these binaries. Despite claims by my interlocutors that a Japanese parent can adopt either the bousei or the fusei role, I did not meet a father who claimed that he best fit the bousei role within the family. Even the stay-at-home dad Tabata-san maintained that although he remained within the home, his children still sought his working wife for consolation and acceptance. In contrast, he was the parent who sternly scolded his children to teach them right from wrong, thus paradoxically serving as the bridge between home and society despite his partner's indisputably greater connection to the world outside the home. (See Chapter 7.)

Japanese Men's Responses to the Message of Gender Equality within the Home

In practice, men display a wide range of reactions after exposure to Fathering Japan and the parenting movement's message about working toward gender equality both within the household and without. As Fathering Japan members informed me, some men eventually embrace involved fatherhood, while others find it impractical to perform *kosodate* due to

structural constraints. (See the discussion in Chapter 7 on men's time schedules.) According to a few of my interlocutors, other fathers, especially those who claim to be ikumen, do not actually enact the fathering practices that they purport to follow. For example, this type of father may relish taking a bath with his infant. However, the mother usually brings the child to the father, who is already in the bath, and she later retrieves the child to be dried and clothed. These fathers thus define the activity of bathing narrowly, and they do not include or perform the sometimes unpleasant work that accompanies the pleasure of bathing with their children.

Although Fathering Japan tends to attract men with a preexisting interest in parenting, the organization courts individuals who see parenting as undesirable as well as those who hold unrealistic self-impressions about their performance as fathers. However, this audience is one of the most elusive because men uninterested in ikuji are not directly tapped into many of the channels of communication, such as social media groups formed around the topic of parenting, that the organization uses to disseminate its message. Additionally, even if Fathering Japan's messages appear in televised news segments or in Facebook feeds, disinterested individuals are unlikely to engage with the themes and ideas the nonprofit raises. Men who take pride in considering themselves ikumen may resist others' questioning their involvement in the parenting process; the questions posed at Fathering Japan certainly push men to reexamine their parenting practices and values.

To reach new audiences who do not access traditional or social media, Fathering Japan relies on its members to spread the word in their local communities and social circles. Additionally, the organization often finds allies in women who have no previous connection to

the organization. Ando-san explained in the following way the organization's issues with disseminating its message:

The husbands don't do anything. Mamas are really aware of this information. For example, most who come to our seminar in Tokyo and other events are invited by mamas. It's true. The mamas make the reservations. [Ando-san laughs] . . . Their husbands' antennae won't prick up for this information. They won't pick it up. People who are already looking for this information will come, but those who aren't thinking about it, or, on the other hand, those who only do things on the weekend, even if they act as fake ikumen, the people who think, 'I'm already doing it.' They think, 'Why do I have to go here?' 'Why do I have to read this book?' If they try to come, of course, they understand that what they were doing by themselves was nothing at all, and, of course, there are many papas who couldn't form a partnership with their wives.

Indeed, I met men who reluctantly attended events after their wives registered on their behalf, a fact that they appeared slightly embarrassed to admit. Some of these men, according to Ando-san, would eventually take Fathering Japan's lessons to heart: "From mamas I hear that papas have changed while enrolled, while listening to my lectures the papas seem to have changed. I hear this kind of feedback from mamas."

Unfortunately, I did not get to hear how participants in Fathering Japan's courses—such as the papa juku for fathers of young children—changed participants' conduct in response to the nonprofit's message, as most attendees do not remain involved with Fathering Japan after their

enrollment ends.¹¹² I had already discovered that most of Fathering Japan's long-standing members were already predisposed toward paternal involvement before joining the nonprofit. If anything, Fathering Japan's events increased their interest in parenting.

¹¹² For reasons discussed in the next chapter, Fathering Japan does not actively recruit new members.

Chapter 4: An Examination of Fathering Japan's High-Profile Projects and Corporate Collaborations

Section 1: Fathering Japan's Efforts to Change Work Culture by Partnering with Corporations

Background

Extremely adept at forging alliances with public policymakers, the national nonprofit Fathering Japan has also collaborated with many large companies that supply the organization with revenue, prestige, and, occasionally, guest speakers. Notable among the nonprofit's allies are the many Japan-based corporations that endorse and support Fathering Japan's flagship initiative, the IkuBoss Project, which aims to cultivate middle managers who are sympathetic to employees facing the demands of raising children. Some of these corporations include Epson, Japan Post, Panasonic, and the information technology company Cybozu, Inc.,¹¹³ whose president often serves as a lecturer at Fathering Japan events. In showcasing Fathering Japan's IkuBoss Project and its push to improve the lives of employed parents, these for-profit companies raise both their own and the nonprofit's public profiles.

High-profile and well-funded, Fathering Japan's IkuBoss Project positions itself at the intersection of company interests and the needs of individual families, but its interests skew strongly toward the goals of corporate management. Moreover, the project advocates a masculinity and an aesthetic at odds with those of other groups that have formed within the

¹¹³ サイボウズ株式会社 (Saibōzu Kabushikigaisha).

larger Fathering Japan organization, most notably those of the Secret Society “The Househusband’s Friend,” a group discussed later in this chapter.

In fact, some Fathering Japan members spoke to me about their consciousness of the disconnect between corporate influences on the organization and the values that Fathering Japan and the IkuBoss Project espouse. For that reason, before transitioning to Chapter 5’s consideration of local efforts that contribute to Japan’s parenting movement, this chapter ends by giving voice to members’ critiques of Fathering Japan. My fieldwork indicated that although most individual members have generally supported the organization’s outreach, their high level of awareness—cultivated by the organization itself—concerning the national and personal issues at stake has produced varied reactions to the nonprofit’s projects, practices, and leadership. Fortunately for Fathering Japan, most members can agree on the nonprofit’s vaguely defined guiding principles related to “raising smiling fathers,” and differences of opinion are rarely grounds for leaving the organization.

Cybozu, Inc., as an Exemplar of Corporate Involvement in Fathering Japan’s Operations

The activities and public performances of the corporations involved with Fathering Japan intersect in numerous ways with the nonprofit’s endeavors. Some corporate gestures amount to mere pleasantries, such as the sending of congratulatory wreaths by various companies, including Sony, to Fathering Japan on the occasion of its 10th anniversary celebration. Other instances in which the nonprofit’s efforts overlap with those of for-profit businesses often appear to benefit the latter, such as when Takashimaya, a department store corporation, worked with Fathering Japan to develop and market goods targeting ikumen consumers (Fathering Japan 2013). More

commonly, Fathering Japan invites leaders from companies with family-friendly policies to speak at events. The nonprofit compensates these lecturers for their time while benefiting from their expertise. Moreover, advertisements for Fathering Japan events always list the lineup of speakers and spotlight their companies because a panel of prominent individuals may encourage people to attend. During the year that I was conducting fieldwork, one of the most frequently featured speakers at Fathering Japan events was Aono-san, the president of Cybozu, Inc., an information technology company based in Japan that produces computer software and the Kintone mobile application that enable business teamwork on the Web (Kintone Corporation 2020). Claiming to be the top developer of collaborative software¹¹⁴ in Japan (Cybozu 2020), Cybozu (short for “cyber-kid”) presents itself a proponent of employee work-life balance and family-friendly management styles.

Admittedly, Cybozu measures up to Fathering Japan’s standards. According to the Japanese website Great Place to Work, since 2017 Cybozu has consistently ranked as one of the best mid-sized companies for female employees—taking first place, except in 2019, when it briefly fell to second place (Great Place to Work® Institute Japan 2017; 2018; 2019; 2020). Tanaka-Sensei—one of the foremost scholars in Japanese men’s studies and, like Aono-san, an active speaker for Fathering Japan—praises Cybozu for its employee-friendly work style in his book *Otoko wa Tsurai yo*,¹¹⁵ or “It’s Tough Being a Man” (2015).¹¹⁶ Arguing against the work policies and culture that force men to commute to work regardless of their personal and family circumstances, Tanaka-Sensei includes a snapshot of Aono-san’s Twitter post (tweet) of an empty

¹¹⁴ Such software helps groups of people work jointly on common tasks, such as the synchronous editing of a single document while the application tracks changes made by individual users.

¹¹⁵ 男がつらいよ (Otoko wa Tsurai yo).

¹¹⁶ A clear reference to the famous movie series of the same name.

office. The tweet suggests that Cybozu employees are working from home in the middle of a typhoon; it explains that the rain has stopped and Aono-san has arrived at the office after dropping off his children at preschool. He feels bad about turning on the lights with no one around, but he has to prepare for a conference—hence his presence at the office. This typhoon incident was also mentioned, with pride, by Aono-san during one of his presentations.

Additionally, when I visited the Cybozu workplace for an event unrelated to Fathering Japan, I found the layout of the office to be everything that Aono-san described in his talks. A warmly lit interior, wooden floors, and colorful, sometimes quirkily shaped furniture made the environment feel more like a café than an office space. Plants hung from the rafters of one large room, and large toy animals (a giraffe!) were positioned around the area. The break room conveyed an “open” feeling with glass panels instead of walls, allowing one to view the city below. Finally, a small, cozy daycare room with two glass walls, some furniture, and a television allowed parents to bring their children if other arrangements could not be made. In short, the Cybozu workspace is one where I would personally like to work.

Nevertheless, I could not help but feel skeptical of Aono-san’s intentions after witnessing him in action several times. Judging from his audiences’ reactions, people considered him an engaging speaker. Looking relaxed and confident in his speaking abilities, Aono-san often delivered punch lines with a straight face and flat tone that sent the room into laughter. For example, Aono-san’s listeners obviously enjoyed his quip about how Cybozu is the first company at which the president has said, “Excuse me.”¹¹⁷ Aono-san also amused the audience when he

¹¹⁷ 失礼します (shitsureishimasu).

offered a vivid description of how, as a new father, he spent 30 minutes trying to open his firstborn's mouth.

At one presentation, Aono-san asked how many managers were in the audience; only a small fraction of those present raised their hands. He then commented that his talk would only be useful if the members of the audience become managers. "Whom did you think you would be speaking to?" I wondered silently as I looked at an audience of mostly young fathers who had yet to climb their respective corporate ladders. In fact, an individual at one presentation raised his hand and asked about regular employees; Aono-san effectively avoided the question. He articulated his stance on the subject more explicitly during a panel on ikumen: "Men can't win against their companies."

Most of Aono-san's presentations actually covered Cybozu's operations. Perhaps current and future managers were supposed to glean ideas from Cybozu's example, but to my mind the point of the talk was to promote Cybozu. Aono-san lingered on the software products the company produces, its overseas branches, and how receptive it is to employees' needs. After prompting Cybozu employees to voice their "selfishness,"¹¹⁸ they asked for a no-overtime policy. "You do know that this is an IT company?" he replied. Yet they insisted, so he relented. Aono-san spoke about the generous six years of maternity leave offered by Cybozu ("incredible!" whispered members of the audience) and the breaks that it offers employees in order to pursue their interests and grow as people. One employee was currently on sabbatical in Africa, he told the audience. Yet the takeaway for the audience appeared to be small, since such policies would have to be implemented by those at the top of other companies' hierarchies; in most cases,

¹¹⁸ わがまま (wagamama).

middle managers would be unable to make such decisions on their own. At most, Aono-san's descriptions were interesting anecdotes.

Aono-san touted the (marginally) higher proportion of female programmers at Cybozu than is typical of an IT company, and the practice of allowing employees to work from home when sick. The pre-COVID-19 Cybozu work-at-home policy supposedly relies on the absolute intolerance of lies: if someone is supposed to be working from home, they cannot lie about where they are physically and what they are doing. How does one cultivate such an environment? By not forgiving a 10-yen (9 cents) difference. Aono-san proudly informed the audience that he would quit as the President of Cybozu if he neglected to pay even 10 yen for food from the company snack box.

In short, Aono-san's presentations appeared to function as forms of publicity and self-promotion, occasionally seconded and supported by praise from Fathering Japan leaders ("Aono-san used to be a workaholic" and "if Cybozu becomes the standard for companies, society will change"), that made the audience mutter in appreciation, but that failed to provide any relevant advice applicable to their lives. Instead, listeners received concrete evidence of "the grass is always greener" phenomenon, which could actually increase their discontent with their work circumstances in a way that does not necessarily translate into action.

Aono-san's only proposed solution to this predicament was a joke: during one presentation, he advised his audience to quit their companies if they were not permitted to take paternity leave. Quitting one's job involves significant risk—one that few fathers would likely hazard immediately after the birth of their children—as well as the unwelcome possibility of starting over at a lower salary. At another point during the same talk, Aono-san told people to

leave their company if they run into any problems—a distinct departure from the Japanese cultural emphasis on persevering through hardship—then solemnly bowed his head toward the audience: “We’ll be waiting for you.” His suggestion that people quit their jobs and join Cybozu generated laughter, but I sincerely doubt that anyone in the audience seriously contemplated acting upon his words.

The IkuBoss Project’s Complex Relationship to Performances of Masculinity in the Workplace

Among Fathering Japan’s various initiatives, the IkuBoss Project is perhaps the most concrete, visible example of the nonprofit’s corporate connections to companies such as Cybozu and of its attempts to shape both the national discourse and public perceptions through persuasive messaging by business leaders like Aono-san and by Fathering Japan’s *riji*. In a corporate seminar first held in 2012 and aimed at improving workplace culture for employees with families, Gunma Prefecture developed the term *ikuboss* to refer to benevolent bosses (Gunma Prefecture 2017). The word *ikuboss* combines the Japanese character *iku* (育), meaning “raise” or “rear” (also present in *ikuji*) and the English word *boss*. In 2014, Fathering Japan launched its own IkuBoss Project to help address the needs of workers with young families, and now Fathering Japan is the go-to nongovernmental organization for anything *ikuboss*-related.¹¹⁹ In the past, Fathering Japan was even involved with the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare’s annual IkuBoss Award ceremony.

¹¹⁹ In 2019, Ando-san was a featured lecturer at the Gunma’s IkuBoss Training School, which continues today.

Interestingly, unlike many of the other initiatives at Fathering Japan, the IkuBoss Project builds on traditional expectations—discussed later in this chapter—that men must master time, thereby perpetuating masculinities tied to and originating in the workplace. In explaining the mission of its IkuBoss Project, Fathering Japan defines the word *ikuboss* as follows:

The term ‘IkuBoss’ refers to supervisors (executives and managers) who consider the work-life balance of the subordinate personnel and staff members they work together with, supporting the careers and lifestyles of those workers and producing results for their organization while also being able to enjoy their own business and personal lives (Furukawa Electric Co., Ltd. 2017).

The term *work-life balance*¹²⁰ refers to individuals’ attempts to negotiate an equilibrium between responsibilities to the household and family on the one hand, and responsibilities at one’s place of employment on the other. When their work-life balance is off-kilter, individuals may compensate for housework, community, and work by neglecting sleep and leisure (Tsuya et al. 2005). As a result, stress and anxiety levels typically rise, putting a physical and mental strain on individuals. This is one of the reasons, Fathering Japan maintains, that fathers are unable to smile: they simply lack the mental energy. Moreover, an abundance of stress from work can lead to less-than-ideal parenting, such as overreacting in anger to children’s misbehavior.

One of the goals of the IkuBoss Project and Fathering Japan is to hold workshops and lectures that create ikuboss who facilitate employees’ work-life balance, thereby improving

¹²⁰ ワークライフバランス (wāku raifu baransu).

mental health and carving out more time for individuals to spend with their families in a positive and rested frame of mind. In fact, the IkuBoss Project has developed a list of 10 ikuboss qualities. According to Fathering Japan's website, any manager who satisfies more than half of these criteria may be considered an ikuboss (Fathering Japan 2019). In this list of criteria for qualifying as an ikuboss, the English loan word *raifu*¹²¹ or “life,” is not an all-encompassing concept; it does not refer to work but instead primarily connotes private circumstances outside the workplace. Fathering Japan’s list of ikuboss qualifications appears in translation below:

1. Understanding: Demonstrates an understanding of the contemporary circumstances of child rearing, as well as an understanding that subordinates carve out time for “life” (child care).¹²²

2. Diversity: Does not discriminate against (treat coldly) subordinates who carve out time for “life”¹²³ and engages in “diversity management.”¹²⁴

3. Knowledge: Knows intra-company systems (such as the parental leave system) and laws (such as the Labor Standards Act) related to “life.”¹²⁵

¹²¹ ライフ (raifu).

¹²² 1. 理解：現代の子育て事情を理解し、部下がライフ（育児）に時間を割くことに、理解を示していること。

¹²³ 2. ダイバーシティ：ライフに時間を割いている部下を、差別（冷遇）せず、ダイバーシティな経営をしていること。

¹²⁴. “Diversity management” implies that bosses, when assigning promotions and important jobs, give equal consideration to subordinates who are and who are not involved in raising children.

¹²⁵ 3. 知識：ライフのための社内制度（育休制度など）や法律（労基法など）を、知っていること。

4. Organizational Permeation: Within their [the manager's] specific jurisdiction in the organization (for example, the section of a section chief), recommends actively and spreads to workers the idea of carving out time¹²⁶ without treating “life” lightly.¹²⁷

5. Consideration: Gives the maximum consideration to the career paths that may strongly affect subordinates’ “life,” such as job transfers accompanied by family and job transfers away from family.¹²⁸

6. Work: In order for work within the organization to proceed smoothly even when some employees take parental leave, takes all possible steps, such as sharing information within the organization, fostering teamwork, and using mobile and cloud platforms.¹²⁹

7. Squeezing in Time: Holds fewer meetings, reduces the number of documents, streamlines decision making, and promotes discretionary labor systems¹³⁰ so that subordinates can easily spend time on “life.”¹³¹

8. Recommendations: Makes recommendations to superiors and human resources from the perspective of a boss in order to manage while attaching importance to subordinates’ “life.”¹³²

¹²⁶ Here, the Japanese sentence does not specify the kind of time to which the criteria refers.

¹²⁷ 4. 組織浸透：管轄している組織（例えば部長なら部）全体に、ライフを軽視せず積極的に時間を割くことを推奨し広めていること。

¹²⁸ 5. 配慮：家族を伴う転勤や単身赴任など、部下のライフに「大きく」影響を及ぼす人事については、最大限の配慮をしていること。

¹²⁹ 6. 業務：育休取得者などが出ても、組織内の業務が滞りなく進むために、組織内の情報共有作り、チームワークの醸成、モバイルやクラウド化など、可能な手段を講じていること。

¹³⁰ Systems in which employees receive a salary regardless of the amount of time worked.

¹³¹ 7. 時間捻出：部下がライフの時間を取りやすいよう、会議の削減、書類の削減、意思決定の迅速化、裁量型体制などを進めていること。

¹³² 8. 提言：ボスからみた上司や人事部などに対し、部下のライフを重視した経営をするよう、提言していること。

9. Making Good on Promises: Organizations and businesses with ikuboss demonstrate that [if ikuboss exist] business results will also improve [in addition to improving family life] and make efforts to spread [ikuboss] throughout society.¹³³

10. Whoever Suggests Should Start First: In their own lives, attach importance to work-life balance and to enjoying life.¹³⁴

My conversations with members of Fathering Japan revealed a complementary interpretation of who embodies the concept of *ikuboss*. Several interlocutors suggested that ikuboss are those managers who support subordinates despite their mistakes, instead of harshly criticizing them in ways that stunt their growth. This definition echoes the common analogy that I heard from many individuals, some of whom were not at all connected to the IkuBoss Project or to Fathering Japan: an ikuboss is to his or her subordinates as a father is to his children. The same basic principles and techniques necessary to raise children are required to raise work subordinates. Like children, work subordinates must be strategically praised and scolded in order to properly motive them, and they must be allowed to make mistakes in order to learn and grow. Hence, micromanaging at work is counterproductive to employee development. Such claims link the two seemingly antithetical realms of work and home under a common undertaking: the growth of the father/boss and the growth of the child/subordinate, a comparison that would likely be more appropriate in bubble-economy Japan, when bosses assumed the role of fathers. (See Chapter 1.)

¹³³ 9. 有言実行：イクボスのいる組織や企業は、業績も向上するということを実証し、社会に広める努力をしていること。

¹³⁴ 10. 隗より始めよ：ボス自ら、ワークライフバランスを重視し、人生を楽しんでいること。

Ikuboss proponents often articulated this seemingly pragmatic argument in an almost utilitarian fashion: become a better father, and you will simultaneously produce profits as a middle manager. The analogy lends children economic value, an idea that differs from the general interpretation of the child as economically useless but emotionally priceless (Frühstück and Walthall 2017; Zelizer 1994, 57).¹³⁵

While not at odds with the creed of work-life-balance, the mindset behind the ikuboss-father paradigm does not significantly break away from the work-oriented hegemonic masculinity of the salaryman. Prior to the collapse of Japan's economic bubble, the salaryman worker could be found reading self-help books about better business practices during his commute to work; his attempts at self-improvement were often for the sake of becoming a more effective employee and elevating his company's position in the world (Dasgupta 2000). Now, a man's attempts at becoming a more involved father can supposedly continue to serve his company.

The IkuBoss Project headed by Kawashima-san—but which many other *riji* also participate in—therefore continues to locate masculinity squarely in the workplace; more specifically, the masculinity of Japanese men never really needed to leave the workplace in the first place. It merely needed to stretch itself to incorporate fatherhood as an additional component. In contrast to the IkuBoss Project, other projects and groups within Fathering Japan regard masculinity as made of a more inflexible material: stretch too far and both the gender construct and the performer rip. For this reason, such projects and their leaders generally encourage men to partially dissociate their masculinity and time from the workplace and to place

¹³⁵ At the very least, this concept considers the child economically useless in the present but a potential resource in the parent's old age.

greater stock in fatherhood. For example, at a two-day school for fathers independently organized by Fathering Japan member Miyamoto-san, Ando-san—as an invited speaker—used a personal example to characterize paternal involvement as highly enjoyable. When Ando-san was still working at a company, his daughter’s teacher asked him to attend a Friday preschool event, time permitting. He decided to leave work early for the day, and he met two other fathers at the preschool event. They eventually became drinking buddies, so opting for a “papa experience”¹³⁶ over work turned out to be incredibly rewarding. At another event, Ando-san informed his male audience that work will still be present for men much later on in life, but that fathers’ opportunities to experience each stage of their children’s growth are far more limited. For example, the period when a son or daughter will cutely say, “I love you papa,” is extremely short; they will quickly grow to an age at which uttering these words becomes embarrassing.

People not directly connected to Fathering Japan echoed this sentiment in other contexts. During a large, seven-hour event on work-life balance sponsored by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, Hayashida-san engaged in on-stage dialogue with a (male) expert—a journalist and Meiji University professor. This expert informed the audience that *ikuji* is extremely time-sensitive, half-joking that when his daughter grows older, he will be considered a “pervert”¹³⁷ if he attempts to hug her. Therefore, good work-life balance is key to fully experiencing what the *ikuji* period has to offer. The connections among masculinity, men’s sexuality, and the implicit threat of violence will be discussed in Chapter 5. However, many of my interlocutors also articulated the belief that particularly with daughters, certain kinds of activities (such as bathing

¹³⁶ パパ経験 (papa keiken).

¹³⁷ 変態 (hentai).

together) and forms of physical contact (such as hugging) will eventually become socially unacceptable. These conversations similarly involved jokes that played with a tension within father-daughter relationships.

While not advocating the complete neglect of work responsibilities, the general Fathering Japan message—occasionally echoed by other parties—is that precisely now is the time to partially relinquish one’s attachment to work in order to more fully participate in family affairs. Notably, this argument is not usually phrased in terms of how paternal involvement is beneficial for the children, but rather emphasizes how men can attain a richer, more fulfilling life by pivoting to the family.

A key exception is Kozaki-Sensei, who was keen to stress the merits of father-child physical interactions. For example, during one event that I attended near the end of my fieldwork, fathers brought their young children to a weekend workshop in which Kozaki-Sensei modeled, and then had fathers perform certain play-exercises with their children. For example, he had men lie on their backs with their feet raised perpendicular to the ground, knees bent toward their chest. As they assumed this position, the fathers were to lift their children up off the ground so that the soles of their feet were supporting the children’s bellies. According to Kozaki-Sensei, this exercise plus “playing horsey” contributed to children’s physical development, specifically their sense of balance. Similarly, in Fathering Japan’s papa juku, Kozaki-Sensei (an Osaka native) informed his Tokyo-based audience that due to the shortage of spaces for “dynamic play,” Tokyo children are small and weak. It is the responsibility of fathers to address this deficiency by engaging in dynamic play with children, such as by wrestling—roughhousing is the domain of men.

Japanese Masculinities and Time Management

Given the relative absence of an ikuboss discussion regarding a reduced workload, relaxed standards for quality, or an adjusted distribution of responsibilities, Kawashima-san and the other leaders involved in the IkuBoss Project appear to be more confident than other riji and speakers about men's ability to balance their various identities in a way that satisfies themselves, their families, and, most importantly, their employers. However, many fathers, including those not connected to Fathering Japan, must deal with the reality that people's time is limited—hence the nonprofit's general emphasis on work-life balance. Other projects seem more prepared to accept the necessity of compromise, since any attempt by fathers to perform all of their roles perfectly is sure to meet with failure—at least under current expectations in Japan about how workers are to perform. Many members of Fathering Japan favor one approach to this balancing act: as Hayashida-san suggested, men at Fathering Japan generally value their masculine identity as fathers above other identities that they assume, “but normal fathers probably highly identify with their occupation and work, and their identity as fathers is weak.”

In contrast, the IkuBoss Project does not really insist that employees do less work; instead, recognizing the importance of family time while maintaining employees' current workload, the IkuBoss Project implies that employees should work more efficiently. This expectation ignores the fact that most of the inefficiency in time spent in the workplace exists during overtime, a point that members at Fathering Japan stressed. Japanese employers have mistakenly assumed that all time in the workplace is equal, when in reality work efficiency begins to drop drastically as the official workday transitions to mandatory or even non-mandatory overtime. As

one interlocutor unaffiliated with Fathering Japan explained, he sits around his office doing nothing in order to earn his overtime pay.

With its can-do, optimistic rhetoric, the IkuBoss Project therefore often ignores the complications resulting from competing demands on men's time. Perhaps this optimism is strategically necessary in order to sell the IkuBoss Project to companies, which are only willing to relax their grip on workers if their bottom lines remain stable; hence the IkuBoss Project's suggestion that a happy worker is a more efficient, productive worker. Ultimately, individuals who try to do too much by adding responsibilities rather than by selecting and prioritizing tasks risk exhaustion and the possibility that they will become unable to fulfill any responsibilities properly. Arguably, the IkuBoss Project's focus on addressing the (male) middle manager—who most likely reached his position by adhering to the status quo—results in less attention than other projects to the lived realities of parents currently in the process of raising young children, yet it remains indispensable to Fathering Japan's revenue and vision.

Section 2: The Fathering Japan Subgroup That Mocks Corporate Culture

Introducing the Secret Society of Househusbands

If the IkuBoss Project continues to bind masculinity to the workplace, the most extreme example of Fathering Japan constituents who dissociate masculinity from paid labor is the Secret Society “The Househusband’s Friend”¹³⁸ (*himitsu kessha “shufu no tomo”*).¹³⁹ A semiofficial Fathering Japan subgroup, this “society” consists of stay-at-home dads and those for whom being a stay-at-home dad is a “side job”—in other words, men who work part-time or on a contractual basis.

The masculinities of *shufu*¹⁴⁰ or househusbands maintain an uneasy connection to work, which is alternatively embraced, disavowed, and self-consciously parodied. The househusband faces difficulties conceptualizing himself without using work as a foil: for example, the wording of “stay-at-home dad as a side job” implies that the primary job is still located within the workplace. Even Katakura-san—a founding member of the Secret Society—once characterized *shufu* as the managers of a household: “we do heaps of overtime. In one day, we work 18 hours at a ‘black company’¹⁴¹ [a company that exploits its employees by demanding excessive unpaid overtime].” He subsequently castigated *ikumen* for their half-hearted paternal involvement. To bona fide *shufu*, *ikumen* act as if performing a part-time job: they clock in, clock out, and only engage in the discrete tasks given to them by their wives. Unlike these *ikumen*, most fathers in

¹³⁸ Alternatively, “The Househusband’s Companion.”

¹³⁹ 秘密結社「主夫の友」 (*Himitsu Kessha “Shufu no Tomo”*).

¹⁴⁰ 主夫 (*shufu*).

¹⁴¹ ブラック企業 (*burakku kigyō*).

the Secret Society have withdrawn from regular, full-time employment. I asked Katakura-san how househusbands see their roles:

KATAKURA-SAN: Shufu like us are comparatively more than papas, we're mamas, we're like mamas. We're both papas and mamas. . . .

KOIKE: In what way are you like mamas?

KATAKURA-SAN: We do stuff around the house. [Prior to the Secret Society] there wasn't even one project [at Fathering Japan] that told papas, "let's do chores." Although [Fathering Japan] does say things like "let's do the PTA," . . . we're also doing chores, which is exactly why we understand the feelings of mamas, but we also understand why papas can't get into chores. We understand the feelings of both.¹⁴²

The Secret Society's Origins

Members of the Secret Society—which is not a formal project within Fathering Japan—relish the irony in how their group's semiofficial status at Fathering Japan echoes their members' unofficial status as men due to househusbands' lack of regular employment—full-time employment being part of the definition of a full-fledged adult male. On the Shufu no Tomo homepage, the Secret Society describes itself as a "Fathering Japan 'un'official organization"—with quotation marks around the "un" in "unofficial" for emphasis.¹⁴³ According to Katakura-

¹⁴² Of course, many mothers are also unable to or do not want to "get into chores."

¹⁴³ ファザーリング・ジャパン“非”公認団体 (Fazāringu · Jyapan “hi”kōnin dantai).

san, their continuing message to the Fathering Japan leadership is “please make this unofficial organization official.”¹⁴⁴

Some of the most unusual characters in Fathering Japan are part of this subgroup, which also offers the most obvious example of smiling fathers. Even the subgroup’s tongue-in-cheek moniker is an example of how members enjoy fooling around. The subgroup’s name (*Shufu no Tomo*, or 主夫の友) is a pun based on the Housewife’s Friend (*Shufu no Tomo* or 主婦の友) a women’s magazine published between 1917 and 2008.¹⁴⁵ Shufu no Tomo members see themselves as distinct from the rest of Fathering Japan. According to Katakura-san, the riji working on various “official” projects are highly competent, but they take themselves too seriously, so “that’s no good!” Although Fathering Japan aims explicitly to increase the number of smiling fathers, my interlocutor opined that “there are projects that don’t smile at all.” As Katakura-san described to me during our interview, Shufu no Tomo originated in a small act of defiance against the “straitlaced” Fathering Japan leadership.

In 2014, Ando-san instructed the stay-at-home dads who belonged to Fathering Japan to “do something as househusbands.” “Do something? What does that mean? What does he mean by ‘do something?’ What?!” they grumbled. The five Fathering Japan members who at the time identified as househusbands gathered together to consult one another about this “order,” concluding that “[we] have no idea” and “he’s being unreasonable, as usual.” Then they asked themselves whether “if Fathering Japan tells us to ‘do something,’ does this mean that Fathering

¹⁴⁴ I could not be sure about the extent to which the Secret Society’s members genuinely mean this request.

¹⁴⁵ One Japanese character in each name differs (夫 or “husband” and 婦 or “wife”), but these characters produce the same sound: “fu.”

Japan will recognize us? As househusbands? Probably not. Well then, who cares?! We'll just mess around!"

The five directionless househusbands then decided to propose a small club within Fathering Japan; they would give the group the tongue-in-cheek name that played on the title of the women's magazine *Shufu no Tomo*. However, after determining that the name's impact on their fellow Fathering Japan members would be too weak, they prefaced their group's name with "Secret Society." (As he laughed and clapped his hands with both glee and pride, Katakura-san recounted how the househusbands settled upon their name, as if reliving that mischievous conclave: "We were guffawing like children.") Someone floated the suggestion that during their pitch meeting with the *riji*, they should all wear black suits, black ties, and sunglasses "like we were from an evil organization." They ultimately were unable to follow through with the dress code, so the evil organization of househusbands was only partially realized in its "Secret Society" moniker.

According to Katakura-san, the *riji* did not know what to make of these five men and their pitch: "When we gave our presentation, about half of the *riji* had incredibly puzzled faces. Those faces, I'll never forget them for the rest of my life. I won't forget those people, I could name them, but I won't. They were like, 'Who are these people? They're weird!'" At the end of their presentation, the five men tentatively put forward, "um, we're fine with being unofficial. You don't need to make us official." However, "The moment we said, 'please acknowledge us as unofficial,' the *riji* laughed. We could tell from their faces that we were busted." Ando-san, Kawashima-san, and the others cracked up, "you guys are funny. You're idiots! Ok, then let's

confer as rijji.” The five men asked, “so then, will you acknowledge us as unofficial?” The rijji replied, “yes~” and thus, Shufu no Tomo was officially unofficially formed.

Returning to Japan for a month in 2019, I spoke with Katakura-san and asked him why he and the other founders initially expected the Fathering Japan leadership to reject their proposal in 2014. He explained by means of digression that around the time Fathering Japan was founded in 2006, society was significantly less receptive to the notion of engaged fatherhood: “in the first place, it was an era in which fathers who participated in chores and ikuji were mostly nonexistent. Things have changed abruptly over the past 12 years . . . really in only the past five years . . . three years. Rapid progress, isn’t it?” As a result, Fathering Japan had to match its message to the times. Katakura-san remarked that “I feel like what Fathering Japan was trying to do was to focus on having papas get involved in ikuji somehow. The slogan of ‘let’s become smiling fathers’ was really good as a slogan . . . but [fathers] still weren’t participating in ikuji, so I feel that [Fathering Japan] first set the goal of having men participate.” He continued, explaining that like the Secret Society, Fathering Japan originated with a group of men who appreciated the value of play. (See Chapter 3.) However, when the time came to incorporate the nonprofit, they had to “get in line with the times” in order to earn legitimacy. Thus, the nonprofit was built on a fundamental contradiction:

[Fathering Japan’s founders] couldn’t play around. . . . Actually, if they didn’t create a legitimate, proper organization, they couldn’t approach anyone. Particularly when it comes to the country, Fathering Japan is pretty involved with national ministries and government offices. About children, kosodate . . . in order to reach committee members

and legislators, [Fathering Japan] would be useless if it wasn't an organization that's solid on all sides. Ando-san really understood this. That's why . . . with this being the foundation [on which Fathering Japan was built], [people] became unable to goof around. Actually, more than being unable to goof around, the concept of goofing around disappeared.

Owing to these factors, the founding five were confident that their presentation would fall flat at an organization which they believed had traded frivolity for effectiveness. The Secret Society's founding members were thus pleasantly surprised not only at their acceptance, but that despite being unofficial they would be funded by Fathering Japan: "Oh, we'll get money?"

Showing a similar lack of restraint, the Secret Society eschewed fiscal moderation. Instead of slowly using the money, or gradually building themselves up, the shufu instead decided, in the words of Katakura-san, to "do something big." They invited a leading journalist, Shirakawa Tōko to be a lecturer on *shōshika*, or the declining birthrate. Shirakawa-san was a regularly featured speaker in Japan's parenting movement during my fieldwork, and I saw her present at three different events hosted by separate organizations: one sponsored by Fathering Japan, one by Sourire (a consulting company that aims to advance women's participation in paid employment), and one jointly sponsored by Google Women Will, the Asahi Shimbun WORKO! project, and Bunkyo Gakuin University. Ultimately, Shirakawa-san found the Shufu no Tomo members fascinating. She not only interviewed them, but eventually became an advisor to the group. Her connections and influence are likely a great asset to the Secret Society, and consequently to Fathering Japan.

Undoubtedly, Shufu no Tomo members bring the smiling and laughter to an organization that, if perhaps not as serious as my Secret Society interlocutors depicted it, certainly cannot compare to the fun-loving Secret Society. However, the Secret Society's frivolity is, according to its members, not simply for their self-gratification. In the words of Katakura-san, *majime*¹⁴⁶ or "serious" projects rarely lead to change: "The causes of paradigm shifts are, generally speaking, relaxing and joking around, 'what the hell is this? That's also interesting!'" In short, the mold is broken by individuals who creatively pioneer new patterns of practice that others find appealing enough to adopt. In this sense, the Secret Society shares with Fathering Japan the general philosophy of smiling and enjoyment, but the Secret Society repurposes this philosophy and takes it to the next level. Shufu no Tomo represents an "extremist" faction with Fathering Japan, one that is worried about the lack of spontaneity and play within the organization—in fact, during their initial presentation to the *riji*, they apparently expressed this concern explicitly.

According to Katakura-san, the founding members initially felt as if "in some cases, we were viewed like rare animals, like humans put in a cage in a zoo" at Fathering Japan. However, despite its rocky beginnings, Shufu no Tomo has ironically become a staple group within the nonprofit: "Shufu no Tomo has become . . . an existence that is commonplace within Fathering Japan (his voice cracks as he laughs)." Yet Shufu no Tomo remains true to its origins of parody and irreverence. Despite being a "Secret Society," in the words of other Fathering Japan members, Shufu no Tomo is anything but secret. On the contrary, the society's members are clownish and considered extremely loud (and, by implication, annoying) when they mockingly decry society, stating in no uncertain terms that they will remain a secret organization until

¹⁴⁶ 真面目 (*majime*).

society recognizes the existence of stay-at-home dads. Underscoring the househusband's status as a nonentity, a common image used by the Secret Society is of a (presumably) male individual in an apron holding a frying pan in front of his face, his involvement in domestic labor literally rendering him faceless. The group's name is printed with the 夫, or character for "husband" situated squarely in the middle of the frying pan—he is anonymous apart from his designation as "husband." Still, despite the implications of this frying-pan symbolism, members of the group adamantly maintain that being a father first does not mean that one is a dropout or a loser.



Illustration 4.1 Secret Society “The Househusband’s Friend” Logo¹⁴⁷

At one not-so-secretive event that I attended, the Secret Society presented awards to public figures, such as politicians and athletes, who increased public awareness about stay-at-home dads or who actively promoted men's participation in child care and house chores. The

¹⁴⁷ Source: <http://主夫.com/>

award ceremony itself was surprisingly formal, with introductions, speeches, and photo opportunities for the journalists present in the audience. Yet in contrast to the Secret Society's spontaneous self-image, nothing unexpected happened in the flow of events, which paralleled other award ceremonies that I attended during my fieldwork. For example, it was not dissimilar to the conferral portion of the "Baby and Birth Friendly Award," which recognized companies, local governments, bosses, and other individuals who contribute to systems and environments in which it is easy for women to continue paid work after giving birth.

Members at the Shufu no Tomo event wore the group's uniform: brightly colored aprons of various colors. Perhaps this display was the subgroup's way of yet again parodying the salaryman—in this case, his ubiquitous business suit—but with an emphasis on member's quirkiness via color choice. As in other cultures, uniforms convey legitimacy and broadcast the social position of those who wear them. Thus, even in its selection of apparel, the Secret Society stands in opposition to the seriousness, formality, and work ethic of other Fathering Japan initiatives such as the IkuBoss Project.

Additionally, the head of the Secret Society calls himself the CEO of the group to parody the hierarchical corporations through which men earn legitimacy within Japanese society—in contrast, Ando-san is only the president of Fathering Japan. During the Secret Society's award ceremony, the CEO informed the audience, which included journalists, about the purpose of their group. He reminded the audience of the Japanese government's goal: having 30% of management positions occupied by women by the year 2020. If this is the case, the CEO continued, then the Secret Society aims to have 30 percent of men become househusbands.

This pronouncement, which flipped the aspirations of authority figures on their head in an absurdist, unrealistic manner—as with the very origins of Shufu no Tomo—is highly typical of the Secret Society members. Realistically, the government’s 30 percent threshold was, to put it mildly, overly optimistic. In 2017, 13 percent of women were in managerial or administrative positions (Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office 2018); the previous year, this number was 12.5 percent (Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office 2017). In 2010, only 11 percent of managerial employees were women (Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office 2013). At this glacial rate, the government’s 30% goal was never going to happen by the proposed deadline—and indeed the threshold has not been met. The coronavirus pandemic has not only decreased companies’ willingness to hire female managers, but currently only 7.5% of companies have currently met the 30% percent goal (Tatsuhiko 2020).

The Secret Society’s professed goal of having 30 percent of men become househusbands—in the near future—is perhaps even more wildly unrealistic than having 30 percent of women occupy managerial posts by 2020. Househusbands are such a minority in Japan that they are a niche group even at Fathering Japan. The CEO’s pronouncement thus caricatures the government’s impractical optimism—and given how members of the Secret Society are familiar with the statistics thrown around at Fathering Japan, as well as their penchant for humor, I am inclined to believe that this ridiculous demand is carefully scripted.

Even today, the Secret Society continues to spice up Fathering Japan’s events. In our interview, Tabata-san—another founding member of Shufu no Tomo—informed me of their plans for the national forum in Niigata. Despite being a niche group within Fathering Japan, Shufu no Tomo was put in charge of one of the national forum’s main events, to be held in a

venue that Tabata-san proudly informed me seats over 100 people. When deliberating about what kind of event to hold, the group hit upon an idea: companies from around Japan had sent Fathering Japan various gifts. Instead of distributing these gifts within the nonprofit according to seniority, need, or some other metric, the Secret Society would hold a quiz competition on marital satisfaction. The most interesting answers would receive prizes; for example, Shufu no Tomo would award oden (hotpot ingredients) from a kamaboko (processed fish cake) company based in Niigata—a gag gift for competing in a quiz contest. As Tabata-san informed me, the Secret Society’s event will distinguish itself from the other events at the national forum, which will seriously discuss issues related to fatherhood: “we’re the ones who most fully embody the concept of ‘smiling fathers’!”

The event’s main sponsor was sponsored by Lion Corporation—a maker of detergent, medication, soap, and other toiletries. “Special sponsors”¹⁴⁸ included Kosodate Switch,¹⁴⁹ which like Father Japan emphasizes flipping the “switch” to (enjoyable) paternal involvement,¹⁵⁰ and oton+to, which also like Fathering Japan, stresses the time-limited nature of fathers’ interactions (play) with children.¹⁵¹ As the existence of these sponsors indicates, Shufu no Tomo works hand in hand with corporations in order to hold events—much as the IkuBoss Project does. However, unlike the IkuBoss Project, the Secret Society is not dependent on these companies for its identity and core values. Ironically, corporate sponsorship offers a form of legitimacy to Shufu

¹⁴⁸ 特別協賛 (tokubetsu kyōsan).

¹⁴⁹ 子育てすいっち (Kosodate Suicchi).

¹⁵⁰ Kosodate Switch’s site features articles about child care and is owned by the company Grouprise, a consulting group for companies exploring the “papa market” (Grouprise 2020; Kosodate Switch 2020).

¹⁵¹ oton+to’s website lists the group’s activities as media coverage related to fathers and children, product conception, and marketing (oton+to 2020).

no Tomo, despite the fact that members individually lack company-bestowed legitimacy due to their unemployed or partially employed status.

Section 3: Contradictions between Corporate Sponsors' Policies and Fathering Japan's Messages

Philosophically, temperamentally, logistically, and financially, the IkuBoss Project stands in stark contrast to the Secret Society. One prominent characteristic of the IkuBoss Project is the amount of resources that Fathering Japan has marshaled in order to ensure the project's success. The IkuBoss Project is Fathering Japan's best-funded initiative, largely owing to the IkuBoss Corporate Alliance,¹⁵² a group of companies that have committed to reforming corporate culture to foster work-life balance among employees. The process for joining the IkuBoss Corporate Alliance involves submitting documents to Fathering Japan and, in the case of large companies, a signing ceremony overseen by Ando-san or a riji. Fathering Japan uploads photographs from the ceremony and a short statement from a company representative to Facebook and the official ikuboss homepage, while companies often post about joining the IkuBoss Corporate Alliance on their own websites, providing the nonprofit with a significant publicity opportunity.

The IkuBoss Project website does not specifically mention an admission fee (Fathering Japan 2020), but my conversations with nonprofit members revealed that companies in the Alliance make substantial donations to the IkuBoss Project and to Fathering Japan. Companies can also pay lecturers from Fathering Japan to offer training workshops for middle managers on becoming ikubosses.¹⁵³ The Alliance also holds information sessions for members once every two months (Fathering Japan 2020), and more recently every three months.

¹⁵² イクボス企業同盟 (ikubosu dōmei kigyō).

¹⁵³ I was not able to attend any of these events because they were not open to regular Fathering Japan members.

In addition to featuring an impressive list of the various companies who have undergone the procedure to join—including Aeon, All Nippon Airways, Calbee, FamilyMart, Hitachi, Softbank, and Sony—some of the companies that take part in the IkuBoss Corporate Alliance also feature statements on their webpages regarding their commitment to worker-friendly management practices.

Ironically, a few members of the IkuBoss Corporate Alliance have reputations that clash with other messages promoted formally and informally by Fathering Japan. For example, alcoholic beverage companies such as Asahi and Suntory promote after-work corporate drinking culture, a practice that members of Fathering Japan highlight as one of the near-compulsory practices that keep workers from returning home to their families. Another company that blatantly contradicts Fathering Japan's ideals but that appears on the list of company logos on ikuboss.com (Fathering Japan 2020) is Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings, Inc. (TEPCO). Starting with its mishandling of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster and extending to its systematic attempts to conceal safety violations, TEPCO's disregard of its workers' well-being and safety is diametrically opposed to the ikuboss ideals of benevolent paternalism and enjoyment of life.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁴ A few Fathering Japan members with whom I spoke mentioned volunteering during the post-Fukushima triple-disaster relief efforts.

Section 4: Networking at an IkuBoss Project Workshop

Of the many ikuboss-themed events that I attended, one of the most relevant to the project's goals was the educational outreach workshop called Ikuboss Action and Networking. Contrary to this title, the event seemed to be all about networking with no action. Moreover, the facilitators declined to actively steer attendees in the direction of conversation topics conducive to genuine workplace reform. The event therefore called into question for whose sake the IkuBoss Project exists.

Most participants at this one-time event were middle managers who hailed from companies that are part of the IkuBoss Corporate Alliance. The event took place in a skyscraper in Marunouchi, Tokyo's financial district. From the shiny stone walls and floor of the lobby, to the smooth and practiced gestures of the man at the reception desk, to the presence of an elevator operator, the whole setting seemed designed to impress attendees and convey a positive image of the IkuBoss Project. What follows is an edited version of my fieldnotes for the event:

After identifying myself as an observer rather than as a participant, I am guided to a table at the back of a brightly lit room where groups of four to five individuals cluster around 24 tables. On each table is a group number, a large sheet of easel-pad paper, and a set of markers, sticky notes, and handouts. Directly to my right is a row of chairs occupied by people whom I surmise are reporters. At the front and right sides of the room are large projector screens, which at the beginning of the event feature the names of companies in the IkuBoss Corporate Alliance.

The vast majority of these participants are men in their forties to fifties, dressed in typical formal business attire: white dress shirts and black suits, with their coats draped over the backs of their chairs. Sometimes their outfits also incorporate a dark-hued tie. The attire of the female participants varies somewhat, but their subdued outfits are always black, grey, or white. Most women combine a dress jacket—typically black or charcoal-colored—with coordinating slacks or a skirt. All of the women whom I can see are wearing black heeled shoes, with the exception of one woman who wears a pinkish set of heels. In short, the attire of the participants at this ikuboss event is fairly uniform, conforming to codified expectations about appropriate dress at Japanese companies.

The quiet, informal chatting within the small groups ends as the master of ceremonies (MC) calls the room to order. Briefly, he explains the definition of an ikuboss and then informs everyone that the mass media will be taking pictures. Anyone who does not want to be included in the photos should raise their hand—no one does so. The MC calls up Ando-san to offer a few words. For this occasion, Ando-san has dressed a bit more formally than he does for other Fathering Japan gatherings. He wears a suit and tie, but he still manages to convey some of his laid-back personality by pairing this outfit with his gray, black, and white tennis shoes, which clashes obviously with the suit and subverts traditional dress categories.

After Ando-san's brief speech, the MC returns to the front. After a few jokes that cause the room to laugh, it is clear that the MC has won over the audience. He directs them to engage in a standard *jikoshōkai*, a type of customary self-introduction common in Japan. The quiet hum of voices permeates the room as the *jikoshōkai* begins, with some participants looking directly at

the current speaker at their table, while others bend over their notepads to jot down important information.

After some time elapses, the MC calls for a round of applause and then gives the participants further instructions. Rather than provide the participants with set themes to discuss, the MC has each group develop discussion topics that they feel are the most pressing issues in their workplaces related to managing their subordinates.

Having identified these topics, the participants are instructed to brainstorm individually what “concrete actions” they can take to address these issues, writing down ideas that “could be put into practice on a daily basis in the workplace.” Each idea goes on a separate sticky note, which participants arrange on the easel-pad paper covering the table, with the text facing the other group members. The MC gives everyone six minutes to complete this task.

Next, the participants reconvene in their small groups. Each participant gives a 30-second presentation on one of their ideas, after which the other members of the group each propose one supplemental idea or offer a piece of advice to the presenter. Three-and-a-half minutes are allotted per presenter for group feedback. The PowerPoint slide projected on the front and side of the room lists phrases that participants can use to offer constructive criticism to each presenter: “How about trying this type of plan?” or “There’s also this type of action, isn’t there!”

As the brainstorming session commences, Ando-san and another riji begin to walk among the tables, listening to the conversations taking place. I do not see them interject with feedback; they merely appear to be observing the groups. While I am initially hesitant to make rounds between the tables, I begin doing so after Ando-san suggests that it might be interesting to listen to the groups talk. I circulate around the room, eventually passing again by Ando-san, who

remarks with perhaps a hint of displeasure that there is little talk about paternity leave. He comments that the main focus for most groups is work-life balance. However, I observe that many attendees are more concerned with management strategies that allow bosses to better connect with their subordinates. Originally, event facilitators likely intended for participants to realize on their own the importance of topics such as paternity leave and limiting overtime. This backfires as the small groups choose to focus their discussions on avoiding micromanagement, lunch meetings, suggestion boxes, praising subordinates for accomplishing tasks, and sharing daily worries. While these strategies are conducive to becoming an empathetic boss, they do not necessarily contribute to employees' increased ability to balance expectations at work and at home.

After hearing Ando-san's remark, I make a point of examining the business cards that each individual received from their fellow participants and has arranged in front of them on the table. Specifically, I looked for the Kurumin Mark,¹⁵⁵ a small seal featured on the business cards of companies that the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare has designated "companies that support kosodate." "Kurumin" is taken from the infinitive *kurumu* (包む), "to wrap" or "to swaddle," and is apparently reflected in the logo, which to me looks more like a corn in its husk than a baby in a blanket.

¹⁵⁵ くるみんマーク (kurumin māku).



Illustration 4.2 Year 2020 Certification Kurumin: We support child rearing¹⁵⁶

The Mark itself is only a potential signifier of whether participants hail from companies with family-friendly policies. Specifically, the bar to qualify for the Kurumin Mark is very low. For example, one requirement that companies must fulfill is having more than one male employee take parental leave, or at least one male employee in the case of businesses that have 300 or fewer employees (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare 2013b). However, according to a Fathering Japan riji, the ministry does not specify a minimum duration for parental leave, so male employees who take a single day off still count as fulfilling this criterion. Additionally, not all companies that qualify or that could qualify go through the application process for the Mark, although companies conscientious or concerned enough to send their middle managers to an ikuboss event probably are more likely to be the kind of companies that would apply for the

¹⁵⁶ Source: <https://jobspring.jp/article/detail/435>.

Kurumin Mark. Nevertheless, I am surprised to discover that business cards displaying the Mark are rare.

As the event nears its end, participants are instructed to exchange contact information in order to communicate further about the topics they have discussed over the course of the evening. After a commemorative group photo in front of reporters, participants leave in the order of their group numbers, ending the event.

Section 5: The IkuBoss Project Workshops as Reinforcers of Corporate Loyalty

IkuBoss Project events, such as the networking workshop, ostensibly attempt to remove a major barrier to work-life balance in the form of middle managers' conservative mindsets about how and to what extent employees should value and prioritize their families relative to their work responsibilities. However, project events serve to reproduce work-oriented masculinities and cater to corporate members without challenging the businesses' fundamental policies about employees' work-life balance. IkuBoss Project events are therefore less likely to convey Fathering Japan's values than are other events, and the seriousness and professionalism of such events contrast with the nonprofit's motto about "smiling fathers." Still, the IkuBoss Project's influence ensures that its values occasionally surface elsewhere at the nonprofit: Fathering Japan's Business Vision mentions uncited Canadian surveys suggesting that the more men play a role in the home, the higher their productivity as workers (Fathering Japan 2021).

Additionally, the workshop's flow may be similar to the schedules at other gatherings, but IkuBoss Project events feel comparatively less like a "third space" and more exclusively like a university seminar. This distinction arises from a number of factors. First, other Fathering Japan project events are attended by and to a greater extent guided by "regulars," participants who set the mood and teach newcomers how to inhabit the third place (Wimmer 2013). However, the audience of ikuboss workshops attends the event in their capacity as employees of a specific company and not as individuals seeking knowledge for the benefit of their private lives or society. According to my interlocutors, many middle managers are actually present on their company's orders, not because of their personal interest in the topic of work-life balance. In this

sense, the relationships formed through IkuBoss Project events are just another business connection.

Second, IkuBoss Project events, such as the Action and Networking workshop, appear to be performances partially for the sake of the mass media and the paying members of the IkuBoss Corporate Alliance, as well as for companies that possess the potential to become sponsors. This is true even of events that are not workshops and that instead feature a panel of experts testifying to the IkuBoss Project's importance; they attempt to convey a professional image of Fathering Japan based on the lineup of speakers, the venue, the event's air of formality and professionalism, and the project's courting of publicity. This effort by the organization as a whole was likely the reason why Ando-san was more formally attired than usual when he helped to lead the workshop discussed above.

Images of Fathering Japan as trendy but similar to a corporation in its professionalism present the nonprofit organization as a viable, attractive partner for corporations seeking to cultivate a more flexible yet productive workplace. Ultimately, company interest in the IkuBoss Project is self-serving. Namely, corporations can no longer count on (male) employees to display excessive devotion to their jobs—to the point that they go home to their families only a few times per month as they did prior to the collapse of Japan's economic bubble in the 1990s (Allison 1994). Learning from the IkuBoss Project's benevolent management practices and performances of sympathy for their employees' private needs are therefore means by which corporations in the Alliance extract value from employees in the form of continued commitment and work efficiency. Nevertheless, by relying on middle manager to cushion employee dissatisfaction through emotional labor, corporations continue to place on the workers

themselves the burden of successfully managing competing obligations and expectations. Under current workplace culture, an employee who goes home early on his child's birthday will likely have to make up that lost time later. Moreover, he will have to work twice as hard in order to prove that his commitment to his company has not been compromised.

Unable and unwilling to insist directly that companies reform their policies, the IkuBoss Project's reliance on bosses who bolster employee's attachment to the workplace fails to deviate structurally from the employee training practices during the heyday of the postwar Japanese economy. According to Kondo (1990), companies funded employee retreats that appeared to be expressions of appreciation for loyal service but that were designed to strengthen work group solidarity, thereby increasing employee loyalty and productivity.¹⁵⁷ As one of my interlocutors pointed out to me, if contemporary companies truly value the well-being of their workers, a more effective solution to work-life-balance issues would be to implement internal structural changes rather than to rely on the good judgment of individual managers. Examples of drastic steps to address workers' work-life balance include eliminating overtime work, requiring paternity leave, and implementing work-from-home measures. However, Japanese companies view such reforms as unrealistic: in fact, 70 percent of small- and medium-sized businesses oppose mandatory paternity leave (The Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry 2020). Further, at the time of my fieldwork, work-from-home was not a valid option due to corporate insistence on face-to-face interactions.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ Kondo explains that in a small factory setting, such policies had mixed results: they accomplished their goal, but employees were not uncritically thankful, maintaining the right to judge their boss for not properly planning the company retreat.

¹⁵⁸ The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about at least temporary changes within Japanese work culture; see this dissertation's Conclusion.

The Ikuboss Project's struggle to effect workplace change is therefore complicated by the continued insistence of corporate Japan on maintaining its ability to decide how and where employees use their time. Even if middle managers are empathetic ikubosses, most companies continue to place discretionary power in managers' hands that requires workers to negotiate their overtime and parental leave. Fathering Japan's events and message are not designed to overturn this power dynamic, but rather to teach middle managers how to become better parent-like figures to their subordinates.

Even so, companies that participate in the Ikuboss Corporate Alliance at least show an awareness about the need to change workplace culture. Far worse are the so-called "black companies" with excessive overtime and toxic work environments that make employees afraid to voice their thoughts—even outside of their companies. One individual identified to me as an employee of a black company refused to be interviewed because he was afraid of repercussions. The Ikuboss Project's message about paternalistic middle-managers who cultivate positive relationships with their subordinates will find no audience among black companies. Such sentiments would disrupt black companies' cost-cutting business methods: hiring young employees, forcing them to work long hours of unpaid overtime, and then recruiting a new batch of entry-wage workers after the current batch of employees inevitably quits.

Fathering Japan can therefore do little else but to gradually chip away at the sustainability of black companies and their practices by continuing, along with other actors, to expound on importance of work-life balance within public discourse. The efforts of multiple actors concerned with work-life balance, combined with such high-profile incidents as overwork-induced suicides and *karoshi* or "death from overwork," have helped social sentiment to gradually shift from

regarding excessive overtime as a badge of pride for the salaryman to an undesirable condition imposed upon employees by their employers. Yet workers still believe that their companies ask too much of them (Japan Labor Survey Association 2021), even with recent legislation clamping down on excessive overtime (Adelstein 2018; Matsuo 2021). As such, the Ikuboss Project remains unable to propose truly radical solutions to corporate Japan, especially those ideas that would raise questions about Fathering Japan's suitability as a service provider and a beneficiary of donations.

Section 6: Critiques and Successes of the IkuBoss Project

Because the IkuBoss Project is the Fathering Japan initiative with the highest profile, I instinctively had an overriding curiosity about its success in motivating corporations to change policies related to work-life balance. Throughout my time in Japan, I kept digging for information about how to evaluate the IkuBoss Project's efficacy in conveying the central philosophies of Fathering Japan and in encouraging systemic changes in Japanese work culture. Unfortunately, when I specifically inquired about how to measure the degree to which the IkuBoss Project had influenced corporate executives and middle managers to allow time for employees to engage with their families, the only criteria offered to me were vague and unconvincing.

Interestingly, members of Fathering Japan sometimes noted that the personas of speakers at IkuBoss Project events clashed with the nonprofit's ethos. For instance, in explaining his skepticism regarding a regularly featured lecturer on the ikuboss circuit and other Fathering Japan events, Ken-san simultaneously referenced Fathering Japan's emphasis on smiling fathers and Item 10 on the list of ikuboss criteria: "Whoever Suggests Should Start First." He made the following observation:

Although he advocates things like ikuboss, judging from his appearance, [the lecturer] doesn't look like he's having much fun. That's why as long as he claims to be an ikuboss, I'm like 'What?!' I don't know at all if becoming an ikuboss is good or not. When he says things like 'let's enjoy life more,' 'this kind of life is fun,' 'your work performance will

increase' . . . or 'the future will be brighter' . . . well, if for example there were evidence . . .

As Ken-san pointed out, audiences will automatically doubt a stern-faced person who exhorts the audience to enjoy life. Ken-san also highlighted a question that I asked myself constantly during my fieldwork: just how successful has the IkuBoss Project been in changing workplace culture in Japan? Middle managers who participate in Fathering Japan workshops fill out surveys after the events, and then they complete another survey some weeks later. Similarly, their subordinates at work submit anonymous surveys evaluating their bosses' behavior. Using such information following workshops, Fathering Japan evaluates the success of their education outreach.

However, to my knowledge, Fathering Japan conducted no long-term surveys to evaluate whether these middle managers have continued to act as ikuboss into the future, changing their management style permanently. It is possible that middle managers could change their workplace behavior in the time leading up to their subordinates' survey submission deadlines, only to return to a more heavy-handed management style when they are no longer in danger of being evaluated negatively.

Additionally, as far as I could determine, neither I nor any of the other Fathering Japan members who were not *riji* had access to data from the ikuboss surveys, anonymized or otherwise.¹⁵⁹ Consequently, we had no choice but to take the word of the IkuBoss Project leaders that their initiatives were making headway within Japanese businesses. All evidence indicates

¹⁵⁹ I told a few *riji* that I would be interested in seeing these data, but they did not offer to share the survey results.

that Fathering Japan leaders never engaged in any form of deception and that no members of Fathering Japan's board of directors and leadership acted in bad faith. Instead, their documents and actions demonstrate that they see themselves as contributing towards a more hopeful, better, and ultimately happy society. However, it is important to acknowledge that the IkuBoss Project is a significant source of revenue for Fathering Japan, which has a vested interest in ensuring that the IkuBoss Project has a positive, successful image.

According to those spearheading the IkuBoss Project, one criterion for judging the project's success is the number of companies that officially sign onto the project as part of the IkuBoss Corporate Alliance. However, the quantity of corporate members does not help anyone measure the quality of the project's efforts. Moreover, some corporate members already had employee-friendly workplaces prior to joining. Such companies as Ricoh Leasing Company are not newly converted by Fathering Japan to the ikuboss way of thinking, but instead enroll in the IkuBoss Corporate Alliance in order to continue their progressive workplace policies (Fathering Japan 2016c; Tokyo Keizai Online 2016).

Further, joining the IkuBoss Corporate Alliance may not necessarily signal a company-wide commitment to the IkuBoss Project's agenda for a number of reasons. First, middle managers rather than company leaders hold more immediate power over the day-to-day operations of rank-and-file employees, and middle managers vary in the degree to which they allow their subordinates to prioritize their private lives. Moreover, as mentioned above, most hail from generations in which men were generally uninvolved in family life. Many middle managers have climbed to their positions by performing as the sort of workers who toed the company line and left much of *ikuji* (child care) and *kosodate* (child rearing) to their wives, adhering to

traditional beliefs regarding the gendered division of labor in the family. These managers may expect their employees to do the same.

Second, Japanese companies may view Fathering Japan less as a partner and more as an outlet for corporate philanthropy—a tradition in the business sector that began in the early 1990s. While characterized as a bastion of conservative practices, the business sector has for many decades recognized the need to reform itself, structurally and culturally shifting from “being profit-driven and hence narrow-minded to being more receptive to diverse ways of thinking which had hitherto often been dismissed as inefficient in Japan” (Kawashima 2003, 104). More recently, the Japanese government stressed that corporations require creative, flexible policies and employees to compete in the global economy (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications 2017), even though immigration is still tightly regulated and notions about the global economy appear ill-defined and ambiguous. Even the Japanese government has provided a definition of what “global talent” geared toward a global marketplace should look like, explaining that “with a deep understanding of their Japanese identity and of Japanese culture, [global] talent can be active in various fields while acquiring rich foreign language skills, communication ability, self-direction, assertiveness, the spirit of understanding other cultures, etc.” (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications 2017). Significantly, this global talent is not the type of workforce that Japanese corporate structures and workplace culture are currently designed to cultivate.

In recent decades, government and for-profit organizations have turned to nonprofit organizations, hoping that the enthusiasm and innovative mindsets thought to be present in the third—or nonprofit—sector will help to revitalize a stagnating society. Company engagement

with the third sector initially took the form of sending employees for such mandatory weekend “volunteer” work as cleaning up parks and streets (Kawashima 2003). However, volunteer work soon gave way to corporate donations after the Law to Promote Specified Nonprofit Activities of 1998 provided a legal framework for companies to contribute financially to organizations that, due to the government’s strict criteria and heavy regulation, were not officially recognized as nonprofit organizations. (See Chapter 1). More recently, the paradigm has shifted again from fiscal support to partnerships between businesses and nonprofits that often involve sharing knowledge and resources. For example, experts at the Wild Bird Society of Japan worked with programmers at the large Japanese technology conglomerate NEC, formerly Nippon Electric Company, to develop software that tracks the migration pattern of endangered birds (Kawashima 2003).

The IkuBoss Corporate Alliance has been trying to achieve a similar partnership between corporations and Fathering Japan, its nonprofit creator. Attempting to cultivate ikubosses, Fathering Japan provides lecturers who encourage sympathy toward employees’ private circumstances, while companies provide financial backing and their middle managers as students. However, as in the cases of many such alliances, one cannot say that such relationships are true partnerships without the two sectors’ sharing more fully in the responsibility for changing the corporate workplace. Fathering Japan is currently doing most of the heavy lifting: by donating money and lending personnel for a few ikuboss sessions, less progressive companies place the burden for social change squarely on a Fathering Japan. In the process, such corporations obscure their unwillingness to enact company policy-backed reforms by presenting the appearance of making efforts toward creating a family-friendly work environment. A more

coordinated front—attacking the issues at both ends via a combination of nonprofit courses designed for middle managers and enforceable policies—would doubtless produce far greater successes in engendering a work culture where men are neither penalized for taking paternity leave nor feel compelled to work overtime at the office.

Fathering Japan may be better served by changing the Ikuboss Project’s target of interest, as articulated by Ken-san and also by a few other members of Fathering Japan during conversations after events. Having recently joined Fathering Japan at the start of my fieldwork, Ken-san is a salesperson who has switched employers an unusual number of times because of dissatisfaction with the working conditions. However, unlike Ando-san, Ken-san was unable to elevate substantially his standing across companies. Ken-san maintained a healthy skepticism about the IkuBoss Project, questioning the argument that if the “top” of a company changes, the rest of the company will follow suit. He suggested that rather than focusing on recruiting large companies to the IkuBoss Corporate Alliance, Fathering Japan would yield more results for Japanese families by focusing on the management at small- and medium-sized businesses for the following reason:

Most Japanese businesses are top-down, but in large companies if the management ranks [at the very top] say to do something, it will take a lot of time to trickle down to the bottom levels. Also, there will be dissenting opinions and debate, as well as people who fundamentally don’t sympathize. In the process, most of the meaning will be lost on people working on the ground, like us at the bottom.

Here, Ken-san voiced his concern that not only do large Japanese corporations have difficulty passing down instructions because of their sheer size, but that inevitably the meaning of such instructions will also become diluted through a lack of comprehension by and resistance from individuals who are unable or unwilling to change their mindset. Ken-san suggested that any change that does occur in the middle management ranks will largely be cosmetic, following the letter of the law but not the spirit of the law. Fundamentally, most middle managers do not understand the problems of rank-and-file employees who are struggling to be involved with their children's lives. Managers are generally older than their subordinates, and they are often the parents of older children who require less time investment; they have therefore forgotten the challenges of raising young children. Lacking this current understanding and possessing a vested interest in the status quo that helped them to achieve their positions, managers have leeway to reinterpret instructions delivered from above, which are unable to anticipate all possible scenarios and permutations in actual practice. On the subject of their subordinates' ikuji and kosodate, Ken-san remarked that middle management can be apathetic or even hostile "because it's not their problem."

As Ken-san observed and evidence suggests, even if company leaders decide to donate money to Fathering Japan or to send a few of their middle managers to ikuboss workshops, the Fathering Japan concepts may not trickle down the company pyramid and produce changes in employees' lives unless the managers must follow enforceable company-wide policies, which the IkuBoss Project does not insist that its corporate members implement. At the ikuboss events that I attended, speakers did not discuss the gaps in communication within company hierarchies; more accurately, corporate interests prevent riji from acknowledging publicly the issues with

implementing ikuboss strategies. Fathering Japan's heavy reliance on the IkuBoss Project, well intentioned or not, precludes any discussion of failure or the project's shortcomings. Instead, lecturers strove to present a positive image of the IkuBoss Project, driving home the necessity of both the project and corporate change by pointing out the demanding nature of company work culture.

However, according to other interlocutors and media reports, corporations do not yet appear ready to enforce ikuboss ideals with concrete penalties and rewards (Koizumi 2019; The Japan Times 2020). Hence Ken-san's suggestion that small- and medium-sized businesses are a much more viable target for Fathering Japan and the IkuBoss Project: "Because [small- and medium-sized] businesses feel like a family, you can trust people whose faces you can see."

Still, others at Fathering Japan argue that targeting large companies is the correct strategy, since such corporations are better positioned to serve as trendsetters and models for smaller companies because of their size and influence. Additionally, large corporations have more resources to initiate workplace change than small- and medium-sized businesses. Proponents of the IkuBoss Project in its current state also value the visibility and prestige conveyed by high-profile partners, which in turn puts Fathering Japan in a better position to drive social change. No one, regardless of their stance on the IkuBoss Project, questioned the value of corporate fiscal contributions to the project. One Fathering Japan member estimated that donations from IkuBoss Corporate Alliance members comprised 70 percent of the nonprofit's income.

Ultimately, Fathering Japan has been wise to target middle managers as instruments for achieving a family-friendly work environment and society. In Japan, structural and cultural barriers in the form of company operations and workplace culture are significant drains on time

and therefore deterrents to involved fathers and husbands. Ishii-Kuntz et al. suggests that “ideological or attitudinal factors such as husbands’ and wives’ gender ideology are not significantly associated with Japanese fathers’ involvement in child care” and that time availability is a more salient factor in determining how couples allocate domestic duties (2004, 788). One can change men’s perceptions of their role in the family, but many will find that the demands of employment impinge on their ability to be involved in their families, and most will be loath to jeopardize their families’ livelihoods by challenging these obstacles on their own. Therefore, one of the major obstacles to realizing the IkuBoss Project’s goals lies not with the project’s broad idea, but with its implementation, its treatment of masculinities as capable of thoroughly fulfilling opposing roles and of time as overly malleable—despite its recognizing paradoxically that time is finite—and the way that Fathering Japan integrates the project into the nonprofit’s structure and revenue stream.

Section 7: Voices of Fathering Japan's Members: Issues of Concern

While members of Fathering Japan direct both admiration and occasionally criticism at the IkuBoss Project, they do not restrict their critical gaze to the project alone; instead, members extend their critiques to the nonprofit as a whole. As enthusiastic and supportive as individuals can appear, most recognize that the nonprofit organization is not a perfect organization. Some members and participants maintain a critical distance between themselves and the Fathering Japan leadership, or at least from certain riji. All nonprofit riji are accomplished, but not all of them are accorded the same amount of respect.¹⁶⁰

However, minor discontent did not prevent people from acknowledging Fathering Japan's influence on their lives. While some individuals had already resolved to become involved fathers before their encounter with Fathering Japan, many stressed the transformative effect that Fathering Japan in general, and Ando-san in particular, had on their identities as fathers. Most of these stories followed a similar narrative: initially they had little interest in fathering, but after attending Fathering Japan events or after interacting with Ando-san, they changed their stance on ikuji and kosodate and metamorphosed into involved fathers. The tone of these narratives often suggests that speakers are looking down on their unenlightened past selves.

Still, my interviews and conversations revealed that despite varying levels of investment in Fathering Japan, and notwithstanding the importance that riji place on listening to regular members' voices and riji's expressed desire to have members play a bigger role in devising and leading new initiatives, most regular members have not actively attempted to influence Fathering

¹⁶⁰ Nevertheless, even one of the more heavily criticized riji had his followers. Other riji had benign or unobtrusive personas, with neither strong supporters nor detractors.

Japan's activities to any significant degree, with one obvious exception being the stay-at-home dads of Shufu no Tomo.¹⁶¹ More precisely, regular members did express or act upon the desire to push the organization in a particular direction, even when they felt dissatisfied. Instead, members have moderated their attachment to the nonprofit. While remaining members, some distanced themselves from Fathering Japan by attending events more selectively, and, in extreme cases, by leaving the organization entirely. Those who have stayed, despite their misgivings, appreciated the ways in which Fathering Japan conveys information about topics in which they were invested, admired some of the riji, or valued the parenting community that sprouted around the nonprofit. The significance of interpersonal relationships among members has superseded Fathering Japan's difficulties in completely meeting the members' desires and needs. On the other hand, some people have left the nonprofit for reasons including disagreements with the organization's direction, an inability to justify the continued financial costs of membership, or their no longer needing Fathering Japan's information or community—their outgrowing the nonprofit, just as their children would outgrow a set of clothes.

Most notably, a handful of individuals who were influential during Fathering Japan's formative days have adopted the practices of mitigation and departure, and not simply because the nonprofit is less relevant to their now-older children—Kato-san, a former riji, is still active in local parenting groups, while Enoki-san, another former riji, was explicit about his disagreement with the nonprofit's direction (see below). One of the original core members of Fathering

¹⁶¹ One of Fathering Japan's riji is a member of Shufu no Tomo. His riji profile on the Fathering Japan website states that with his fellow househusbands, he was responsible for the formation of the Secret Society in 2015. While he can technically take credit as the supervising riji, he was not one of the founding five mentioned by my Shufu no Tomo interlocutors, who initially challenged the Fathering Japan leadership's commitment to laughter. Thus, there is a discrepancy between Fathering Japan's official presentation of its history and the unofficial, unwritten history of an unofficial group within the larger organization.

Japan—Nishimura-san—founded his own nonprofit organization in 2010.¹⁶² Nishimura-san was never a riji, but I was informed by Kato-san at a community event not affiliated with Fathering Japan that Nishimura-san is no longer part of the nonprofit. However, the Fathering Japan website has consistently listed Nishimura-san as a lecturer and musician, and, as of September 2020, he is still participating in Papa’s E-hon Raibu with Ando-san and the other band members. Kato-san’s belief that Nishimura-san left Fathering Japan is therefore a reflection of how both are disengaged from the nonprofit but continue to hang in its orbit.

Past and present members choose which ideas to take away from Fathering Japan, which practices to selectively and feasibly embrace in their own lives, and which messages to ignore or critique. When necessary, they adopt distancing strategies that are both an assertion of agency, and a form of self-selection that ultimately maintains a core of active to semi-active members who are more-or-less in agreement with the nonprofit’s direction. What follows below are some of the most common and salient criticisms of members, both active and disengaged.

A Window of Relevancy: Leaders Who Have Aged Out of Topics Aimed at New Parents

A common issue voiced by members concerns the age of many riji, or more specifically, the fact that most riji no longer have young children. As the parents of middle school, high school, and college students, some Fathering Japan leaders are perceived by members to be disconnected from the challenges faced by parents of young children—either having forgotten, or having become less capable of speaking to such subjects because they are no longer as deeply personal. Additionally, members expressed concern that the old guard is increasingly prioritizing

¹⁶² The dead link for this nonprofit, えほんうた・あそびうた (e-hon uta · asobi-uta), is featured on Nishimura-san’s active Twitter account.

topics more appropriate to later stages of kosodate, and that this tendency is discouraging newcomers (i.e. the parents of young children) from joining the organization. The parents of young children may attend a session, but after concluding that the nonprofit is not adequately speaking to their needs, they do not return. A lack of new members could eventually prove detrimental to Fathering Japan’s growth, leading to a shrinking membership and ultimately to a loss of influence.

In the words of Ken-san, who sees the current leaders as too stuck in their ways: “Apologies to the people who created Fathering Japan, but I think it would be good if they retired soon (laughs). It would be good (laughs). Of course, they could become advisors or supporters . . .”

However, according to the riji themselves—who are aware of this concern—such a situation is unlikely to happen. By their own admission, they are unlikely to vacate their positions as riji due to the benefits derived from the Fathering Japan brand. For example, riji can easily obtain lecture gigs by capitalizing on their position on Fathering Japan’s board of directors.

In contrast, Kozaki-Sensei mentioned that the nonprofit organization Florence recently changed its entire board of directors. According to its website, Florence similarly aims to create a “society fulfilled with smiles of diverse families, where all children are embraced, and parents are challenging anything [sic] with child-rearing” (Florence 2020). Although formally established two years before Fathering Japan and covering many of the same topics—and in fact appearing at many of the same events—Florence is not as influential as Fathering Japan,

although still quite prominent in Japan's parenting movement. Whether its drastic replacement of riji will make it more competitive in the future remains to be seen.

However, around the middle of 2020, Fathering Japan added two new riji to its roster. One riji's profile states that he was born in 1971; he has a son in his first year of university and daughter in her third year of high school. (High school lasts for three years in Japan.) The other riji was born in 1982, but his profile does not list the ages of his two sons. These riji replaced two other comparatively newer riji. According to a 2017 profile, one of these former riji was born in 1971 and has three children: a son in his fourth year of elementary school (ages 9 to 10), a daughter in her first year of elementary school (ages 6 to 7), and a daughter in kindergarten. This individual is still listed as a lecturer and a representative of Fathering Japan Chugoku on the branch's website. The other replaced riji was born in 1980 and has a son of an unspecified age. His riji profile has disappeared, but his papa profile is still present on the Fathering Japan website. Papa profiles list basic details about Fathering Japan members, such as birth year, birthplace, job, what activities men hope to participate in as fathers and nonprofit members, and what triggered their papa switch.

While this riji replacement seemingly reflects some degree of turnover, a closer look reveals more stability than change. As of August 2021, 10 of the 12 riji present at Fathering Japan in 2016, when I started my fieldwork, continue to number among the nonprofit's current 15 riji. Most of the turnover has therefore been in the newer additions to the riji roster. While not all of the riji's online profiles mention details about their children, or indeed hint at their existence—raising questions to those unfamiliar with the nonprofit about whether these riji are even parents—some of the more established riji still have children in elementary school.

Nevertheless, members still perceive them to be “aging out” of active ikuji, since they believe that Fathering Japan should be courting new fathers—which it is.

Problematizing the Authenticity and Scope of Fathering Japan’s Message of Smiling

Nonprofit members have various opinions regarding Fathering Japan’s constant emphasis on smiling and laughter. Many see the model as catchy and compelling, while others find Fathering Japan’s slogan “Let’s Increase the Number of Smiling Fathers” to be completely unproblematic. For example, take Tawara-san—a clean-shaven, immaculately dressed salaryman from every angle. Tawara-san is in his 50s, with twins who have grown beyond the age requiring active ikuji, but he still participates in Fathering Japan events. When I asked him how people unable to smile would react to the nonprofit’s message, Tawara-san replied that people who are overworked and stressed should consult Fathering Japan initiatives such as the Partnership Project for insights.

However, still others—such as the stay-at-home dads of Shufu no Tomo—maintain that many riji appear overly serious and are therefore unfit to preach about smiling. This perception is not restricted to members of the Secret Society. For example, Ken-san suggested that some of the older men on the Board of Directors lack a sense of humor. However, he exempted Ando-san from this characterization:

Because Ando-san is a person with a neutral image, he doesn’t come off as stiff and formal, he gives off the impression of being free. When he says, ‘I started an NPO, I want to create this kind of society!’ it’s like, ‘I get it!’ and the message is very easy to

understand. However, [another riji's] message comes off as if he's reading from a treatise or technical paper. It's boring.

Enoki-san, a former Fathering Japan riji, saw the nonprofit's emphasis on smiling, laughter, and positive emotion as excessive:

What I'm opposed to . . . laughing, getting angry, there should be these kinds of fathers. Just laughing, um, is a little odd. Always 'ha ha ha ha ha.' It's weird. It's absolutely weird. And at today's Fathering Japan, there's a lot of positive talk. But few people talk about negative things, intentionally so, people at Fathering Japan today are trying too hard to laugh, and their laughter seems a little like lies.¹⁶³

As mentioned in the previous chapter, I also found the relative lack of negative topics at Fathering Japan surprising given that parenting is a task replete with plenty of hardships. However, like Enoki-san, I came to realize that the absence of more serious topics was in fact a strategy to encourage men to take the first steps toward being active parents. When I asked what he meant by lies, Enoki-san replied: "Their faces have become laughing masks. It's a performance. . . . There are times when I can't tell whether they're really laughing or not."

There was a pause in our conversation, and then Enoki-san remarked as if lost in thought: "Ando Tetsuya also, although he says it would be good to increase the number of smiling fathers, he doesn't actually smile that much." My ears immediately pricked up at this comment—one that

¹⁶³ As indicated earlier, *warau* means both "to smile" and "to laugh." The context determines the word's meaning, and sometimes both meanings are invoked simultaneously.

I had never heard anyone voice before—from someone personally close to Ando-san and I immediately inquired further. My interlocutor carefully chose his next words, unsure about how to convey his thoughts: “He’s lecturing every day, so his *gūzō*,¹⁶⁴ do you understand what *gūzō* means? [using the English loan word *idol*],¹⁶⁵ it’s idol, so his only role has become that of ‘Ando Tetsuya.’ His part . . . he performs as the star, as the idol ‘Ando Tetsuya.’” In short, Enoki-san argued that the mask has become the man: somewhere underneath, Ando-san as father and individual has been lost beneath unspecified parties’ expectations that he play the part of “Ando-san” the public figure. Enoki-san continued:

But I think it’s okay, even so. He’s engaged in aerial warfare.¹⁶⁶ He’s releasing a lot of bombs from an aircraft. He’s having a lot of people listen to his words. And, I think that he wants fathers in Japan today to realize a lot of things. But it’s no good if he speaks to them one by one. It’s the same as a religion. Even Christianity is the same. It’s an important job to teach everyone one by one, but if you gather a lot of people together and then you create a bible, then you can spread the message to a lot of people. Both are necessary.

In contrast to Ando-san and his description of aerial warfare, Enoki-san portrayed himself as engaged in ground warfare; he was involved in outreach to fathers on a more personal,

¹⁶⁴ 偶像 (*gūzō*): image, idol.

¹⁶⁵ アイドル (*aidoru*).

¹⁶⁶ 空中線 (*kūchūsen*). Technically, this word refers to air-to-air combat, but I am translating the term as “aerial warfare” to encompass the information in my interlocutor’s next statement, which refers to air-to-ground combat as distinct from air-to-air combat.

individual basis through his social networks and community activities. Enoki-san's warfare metaphors were the most extreme, implicitly violent articulation of the parenting movement's fight against ingrained systems of beliefs and social structures, although it was clear that many leaders at Fathering Japan saw their activities loosely as a sort of battle for the hearts and minds of fathers across Japan.

Moreover, Enoki-san, who has known Ando-san for a long time, painted the president of Fathering Japan as a troubled, even tragic character who has lost the ability to genuinely embody the message that he originally formed Fathering Japan to help propagate: that fathers should become capable of smiling authentically. Enoki-san's reflections were a distinct departure from other members at Fathering Japan, who expressed nothing but respect for Ando-san and whose unfavorable remarks about certain riji generally excepted Ando-san from criticism. Consequently, perhaps Enoki-san's comparison of Fathering Japan to a religion extended much further than he explicitly articulated in our conversation: Ando-san the guru revealed himself as a messiah figure who has sacrificed himself for his cause.

Leaders Who Are Too Extraordinary

Only one individual raised this issue, but other members' generally high regard for riji led me to suspect that they would also agree with his assessment. Namely, a long-standing member suggested that Fathering Japan riji are not good role models for nonprofit members and event participants. As people capable of making a living as social entrepreneurs and freelancers, the riji are exceptional, ambitious, and accomplished, but they are not examples that others can emulate realistically. It takes special qualities to leave the aegis of company employment and to make

one's way successfully through the third sector, all the more so when one must provide for one's family in the process. This member suggested that by putting white-collar workers on the board of directors, as it did in the past, Fathering Japan would not only provide more relevant examples for most members of what work-life balance could look like, but it would also offer a greater diversity of options for how to live. After all, Fathering Japan generally stresses the importance of diversity.

Certainly, the Fathering Japan riji are impressive, especially given that many have three children and must provide for them from a position of relative instability compared to the salaryman worker. Three is a high number of children for the Japanese nuclear family: as explained in the Introduction, Japan averages 1.43 births per woman (The World Bank 2019). One director once joked that having three children was a requirement for becoming a riji, thus highlighting the performative aspect of being a parent of three. Parenting more than one or two children apparently demonstrates that it is possible to balance work and family even when one has a demanding schedule and a large family. Moreover, if onlookers assume that riji practice what they preach, it seemingly proves the often-cited hypothesis at Fathering Japan that happy couples and families lead to more children, thus raising the low national birth rate. Unmentioned and unreferenced was the fact, incidental or otherwise, that having another child also keeps open one's window of relevancy on the subject of ikuji. A third child temporarily addresses the concern, expressed above, that some riji have aged out of certain topics and are no longer adequately positioned to speak on them.

Criticisms Concerning the Cost of Membership

A major concern voiced by members regarding Fathering Japan as an organization was the high cost of membership. A one-time admission fee of 10,000 yen and an annual fee of 10,000 yen meant that first-year members paid a total of 20,000 yen (approximate 185 USD). Some suggested that were the fee lower, Fathering Japan's membership would be significantly higher than the roughly 500 individuals who were registered as members at the time of my fieldwork. However, the Fathering Japan leadership had a readily available explanation for this cost of admission. Ando-san informed me that the price of membership was intentionally set high. Their strategy was not to gather large numbers of people, but to accept people willing to work for the organization:

If someone is properly committed, they will be willing to join even if they have to pay 20,000 yen . . . if it's 20,000 yen, normally fathers will stop to think: 'Can I use it for something else?' . . . There are plenty of NPOs that can't accomplish anything like we can, all they have is a large number of members.

Hayashida-san echoed this thinking, arguing that a low admission fee would open up the nonprofit's membership to individuals who conclude that they "might as well join" based on a whim. She placed a stronger emphasis on the importance of admitting members who agree with Fathering Japan's goals:

In other words, there would be many people who wouldn't strive for the same mission . . . Fathering Japan is an organization that is genuinely trying to achieve its mission, so we want people who really approve to join. The people who do join are incredibly capable and thoughtful. Committed people properly carry this mission with them . . . these people go into their communities and take care of the less difficult obstacles [to Fathering Japan's mission], so in the end, even if the number of people joining Fathering Japan doesn't increase, our members interact with a lot of people outside of the organization, so they have a large influence [despite their small numbers]. We don't really need a lot of people in Fathering Japan proper.

Ando-san and Hayashida-san's insistence that a large membership is not necessarily a positive thing belied the many instances in which the nonprofit's speakers proudly announced membership numbers at events.

Members' passion for Fathering Japan's outreach is nevertheless consistent with the nonprofit's emphasis on engaged, smiling fathers who are empathetic and emotive toward their families, and it is a message that the Shufu no Tomo subgroup embodies. However, as this chapter discusses, when the nonprofit speaks to its corporate sponsors, it occasionally loses this focus on individual fathers' engagement with their families. Finally, Hayashida-san's quote pinpoints an additional reason that Fathering Japan cultivates and maintains a core group of invested members. The nonprofit recognizes that change at the community level is best shouldered by people living in those same communities. Properly motivated members who feed

off each other's enthusiasm are the best candidates for bringing Fathering Japan's values to local groups of fathers, a topic that the next chapter will discuss.

Chapter 5: A Place to Belong: Parenting and Community Engagement

Section 1: Local Parenting Groups' Role Relative to That of Nonprofit Organizations

Background

I walk through the forest, treading carefully to make as little sound as possible. As I step through the autumn leaves, my tight-fitting black costume covers my entire body, and only my glasses peek from between a gap in a cloth mask. Occasionally, I chance upon other men who are similarly clad in black. We nod at one another as I continue my patrol. Some of these men are stationed at specific posts, observing as children move from tree to tree using swings made of wooden logs, as children clamber up a stone wall, or as they throw Frisbees at a board on which pictures of enemy samurai have been carefully taped. When children complete a task, one of the masked men marks the card that the children wear around their necks with a seal of approval. These men and I are portraying ninja, and today our mission is to run an obstacle course that—at least in the eyes of the local children—is undoubtedly one of the highlights of the annual city festival.

The Nature of Local Parenting Groups Focused on Fathers

The above excerpt from my field notes describes a ninja-themed obstacle course operated by fathers living in a suburban community near central Tokyo. The event marked my first foray into the locally managed parenting groups that are at times tangential, at times directly in dialogue with the larger nonprofits in Japan's parenting movement. By participating in diverse

activities in several different communities, each home to their own organization, I quickly realized that the activities and purview of these local fathering groups overlapped but were not identical to the broader concerns of larger organizations such as Fathering Japan. If Fathering Japan pushes for changes in national, regional, and city-level policy and engages in educational outreach efforts aimed at parents, middle managers, and special interest groups, then groups involved in *chiiki katsudō*¹⁶⁷ or “community engagement” attempt to address what members claim are the specific needs of their neighborhoods. In the same way that Fathering Japan teaches men that parenting can be fun, *chiiki katsudō* attempt to fill these local needs while having fun. While *chiiki katsudō* groups do not preach smiling, one can still witness seemingly spontaneous—if occasionally slight or creaky—smiles arising from the lips of men in the middle of an activity.

Although *chiiki katsudō* is a broad term that describes diverse groups and actors with various goals involved in a wide array of activities, my research focused on the *chiiki katsudō* connected directly or indirectly to Japan’s parenting movement. Therefore, this dissertation focuses only on the meaning of *chiiki katsudō* to refer to loose associations of men meeting in their capacity as fathers, the way in which the term is primarily deployed at my field sites. As the next section explains, we can further divide the fathering groups involved in *chiiki katsudō* into two categories: the more family-oriented and less common *papa saakuru*,¹⁶⁸ or “*papa circles*,” and the more *oyaji-no-kai*¹⁶⁹ or “fathers’ gatherings” that are oriented towards personal

¹⁶⁷ 地域活動 (*chiiki katsudō*).

¹⁶⁸ パパサークル (*papa sākuru*).

¹⁶⁹ 親父の会 (*oyaji-no-kai*).

fulfillment. While variations on these terms exist (i.e., *papakai*¹⁷⁰ or “papa meetings”) and the two exist on a continuum rather than as discrete categories, most *chiiki katsudō* groups can be roughly characterized as one or the other.

Through personal connections, I was occasionally invited to participate in community events that were not, at least to my knowledge, directly connected to any nonprofit in Japan’s parenting movement. However, most of the groups that I came into contact with could be ultimately traced back to connections initially made at Fathering Japan. In this way, I networked from regional and national level associations “down” to local level groups involving fathers who were often only faintly aware, or in many cases unaware of Fathering Japan, but nonetheless were indirectly influenced by its core values.

In some cases, Fathering Japan’s influence was observable via its effect on public discourse. For example, I heard expressions coined by Fathering Japan—especially by Ando-san, who has a way with words—echoing throughout *oyaji-no-kai*. Examples include the term *ikimen*¹⁷¹—a spin on *ikumen* that uses the *iki*¹⁷² (region) from *chiiki katsudō* instead of *iku*¹⁷³ (bring up or raise)—referring to men who participate in *chiiki katsudō*—as well as the metaphor that children are “time-limited passports,” which will be discussed later in this chapter.

In other cases, Fathering Japan’s influence on *chiiki katsudō* was observable due to the influential roles of Fathering Japan members in community engagement. For example, Watanabe-san is a leading member and the “closest thing to a representative” of a union of local

¹⁷⁰ パパ会 (*papakai*).

¹⁷¹ イキメン (*ikimen*).

¹⁷² 域 (*iki*).

¹⁷³ 育 (*iku*).

oyaji-no-kai located in the suburbs of the Greater Tokyo Area. Each oyaji-no-kai in this federation is tied to a specific elementary school, and its members consist of men whose children attend this school, but all of the oyaji-no-kai work collectively to put on large events. Watanabe-san's guiding influence and passion—itsself shaped by his prominent position in Fathering Japan—make itself felt throughout all the oyaji-no-kai. However, to the extent that most members of this federation have heard of Fathering Japan, it is usually in association with Watanabe-san.

As Ando-san pointed out, many oyaji-no-kai have current or former leaders such as Watanabe-san who participate in Fathering Japan. Some oyaji-no-kai leaders undoubtedly were pushed into their role, but others assumed their positions because they possessed the kind of passion and curiosity that could also drive them to join a special interest group such as Fathering Japan. Significantly, such influence is not unidirectional. There exists a feedback mechanism where members of Fathering Japan who participate in chiiki katsudō bring information about their activities back to the nonprofit, which then uses this information to further inform its trendsetting actions. In this way, oyaji-no-kai contribute to Japan's parenting movement even as they are influenced by it unknowingly.

Indeed, oyaji-no-kai and papa circles are integral to Japan's parenting movement, and they also play significant roles in the lives of the men who join these chiiki katsudō groups. While proponents of these chiiki katsudō groups may claim that their organizations formed in response to the unique desires of participants—and that the types of activities they engage in, the frequency with which they assemble, or some other characteristic of their specific group are

therefore distinct from other chiiki katsudō groups—the underlying motivations and sentiments of chiiki katsudō are largely shared across the Greater Tokyo Area and indeed Japan as a whole.

Finally, if Fathering Japan and other nonprofits set their sights on society’s future, then chiiki katsudō groups concentrate on a bygone era. My research suggests that fathers’ motivations for participating in oyaji-no-kai (but not necessarily papa circles) include an appreciation for activities linked to “traditional” Japanese culture, a profound nostalgia for a (re)imaged past in which community life in Japan was more intimate and fulfilling, and the desire for meaningful homosocial relationships outside of the workplace.

Section 2: Papa Circles and Oyaji-no-kai as Two Distinct Forms of Chiiki Katsudō

Chiiki katsudō is a broad term that refers to a diverse array of practices taking place in local communities. Broadly understood, the phrase refers to collective efforts to improve the spaces in which people live, often with an emphasis on building *tsunagari*¹⁷⁴ (connections) between people, addressing local needs and problems, and enjoying oneself in the process. Similar to Katō's (2012) suggestion that education—learning the tea ceremony and the Japanese values and history associated with it—provides women with the justification for engaging in recreational activities, the *chiiki katsudō* goal of improving the community offers participants the opportunity to have fun in a public space without risking social censure for self-indulgence.

A wide variety of groups are active *chiiki katsudō*, including nonprofit organizations, schools, and study groups. In some cases, local governments may be involved by providing groups with financial resources or space to conduct their activities. Significantly, *chiiki katsudō* is understood to be a grassroots activity, so city halls or ward offices usually play a supporting role. (See Chapter 6.) In relation to fathers, one of the most salient but ambiguous distinctions is that of the papa circle and the *oyaji-no-kai*. For many, the two terms are more or less synonymous. However, some individuals invested in promoting *chiiki katsudō* attempt to distinguish between the two in order to highlight what they see as desirable and undesirable activities. In reality, *oyaji-no-kai*—the more prevalent, visible type of local group centered on men's community engagement—and papa circles exist on two ends of a spectrum, although many groups of local fathers fall somewhere in between.

¹⁷⁴ 繋がり (*tsunagari*).

The Characteristics of Oyaji-no-Kai

According to Watanabe-san, the most vocal advocate of a distinction between the two, men form papa circles to learn how to be better husbands and fathers. They take *kaji*¹⁷⁵ (house chores) and *ikuji*¹⁷⁶ (childcare) as their primary concerns, which is why they seldom meet. In contrast, oyaji-no-kai gather together fathers for the sake of making *nakama*—a term that combines the meanings of “companion” and “member of the same social category”—with whom to engage in community activities and drink. There is not only strength in numbers, but also confidence: fathers working together for sake of the local community are less likely to be regarded with suspicion than individual men. However, oyaji-no-kai do not necessarily consist of men who are currently in the process of raising children. For example, an oyaji-no-kai active in the area where I lived, and in which I was invited to participate, included a few women in its membership. The rest of the participants were mostly men whose children had long since reached adulthood.

Oyaji-no-kai consisting of fathers, the primary focus of this chapter, are generally all-male and are not formed for the sake of men’s wives and children. In most cases, participation takes time away from men’s involvement with their families, as well as men’s greater participation in housework or *ikuji*. Watanabe-san suggested that within many oyaji-no-kai there exist fathers who are highly involved with their families, but that the overriding purpose of the organization is recreational. Members of oyaji-no-kai may certainly view the events they hold as contributing to the well-being of children in the community, but fathers participate to the extent

¹⁷⁵ 家事 (*kaji*).

¹⁷⁶ 育児 (*ikuji*).

that they find the activities enjoyable. Take away this enjoyment, Watanabe suggested, and the organization will fracture or dissolve.

Due to the emphasis on recreation, oyaji-no-kai can transform into groups of men who simply get together to drink. *Nomikai*, or drinking parties, are a commonly enjoyed activity for all types of oyaji-no-kai. In fact, some view them as a defining trait. One man even remarked that “those guys who don’t go to nomikai are useless.” In rare cases, individuals can act as a moderating influence on drinking activities. For example, Watanabe-san strongly disapproves of groups that see drinking parties as their *raison d’être*. As an influential member in his federation of linked oyaji-no-kai, Watanabe-san attempts to keep the local men’s groups from veering in this direction. He does this partly for very practical reasons:

Oyaji-no-kai are different [from papa circles]. Men show up for *chiiki katsudō*. They don’t do anything in the house . . . What do their wives think? . . . Men work on weekdays. On weekends they do oyaji-no-kai events and drink alcohol. That’s no good, is it? I really want to change this behavior. So I said to the men participating in oyaji-no-kai events: Before attending the meeting, please do the laundry and clean the house. Please cook food, even if you don’t eat yourself. If they don’t do this, the reputation of the oyaji-no-kai will suffer. Our standing among mothers will really decline. The mothers here actually ask their husbands to participate in oyaji-no-kai. That’s why our members with children in elementary school are now pretty good about cooking before showing up for our meetings.

The Characteristics of Papa Circles

According to Watanabe-san, “if anything, papa circles are for the sake of children and wives, they’re about doing *kaji* and *ikuji*. . . . Papa circles and Fathering Japan are similar, their core is about doing *kaji* and *ikuji*.” Papa circles are forums for acquiring new knowledge: fellow fathers teach each other skills that could be useful in the home. As such, papa circles are favorably regarded by their participants’ partners—at least according to my male interlocutors. However, my female interlocutors did not make a distinction between *oyaji-no-kai* and papa circles.

Genuine papa circles are much rarer than *oyaji-no-kai*; since papa circles do not heavily emphasize recreation, fathers find them significantly less appealing than *oyaji-no-kai*. In fact, during my 13 months of fieldwork, I observed only two organizations that could be considered papa circles, one of which had strong elements of an *oyaji-no-kai*. However, I certainly heard descriptions of more organizations that qualified as papa circles. In contrast, I encountered dozens of *oyaji-no-kai*, including groups from outside the Greater Tokyo Area that congregated at a “national summit” of *oyaji-no-kai*. A group that I call Yamamori Papa Circle—one of the two papa circles with which I became familiar—is primarily operated by one individual, with the rest of the membership pitching in whenever necessary. As a true papa circle, the members of Yamamori Papa Circle spend more time dealing with their household affairs than doing *chiiki katsudō*.

Similarly, the other group that I consider a papa circle—which I will call Sadano Papa School—does not actually label itself as a papa circle. Existing in the spectrum between papa circles and *oyaji-no-kai*, Sadano Papa School arguably leans more toward the former due to its

strong emphasis on educational outreach to fathers. Specifically, the group aspires to teach men how to become more involved in their families lives in a “fun” way. It also aims to cultivate a local environment in which it is easy to raise children, but it consistently fails to capture the interest of other local fathers.

The organization possesses a small but core membership that organizes seminars by working with the local city government and nonprofit organizations. In some ways a miniature version of Fathering Japan, Sadano Papa School targets men in its local community instead of fathers across the nation. Unlike Fathering Japan, Sadano struggles to mobilize resources. Regularly facing problems with their revenue stream, Sadano encourages but cannot compel members to become speakers at its events due to the organization’s inability to pay the per diem of a high-profile speaker more than a few times per year. (See Chapter 6.)

Ultimately, while the division between oyaji-no-kai and papa circles is highly artificial, the distinction proves useful in elucidating the modus operandi of different gatherings of fathers. Certainly, I witnessed a clear difference between fathering groups that exist for the sake of families and those that solely exist for the sake of their members’ personal enjoyment. Consider this difference: at Sadano Papa School, members struggled to pay for photocopies so that they could distribute handouts to local parents attending a lecture on *kosodate*¹⁷⁷ or child rearing. In contrast, when Watanabe’s oyaji-no-kai gathered to provide security for their affiliated school’s sports meet, one father appeared less interested in his children’s performances than he was in practicing his golf swings.

¹⁷⁷ 子育て (kosodate).

Section 3: Japanese Women's Views About the Value of Their Husbands' Community

Engagement

Japanese women hold mixed opinions regarding their husbands' participation in *chiiki katsudō*, and the women recognize that these groups for fathers do not always or unconditionally contribute to better family dynamics. Notably, I did not encounter any women who were completely supportive of *oyaji-no-kai* among the women whom I interviewed or met at events tied to Japan's parenting movement. Instead, responses to *chiiki katsudō* ranged from outright disapproval to grudging acceptance. Ultimately, an individual's stance toward *oyaji-no-kai* was itself strongly shaped by the perceived effect of *oyaji-no-kai* on household involvement. The following two cases illustrate the perceptions of women whose husbands are active in *oyaji-no-kai*.

The Case of Watanabe Ayumi-san

Watanabe-san's wife, to whom I will give the pseudonym Watanabe Ayumi-san, illustrated one way in which women may hold *chiiki katsudō* in ambivalent regard. An energetic woman who shows up for the events held by Watanabe-san's *oyaji-no-kai*, Ayumi-san supports Watanabe-san's activities to an extent. However, she also appears to greatly enjoy socializing and interacting with the people in her community. She pulled me and one other individual around the ninja-themed obstacle course described at the beginning of this chapter. During a performance by an all-fathers band featuring popular children's songs—ironically a stoic, emotionless performance—Ayumi-san loudly cheered and clapped to the rhythm. When the band had finished

playing, Ayumi-san called for an encore, embarrassing the musicians who did not know how to respond.

Partly due to her husband's influential status, but largely due to her own personality, Ayumi-san seemed completely at home during the after-event nomikai, seamlessly blending in with the almost entirely male attendees as she engaged in drinking banter. Her boisterous performance that appeared to be or at least approximate masculine drinking was a vivid contrast to the more reserved attitude of many other women who I witnessed attending nomikai during my fieldwork.

However, despite her familiarity with chiiki katsudō, Ayumi-san was critical of Watanabe-san's level of engagement with his oyaji-no-kai. As mentioned in the last section, Watanabe-san is an avid promoter of husbands and fathers performing household tasks before they show up for chiiki katsudō meetings and events. He insists upon maintaining a good reputation among the wives of the oyaji-no-kai's members, largely because it allows husbands greater latitude to participate. Nevertheless, according to his wife, Watanabe-san has fallen prey to the very vices that he advises other fathers against: Ayumi-san has told him to stop participating in chiiki katsudō because they consume too much of his time. As a leader and prominent figure in several oyaji-no-kai, not to mention Fathering Japan, Watanabe-san must pour more time than the average member into chiiki katsudō. However, if he is unable to negotiate a compromise between chiiki katsudō and the expectations for household participation set by his wife—who has already demonstrated that she is more positively disposed toward oyaji-no-kai than many other women—then Watanabe-san may run the risk of appearing

hypocritical. At the very least, Watanabe-san's case exposes the inherent contradiction at the heart of the "ikumen" concept discussed in Chapter 1.

Although I never heard Watanabe-san voice Ayumi-san's concerns at the oyaji-no-kai—likely because this would have undermined his efforts to encourage men to do kaji and ikuji—he readily admitted to over-participating in chiiki katsudō at Fathering Japan venues. In fact, he almost proudly broadcast his wife's disapproval: "Stop the ikumen activities! Pay more attention to your daughter." Such an admission likely afforded him a mixed sort of status at Fathering Japan. On numerous occasions, members of Fathering Japan have remarked on the dangers of becoming excessively involved in recreational gatherings, such as drinking parties, to the point of neglecting household responsibilities in favor of chiiki katsudō. Still, Fathering Japan's efforts to encourage chiiki katsudō among men, coupled with the widespread recognition of Watanabe-san's multiple leadership roles, likely earned Watanabe-san a net gain in respect for his wholehearted commitment to the cause.

Status aside, Watanabe-san's admission of Ayumi-san's discontent always received a few laughs. Fathering Japan generally emphasizes prioritizing the perspective of one's spouse, both seriously and humorously, such as when Ando-san ambivalently quips that "the wife (*kami-san*) is a god (*kami-sama*)."¹⁷⁸ However, members of Fathering Japan are not averse to the practice of offering comedic examples of their wives' expectations that they find unreasonable or wholly reasonable (and hence a form of self-deprecating humor).

¹⁷⁸ かみさんは神様 (kami-san wa kami-sama).

The Case of Oda Emi-san

The majority of women with whom I spoke maintained a greater distance between themselves and oyaji-no-kai than did Ayumi-san. Nevertheless, they too expressed ambivalent attitudes toward their husband's participation in chiiki katsudō. In particular, they saw the nomikai so beloved by men of oyaji-no-kai as a waste of time that could be better spent doing chores or taking care of children. However, some women admitted that community engagement can bring certain benefits which render chiiki katsudō a compromise. When offering thoughts about how Japanese women view fathers' recreational gatherings, Oda Emi-san—the wife of Oda Ken-san (see Chapter 7) suggested the following:

I think that women hate [the gatherings]. [She laughs] Well, there is also merit in connecting fellow papas. Mamas dislike it when papas go out drinking and then come home. But it's the sort of thing where, because of the merit of developing connections [with other papas], mamas decide not to say anything.

When asked what exactly kind of merit these connections bring, Emi-san replied that women may refrain from voicing criticisms about papa gatherings because they teach fathers that kosodate is also their responsibility, and not just that of mothers and wives. This revelation may be considered a greater overall “win” than the “loss” resulting from father's participation in oyaji-no-kai nomikai.

In many ways, Emi-san's comments regarding Ken-san parallel her strategy for getting her children to follow instructions. She told me, “I satisfy them. If they first do what they want to

do, they feel refreshed, and then they listen to what I have to say. Generally.” In fact, I witnessed this method in practice when I went out to dinner with Emi-san, Ken-san, and their children after a study group headed by Emi-san on creating third spaces in their local community. The older of her two sons, angry that Emi-san was holding his younger brother in her arms, lashed out at her. Jealously, the older boy flailed with his arms and screamed in protest. In a seemingly intentional manner, he hit Emi-san in the face as she crouched down on the floor. Emi-san made a sad face and told her son that she was hurting, trying to communicate to him the effect that his actions had on her.

Ken-san angrily intervened, so I did not get to see whether the oldest son was open to listening to Emi-san after he exhausted himself. However, by quietly accepting her son’s blows, Emi-san exemplified the ideal of *bosei* (discussed in Chapter 3)—of maternity—by accepting her child in his entirety. Her patience also echoes a characteristic of Japanese motherhood identified 40 years ago by De Vos when he wrote,

The Japanese mother has perfected the technique of inducing guilt in her children by quiet suffering . . . She takes on the burden of responsibility for her children’s behavior—and her husband’s—and will often manifest self-reproach if they conduct themselves badly. Such an example cannot fail to impress. The child becomes aware that his mother’s self-sacrifice demands some recompense (1986, 84).

In short, Emi-san claimed to manage her husband in the same way that she manages her children. She makes sacrifices and acts without first receiving compensation. This practice does

not mean that she completely discards her desires and needs. In fact, she said she believes that enjoying oneself is key to motivating one's children—the philosophy of Fathering Japan—but that she must also demonstrate the capacity to postpone immediate gratification when the situation calls for a delay. She keeps her eye on the greater prize, making concessions to achieve her goals. More of Oda's discussion about this sacrifice and her relationship to Ken-san appears in Chapter 7, which compares her account with Ken-san's own narrative of how he changed his view on *kosodate* and his role in the family.

Factors Other Than Household Involvement That Influence Women's Views of Oyaji-no-kai

It is worth noting that women's calculations of an *oyaji-no-kai*'s worth may change depending upon other factors, such as the frequency with which their husbands attend *oyaji-no-kai* meetings, their relationships with their husbands, and whether their husband's *oyaji-no-kai* actually produces something concrete by contributing to the families' schools or local communities. According to an online article written by Otsuka (2017), the author of several books on Japanese parent-teacher associations (PTAs) and an officer in her school's PTA, mothers in the PTA may be especially resentful of *oyaji-no-kai*. Otsuka acknowledges that PTAs consist of women and that it is therefore difficult for men to join: even when fathers show up, mothers may refuse to speak with them. In the United States, Cazenave (1979) similarly found that Black men were discouraged by what they referred to as “mother's clubs” from participating in the PTA and other aspects of their children's education.

Partly for this reason, fathers form their own organizations, the oyaji-no-kai. However, mothers may feel that their PTAs do all of the work for their children's schools, while the oyaji-no-kai—or fathers' groups—exist to party (Otsuka 2017) . On the whole, most of my female interlocutors had husbands who were active fathers involved in child care and chores. As a result, these women's perspective on PTAs was generally more positive, albeit still ambivalent, than that of the women described by Otsuka, whose husbands did not embrace fatherhood as an identity.

Ultimately, women's stances on chiiki katsudō are similar to those of the wives who remain silent regarding their husbands' participation in Fathering Japan events and the after-event nomikai. Women told me that they regard their husbands' attendance at these events as the lesser evil when compared to fathers' working overtime at the office; their husbands might learn something of value related to kaji or ikuji. According to women's accounts, men's desire to be involved fathers can be far more complicated and less innocent than the men claim.

Section 4: Children as Time-Limited Passports to Fathers' Communities

As Chapter 1 discusses, men's commitment to their places of employment and their work-based identities began to deteriorate—sometimes painfully and forcibly (Dasgupta 2013; Fu 2013)—after the collapse of Japan's economic bubble in 1991. Men began to look to their surroundings in pursuit of fulfillment, seeking to make *tsunagari* (connections) that would not evaporate upon retirement. However, many quickly discovered that they lacked a route into local social life. Enter *oyaji-no-kai*: local groups of fathers that are formed and joined in response to men's perceived inability to otherwise carve spaces for themselves in their places of residence.

The lack of *tsunagari* outside of the workplace constitutes a longstanding source of dissatisfaction. Across different field sites, a number of men explained to me—often in the form of tension-easing jokes—how they felt unwelcome in community spaces, and they maintained that communication with strangers felt awkward and unnatural. Men, they maintained, are particularly apprehensive about speaking to women; they fear that even benign attempts at interacting with strangers could generate misunderstandings regarding their intentions. More specifically, men do not want to be perceived as inappropriately engaging in *nanpa*,¹⁷⁹ the Japanese term for hitting on (flirting with) someone.

Fortunately, a workaround exists. Despite the supposed barriers to entry, many of the fathers whom I interviewed have taken to referring to their children as “passports to the local community,”¹⁸⁰ a phrase often voiced by *Fathering Japan*, but also by individuals unaffiliated

¹⁷⁹ ナンパ (*nanpa*).

¹⁸⁰ 地域のパスポート (*chiiki no pasupōto*).

with the nonprofit organization. By “passport,” men mean that when their children accompany them in public, the latter’s presence increases the acceptability of striking up conversations with strangers. Indeed, some fathers took delight in pushing around a stroller and receiving compliments about their baby. However, they recognize that this opportunity will not last forever: their children will only elicit adoration from strangers up until a certain age. As one individual jokingly acknowledged, it is difficult to call a college student “cute.” For this reason, male proponents of *chiiki katsudō* describe children as “limited-time passports” to engage in *chiiki katsudō* and to join the social networks present in their places of residence. The expression can also function as an injunction to new fathers: become involved with your young children and use them to form *tsunagari*, or you may eventually regret wasting the opportunity.

Understanding the Passport Metaphor

As I dug deeper, I quickly realized that passports are an extremely appropriate metaphor for describing the role of young children in connecting fathers to their local communities. Explaining the reasons behind the metaphor’s aptness requires an understanding of the term *passport*, which includes at least the following three parts in its definition:

1) A government issues passports to its citizens, who hold and safeguard them: While governments do not literally issue children to their parents, countries do perceive children as future resources (workers).¹⁸¹ The state monitors children and embeds them in local communities—in the state’s schools first and foremost (Steffes 2012)—but families “hold” and

¹⁸¹ While not the dominant view of children in Japan, national concern over the low birthrate has certainly drawn attention to the connection between children and Japan’s future.

raise children. Therefore, children help to bind fathers to their families' neighborhoods and regions in ways that men without children do not experience.

2) A passport certifies the recipient's identity and nationality: Men who are fathers have proceeded through heteronormative, or heterosexually normative, life stages. In Japan, fatherhood normatively entails having achieved the status of an adult male by clearing the prior conditions of employment and marriage. Fathers' commitments and obligations—such as the societal expectation that they will provide for their families at least financially but increasingly emotionally—tie them closely to social institutions and structures, such as their places of employment. For this reason, Japanese society perceives fathers—and even husbands—as less willing than single men or even married men without children to jeopardize their ability to fulfill these commitments and obligations. In this sense, the culture sees fathers as more stable and “safer” than unattached men. Even in past generations, companies that discouraged dating because it distracted employees warmly welcomed marriage engagements; male workers' need to provide financially for their families tied those employees even more closely to their companies and made them less likely to leave unexpectedly (Rohlen 1979).

3) People who wish to travel internationally are required by governments throughout the world to hold a passport. Under the passport metaphor, one belongs not to Japan as a nation, but rather to one's area of residence. Despite this, in various discussions with a range of interlocutors, I discovered that Japanese fathers of young children believed that women—particularly mothers—dominate the local community, forming strong social networks that men are unable to freely enter. In other words, these men considered the social spaces connected to the geographical areas in which they lived as foreign spaces. Many men very much wanted to

participate in their local communities. In fact, the language that they used to describe mothers' social networks at their children's schools, community centers, and housing complexes sometimes bordered on outright envy. Interestingly, a position existed and exists for men in their communities—just not for salarymen. In his well-known ethnography of community life in late 1970s Tokyo, Bestor (1989) documents how local business owners served as leaders in neighborhood associations known as *chōnaikai*,¹⁸² while women played supporting roles by ensuring the *chōnaikai*'s smooth operation. However, in recent years the primacy of *chōnaikai* has declined due to such factors as changes in transportation, land use, and the growing preference of many consumers for giant retail chains over specialized local stores and shopping districts (Bi-Matsui 2009).

For the reasons listed above, male interlocutors suggested that until their children were born, they lacked a means of entry into community-based social life, which is oriented around families and children. However, fathers found that by toting their sons or daughters around, they gained access to spaces which they had previously considered off-limits. In other words, children functioned as a kind of passport to community spaces.

However, such passports only afford men passage across the borders of these community spaces. A father's entry via his children into local social networks does not necessarily guarantee any sort of status or the right to perform certain roles. Many of the men whom I interviewed instead earned this validation and acknowledgement by throwing themselves into community activities, consciously attempting to make their presence known by being conspicuous in their

¹⁸² 町内会 (*chōnaikai*).

activities. They designed events for children at the local *matsuri*,¹⁸³ or festivals, acted as a form of security at *undōkai*,¹⁸⁴ or school sports days, and a few joined parent-teacher associations—though they did not actively enjoy these groups, which as the previous section explains, are largely women’s organizations. Thus, while their children were the passports or visas that afforded men the right of entry, fathers’ efforts and actions after entering affirmed their belonging.

Why Japanese Men See Community Spaces as Foreign Territory

All of these observations raise the question: What underlying social factors have led Japanese men to perceive community spaces as inaccessible? In the past 70 years, multiple factors have hindered men from participating actively in the communities where they live. The culture of postwar Japan tied men to the workplace and distanced them from the home and community (Allison 1994). According to my interlocutors, Japanese society also assumes that men are less socially oriented than women—a characterization that I suspect may help to perpetuate many men’s reluctance to engage in social activities by providing justification for their less than adequate attempts to interact with others, especially in situations when such interaction is optional.

In interviews and informal conversations, several Japanese male interlocutors described the situation to me in the following way: in contrast to women, who will approach and converse with one another even as strangers, men feel unsettled at the thought of engaging in casual

¹⁸³ 祭り (*matsuri*).

¹⁸⁴ 運動会 (*undōkai*).

conversation with strangers. As mentioned above, men were particularly apprehensive at the thought of approaching women because they could be mistaken for engaging in unwanted *nanpa* or flirting. However, a few also cited reasons for this reluctance stemming from masculinity's perceived relationship to violence, especially against women and children.

In the Japanese popular imagination, men and masculinity have a much stronger association with many forms of violence—particularly physical violence—than do women and femininity. News coverage of violent crimes usually implicates male suspects. Discussions of domestic violence usually imply a male-on-female dynamic, although men can also be the victims of domestic violence (Alexy and Cook 2018). Moreover, statistics on gender-based violence generally support the popular discourse linking men and masculinity with violence. According to the National Police Agency, women are the victims in 79.4 percent of all reported domestic violence cases in Japan (National Police Agency in Kobayashi 2019). A more dated survey by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government reports that 64.4 percent of fathers committed both intimate partner violence and child abuse. Domestic violence deeply affected children regardless of whether or not they were the targets of this violence: such children often acted violently toward other children or refused to go outside (Tokyo Metropolitan Government 1998 in Sasaki and Ishii-Kuntz 2016). Finally, despite its comparatively low crime rate, Japan's historical rate of such violent crimes as burglary and homicide positively correlates with the proportion of young males in the population (Roberts and LaFree 2004).

In fact, my male interlocutors seemed aware of social perceptions concerning masculinities' implicit potential for violence, and they based some of their past and present conduct on how people around them might interpret their actions. Although the fathers whom I

interviewed did not appear to be constantly, consciously thinking about the possibility that others could mistake them for predators, many made it clear that they believed that unattached men have a limited ability to inhabit certain spaces or to interact with certain people. As my interlocutors explained to me, a man who goes to a playground without an accompanying child could raise questions regarding his motives; a former nursery school teacher explained that even male child-care workers are not above suspicion and that some parents explicitly request that preschools have male teachers refrain from changing the diapers of female children.

A strong body of research in Sweden and the United States highlights similar concerns: many people in the United States automatically view men with jobs in early childhood education as suspicious (Pruit 2014). Anxiety over inappropriate touching is highly gendered in Sweden; male preschool teachers are more likely to face suspicion than are female preschool teachers (Åberg, Hedlin, and Johansson 2018; Hedlin and Åberg 2019). In the United States, the discourse portraying men as predators ultimately serves to police the boundaries of early childhood education and dissuade men from entering a “women’s profession,” despite the call for more male teachers based on the belief that children, particularly boys who struggle in school, need positive male role models (Crisp and King 2016).

Similarly, a Japanese man who attempts to converse with young women could be regarded as engaging in unwanted flirting, or, as one interviewee put it bluntly, as a “dangerous person.” However, the equation changes considerably if the man has a “passport”—his own child to accompany him. One interlocutor contrasted his pre- and post-parenthood behavior: before the birth of his daughter, he was careful to regulate his interactions with strangers, particularly with women; now when his daughter is present he is no longer concerned, and he talks to women

without fear of generating misunderstandings. Another father stated that he no longer hesitates to speak to women carrying infants; he will readily ask the child's age and make casual conversation while waiting for the elevator.

The perception of the implicit potential for violence in these men's masculinities does not entirely disappear when the men become fathers. Still, Japanese society appears to assume that fatherhood can suppress masculinities' potential for violence, perhaps because a man with a child of his own is more likely to understand the social importance of safeguarding children. However, the instability of the Japanese employment system has increasingly called into question men's traditional role as protectors and primary providers (Cook 2013), though for many men this has not completely eroded the primacy of becoming the *daikokubashira*¹⁸⁵ or "main pillar" that supports their families financially (LeBlanc 2012; Roberson 2002).

In a manner not unique to Japan, men are in the process of renegotiating their gender ideologies in the context of changing social and economic circumstances all around the world (Kabeer 2013), including in the United States (Faludi 2000; Kimmel 2011; Sherman 2009), Cuba (Simoni 2015), Mozambique (Aboim 2012), and in the Middle East (Amar 2011; Inhorn and Isidoros 2018). Koo (2019) reminds us that the link between masculinity and providing for the family is artificial and shifts through time, pointing out that Korean women functioned as their family's primary wage earners from the early industrial period until the democratic period.

Of course, Japanese men have different, often highly specific understandings of what it means for a father to protect his children. For example, emotionally distant Showa men largely restricted their protection to providing financial stability for their families, as well as to shielding

¹⁸⁵ 大黒柱 (daikokubashira).

their families from external danger. Due to their role as family guardians, men's sense of security in their neighborhoods decreases after having children, whereas women's sense of security remains the same (Hino, Uesugi, and Asami 2016). As a result, fathers who continue to hold on to the traditional gender identities and roles may not see safeguarding children emotionally, psychologically, and developmentally as part of their primary parental responsibility. Nevertheless, a combination of the increase in dual-income households, ambivalence toward workers' places of employment, and the popular discourse surrounding *ikumen* is—as was suggested in previous chapters—encouraging men to redefine their gender identities and ideologies, in turn pushing them to seek other like-minded fathers.

After hearing one of my presentations that touched on the connection between masculinity and violence, one of the female *riji*, or directors, at Fathering Japan informed me that men are perhaps more apprehensive of appearing “dangerous” than the social situation frequently warrants. In other words, men unaccompanied by children perhaps have fewer restrictions on their movement through the local community than they believe they do. Her incisive comment points to the difference between a perception of limited social mobility and a potential but unrecognized social mobility. Ultimately, it is the power of members in the community to police boundaries and to expel the abject—either by calling upon the authorities or by conferring social stigma—that gives men pause but that ultimately dissolves when they carry their passports with them.

As a final note, the view of children as limited-time passports in some way represents a highly utilitarian approach to *kosodate* that potentially clashes with the notion that children are an end in themselves. However, some interlocutors articulated both perspectives in the context of

different discussions, and they appeared to see no conflict between “using” their children to get what they wanted out of the local community—an *ibasho*,¹⁸⁶ or place to belong—and stressing their children’s inherent and singular value. While local gatherings of men tend to emphasize the “enjoyable” over the “active” elements in Fathering Japan’s definition of *fathering* (see Chapter 1), oyaji-no-kai and papa circles continue to exist as loose extensions of the parenting movement. Men’s interest in local forms of sociality spurs their involvement despite women’s mixed feelings toward their husbands’ participation in some groups, as the next chapter illustrates when describing in ethnographic detail the differences between recreational oyaji-no-kai and educational papa circles.

¹⁸⁶ 居場所 (*ibasho*).

Chapter 6: The Performances of Local Groups of Fathers: Oyaji-no-kai and Papa Circles

Section 1: Chiiki Katsudō: Japanese Masculinity on Display

Chiiki katsudō allow men to accomplish numerous objectives simultaneously, including having a good time, putting on enjoyable activities for local families, forming *tsunagari* or interpersonal connections with other men, making themselves known as non-threatening entities, and, in the process, demonstrating their masculinity in front of each other and their families. These gender performances channel values and practices that, while not always at odds with the “involved father,” often strongly echo the hegemonic masculinity against which the involved father positions himself. As explained in the previous chapter, papa circles come the closest to the engaged fatherhoods promoted by Fathering Japan and by other nonprofits in Japan’s parenting movement. In contrast, oyaji-no-kai or fathers’ gatherings vary drastically in the degree to which their activities contribute to members’ individual households.

Each chiiki katsudō group maintains that its organization is unique for various reasons: they are more active, they have a special relationship with their children’s school, they have a special understanding with their members’ spouses, or they put on distinctive kinds of events. In a certain sense, such claims to uniqueness are true: my networking activities brought me into contact with some of the most active chiiki katsudō groups, most of which exist within Fathering Japan’s sphere of influence—although neither oyaji-no-kai nor papa circles mobilize their members to advocate beyond the local level. Still, no two oyaji-no-kai or papa circles are entirely alike, a situation that fits the chiiki katsudō ideal: such groups should address the specific needs

of their communities and members. However, unifying elements certainly bind many groups together. In the case of oyaji-no-kai, these commonalities include a love of drinking parties and the practice of hosting events at festivals. In the case of papa circles, the overall focus is increasing men's involvement in home life.

This chapter examines four different chiiki katsudō events in which I participated during my year of fieldwork in the Greater Tokyo Area. The events were organized in and through children's facilities, schools, or city halls and involved men performing in front of each other and often their families. The first event entailed the complementary cooking efforts of both fathers and mothers, while an oyaji-no-kai led the second barbecue-like gathering. The third event was the annual congregation of oyaji-no-kai from across Japan in which children, while present, were more of an afterthought in the overall flow of the day's events. This unusual congress was aimed explicitly at fathers, and, like the other oyaji-no-kai event in this section, evoked nostalgia for an unreclaimable, imagined Japanese past. The fourth and final case study concerns a meeting held by a papa circle engaged in educational outreach. Although the gathering focused mainly on bookkeeping and did not aim at a public audience, members' conversations provided insight into the difficulties that papa circles face in attracting local fathers to their lectures and workshops, which lack the appeal of oyaji-no-kai events.

Section 2: The Gendered Division of Labor at a Mochi-Pounding Chiiki Katsudō

Men's Public Performances of Physical Labor and Skill

In January 2017, I attended a *mochitsuki*,¹⁸⁷ or event for making *mochi*¹⁸⁸ (pounded rice cakes), held at a community children's center (*jidōkan*).¹⁸⁹ A large gravel-covered area adjacent to the *jidōkan* served as the primary site for the *mochitsuki*. Benches were positioned around the perimeter of this space, which was ringed by shrubbery and the occasional tree. A low fence further separated the entire area from a narrow sidewalk and the street. Occasionally, people would dart into the *jidōkan* itself—a squat white building with glass doors and colorful signs posted in front—only to emerge with a piece of equipment for the *mochitsuki*.

I estimate that around 70 people attended the event. While most of the children present were in elementary school or younger, the adults ranged in age from their early twenties to their seventies. Women and men may have been present in roughly equal numbers, but the *mochitsuki* displayed traditional gender dynamics reflecting Edward's (1990) complementary incompetence.¹⁹⁰ As a gathering that I was invited to through my personal connections, rather than by networking from Fathering Japan, the event is significant because it existed even further outside of the nonprofit's scope of influence than many of the other *chiiki katsudō* events in which I participated. Certainly, it is possible that some individuals may have at one time

¹⁸⁷ 餅つき (*mochitsuki*).

¹⁸⁸ 餅 (*mochi*).

¹⁸⁹ 児童館 (*jidōkan*).

¹⁹⁰ Complementary incompetence refers to the belief that men and women have gendered strengths and weaknesses that complement one another. Marriage allows husband and wife to capitalize on their strengths and cover for their partner's weaknesses.

participated in events held by Fathering Japan or an associated organization. However, there were no currently active members in attendance.

Indeed, in contrast to the greater gender equality characteristic of nonprofit organizations where both men and women are present, the dynamics at the mochi-pounding party reflected more “traditional” interactions between men and women, following the principle of “complementary incompetence” (W. Edwards 1990) by dividing up a larger undertaking into gendered tasks.¹⁹¹ The first thing that I noticed upon arriving at the mochi-pounding event was that mothers, fathers, and children kept relatively separate from one another throughout the day. While the children entertained themselves by playing soccer or battling with Japanese spinning tops (*koma*),¹⁹² the men steamed the rice and pounded the mochi in an area cordoned off by traffic cones. This physical barrier was also social. While the men worked, women performed their duties on a row of tables in a separate area: pulling apart the pounded rice, shaping it into round cakes, and covering it with toppings. The only time someone breached these boundaries was when a woman transported the pounded mochi between the gendered areas. The after-event clean up kept intact these gendered tasks: women and men seemed to gravitate toward different responsibilities. Women wiped down surfaces and emptied and put away utensils and containers, while men did the heavy and not-so-heavy lifting by moving the tables, crates, and cones back to the *jidōkan*’s storage.

The children’s space was far more neutral: children played together regardless of gender, with the exception of a group of older boys playing soccer. Adults wandered for short periods, but even here behavior tended to differ: women would quietly watch over the playing children,

¹⁹¹ Of course, complementary incompetence in social events is common outside Japan as well.

¹⁹² 独楽 (*koma*).

while men would demonstrate to children the proper technique for winding a string around the koma, then throwing the top onto the ground in a motion resembling skipping a rock while simultaneously pulling on the string. When done correctly, the top would rotate with hopefully enough speed and force to knock the other tops out of the area.

As I frequently observed during *chiiki katsudō* held in public spaces, fathers and mothers had different ways of approaching and interacting with children—both their own children and those of acquaintances and friends. Mothers were more easily able to approach and converse with children or to stand nearby as silent guardians. However, fathers usually needed a physical medium or activity in order to make a connection with children. In the case above, this medium was the koma. However, the catalyst for fathers' interaction with children in public space could also involve food, music, or other sorts of craft-like activities or games. Perhaps this pattern hints at fathers' continued unease at interacting with children without an externally observable agenda; engaging in a concrete activity may also simply be the way that many men have learned to make connections with others. Nonetheless, an unattached man approaching a child in a public space typically used an activity or item as a bridge, although children did not need a similar pretext to approach men. In fact, I witnessed children who were eminently comfortable engaging in banter and horseplay with fathers other than their own. However, it was evident that these children knew, respected, and trusted these men due to the fathers' repeated involvement in their locally active *oyaji-no-kai*.

Upon arriving at the mochi-pounding event, I asked some women about the event's main organizer—a day-care worker at the *jidōkan*—whom I had met through a mutual friend and who had invited me to participate in the day's activities after hearing about my research project. He

was busy ensuring the day's smooth operation from behind the scenes, and so he darted away immediately after I greeted him. In his place, the women led me to the men's area, where I spent most of the day helping out with the mochi-pounding.

Mochi-pounding is an involved process. After steaming the mochi in a metal containers suspended over a wood fire, the cooks transferred the rice to a large wooden mortar called an *usu*,¹⁹³ where three men would take turns grinding the rice using a *kine*,¹⁹⁴ a long-handled wooden mallet with an asymmetrical head. As we proceeded to knead the rice, periodically wetting the mallet with water to prevent rice from sticking to the mallet's head, someone would occasionally question whether the mochi was ready for the next stage of processing. Usually, the most senior man would chip in by making such comments as, "the shape of the rice still remains," meaning that we could still see the individual grains of rice in the paste. His remark would prompt us to continue our efforts, transforming the individual grains into a uniform substance.

Eventually, we transitioned to pounding the mochi with the *kine*, chanting a rhythm to help us keep pace. Everyone took turns, and each individual seemed to have a different technique, from where they positioned their hands on the mallet's handle, to how they placed their feet on the ground, to how far they raised the mallet over their head before bringing it down on the mochi with a satisfying thud. One individual working at each *usu* would crouch next to the mortar, occasionally reaching into the hollow to quickly turn the mochi over, wet the mallet's

¹⁹³ 臼 (*usu*).

¹⁹⁴ 杵 (*kine*).

head with water, or remove any debris such as the ash that floated over from the nearby fire where the mochi rice was being cooked.

When it was my turn, I tried unsuccessfully to mimic the other men's movements. An older man whom I estimate was in his late sixties or early seventies wandered over to our usu and began to coach me on how to bring down the mallet. He wore a durable blue jumpsuit, black boots, and pink towel wrapped around the top of his head—a common outfit for many manual laborers in Japan. Apparently exasperated by my technique and my lack of upper body strength, he transitioned from telling me to “hit it in the middle” to yelling at me to “put more power into it!” to screaming, “You call yourself a man?!”

When my turn was over, he explained the proper technique to me, then lowered his body and did a half squat with his hands on his spread knees, watching the next man's mallet make contact with mochi with a keen eye. He was significantly less critical of this man's technique, for obvious reasons.

What for me was an unnerving incident highlights a set of values that I began to notice within the gendered performances taking place in *chiiki katsudō*. Consonant with the nostalgic overtones of communal activities described below, the men who participated in this *chiiki katsudō* event valued a traditional masculinity linked to strength and skill with one's hands in a creative undertaking. Their dynamic displays most certainly did not go unnoticed by the other attendees. The children present at the event certainly learned about heteronormative gender roles from these performances, and they saw their mothers and grandmothers involved in distributing food and performing the majority of care work. In watching their fathers and grandfathers, children also observed a particular configuration of masculine practice—one that operates

separately but compatibly with domestically oriented femininity—that requires the handling the hard labor and potentially “dangerous” tasks.¹⁹⁵

Similarly, in her ethnography of pastry artisans, Kondo (1990) highlights how such feminine tasks as cooking and decorating can be gendered masculine by tying these activities to notions of artisanship, Japanese tradition, and the endurance of hardship in order to see a task to its completion. While the men operating the *kine* and *usu* were not professional mochi makers, and few were likely artisans of any sort, they shared the same ethos as Kondo’s artisans. In their public performances, they demonstrated the strength necessary to carry out an endeavor, the mental and physical fortitude to see a trial through to the end, and the accumulated years of wisdom and practice necessary to perfect an art. This last value is not only limited to men, as Katō (2012) highlights in her research on the decades that women invest into the never-ending pursuit of mastery of the Japanese tea ceremony. Partly for this reason, and partly due to the strong Japanese emphasis on age-based hierarchies (Bestor 1991; Hendry 2012; Nakane 1972) the oldest and most experienced individuals have the greater if not always the final say in decision making.

The man who took the *kine* from me set about his task with vigor. To the laughter of everyone present, this man called out “*oishiku nare*”¹⁹⁶ as he struck the mochi, a spell chanted by young women paid to act as maids at maid cafes as they enjoin a dish to “become delicious.” Supposedly, the sentiments poured by the maids into the food through this charm and affective labor make a dish even tastier (Galbraith 2013), despite the cheap nature of the food and the fact that dedicated but invisible cooking staff are the ones who actually make the meal.

¹⁹⁵ What people consider dangerous varies over time.

¹⁹⁶ おいしくなれ (*oishiku nare*).

However, while the man's invocation was clearly intended as a parody of a hyperfeminine character—performed by women acting out a fictional role for customers—while engaged in a masculine task, he was probably not far from the mark. When I later asked the *jidōkan*'s director about whether the mochi we were making tasted any different from that produced by specialized mochi-making machines, the director paused. He looked away briefly, then replied, “not really.” He then paused again, looked away, and revised his previous statement by adding that, “we put our feelings into this mochi.” “Then this must be more delicious,” I replied, causing the people around us to laugh.

The Value of Mochi-Pounding Gatherings

There are three primary reasons why a large gathering of people wielding mallets replaces a much smaller gathering of people using a machine, or an even smaller group of individuals selling or distributing convenient factory-produced mochi. All of these reasons—nostalgia for past practices, the satisfaction derived from a group effort, and labor performed for one's own family—are tied to participants' understanding of the cultural nuances of what *chiiki katsudō* or “community engagement” entails.

First, people derive pleasure from mochi-pounding's traditional overtones that harken back to a nostalgic past, albeit one that participants are unlikely to have directly experienced. On some level, mochi-pounding is nostalgia-laden activity that, according to some, temporarily recreates past forms of sociality and group activities rooted in a lost Japanese village-based society—although in peasant villages, mochi was often made by individual but sizable, multi-generational families (Smith, Eng, and Lundy 1977). Such societies required cooperation on

multiple levels, including pooling manual labor to accomplish large tasks; exchanging and partaking of food and alcohol for social and ceremonial purposes; and revolving around face-to-face, intimate ties between residents that went back generations (Embree 2002 [1946]; Smith, Eng, and Lundy 1977). However, even in village society, men and women generally kept to separate spheres. For example, men and women sat on different sides of the room during weddings and funerals, and husband and wife would not speak to one another as they walked together; men and women's social circles were homosocial ones (Embree 2002 [1946]).

Nostalgia and anxiety over a lost identity due to Westernization has a deep cultural resonance and roots (Ivy 1995), although the term *natsukashii*,¹⁹⁷ or nostalgic, can in Japanese be applied to something that one has not directly experienced. For fathers and other participants in community events, *chiiki katsudō* is a way of experiencing *natsukashii* sensations and reclaiming this lost past in a limited fashion.

The sentiment of *natsukashii* leads people to romanticize the disappearing countryside community as the last bastion of an authentic Japan (Creighton 2001). Still, regional variation means that the decline of local communities occurs differently across Japan (Manzenreiter, Lützel, and Polak-Rottmann 2020). Some communities have managed to preserve themselves, and a few have even successfully reinvented themselves (Ivy 1995; Qu and Cheer 2021), but smaller and more remote communities not linked to a major metropolis face depopulation. Many are in danger of gradually evaporating (Love 2007), and some face divisive and difficult decisions related to survival, such as questions about whether to allow the presence of a nuclear

¹⁹⁷ 懐かしい (*natsukashii*).

power plant (Dusinberre 2012). Other communities are not asked for permission before neighborhood-transforming facilities are built in their vicinity.

A profound sense of nostalgia is often strategically deployed to invoke the loss of traditional community dynamics. In urban settings, local ties weakened as a more mobile population meant that residents seldom stayed in a locale long enough to put down roots, in part due to constant job transfers that eroded social networks (Jolivet 1997). The phrase *mukō sangen ryōdonari*,¹⁹⁸ no longer commonly used, literally refers to the three houses across from and the two houses on either side of one's own house. It once encapsulated the belief that families should strive to maintain positive, close relationships with the five houses bordering their own. In contrast, residents of housing complexes today may only be acquainted with the faces of their neighbors. In rural settings, depopulation has taken a toll on the long-term sustainability of local communities starting since the late 1950s (Iguchi 2002) and continuing into the present, as young people began to move to the city for and better education and job prospects, leaving behind a greying population (Allison 2013; Matanle and Sato 2010; Perez-Barbosa and Zhang 2017) who may also move to the city to be with their children (Oishi 2019).

In contrast to the more studious and somewhat hierarchical template for Fathering Japan's formal events, at which experts present the latest research on parenting, discuss the implications of government legislation, and answer questions from the audience, *chiiki katsudō* are strongly oriented toward creative pursuits in which everyone is allowed to play an active role. The availability of these roles may differ according to gender, age, experience, and length of tenure in the group. Still, when compared to Fathering Japan and other larger, more formal organizations,

¹⁹⁸ 向こう三軒両隣 (*mukō sangen ryōdonari*).

men (and women) involved in chiiki katsudō are better able and more willing to fashion their roles and shape their associations.

The chiiki katsudō of oyaji-no-kai often involve crafts and craft-like activities, which organizers and participants romanticize as recalling a more “authentic” Japan; crafts are situated at the crossroads of this lost national identity and nostalgia (Creighton 2001). Those who preserve time-honored ways of crafting traditional objects are perceived as taking a stand against the flow of time (Kiritani 1995). Frequently featured on television show segments, craftspeople garner interest and capture the public imagination, even as they cannot find successors among the younger generation. Nevertheless, men in oyaji-no-kai who dabble in traditional and craft-related activities popularly associated with rural Japan, with the past, and even with their own childhoods—such as carving bamboo whistles and folding origami—are able to experience the bittersweet emotion of *natsukashii*.

A second and related reason that people opt for labor-intensive mochi-pounding is that the group effort is socially satisfying. Mochi-pounding and other similar activities provide people with an excuse to gather as a community and to socialize with people with whom they would not otherwise possess a legitimate reason for interaction. It is an opportunity to form or strengthen *tsunagari*. Indeed, communal connectedness was the kind of experience identified by *Fathering Japan* as a selling point of chiiki katsudō, and by all accounts it strongly appeals to many men who desire *tsunagari* that are not formed as part of compulsory income-generation activities. Moreover, the very nature of mochi-pounding is socially satisfying because it requires, “genuine Japanese cooperation and trust,” especially during the part of the process when

someone must reach into the usu to reposition the mochi in between the rhythmic strokes of the kine (Hendry 1999, 125).

Finally, such events provide a platform for men to demonstrate visibly the culturally valued traits of endurance, strength, and dexterity—associated with traditional forms of masculinity—through the creation of mochi, which is then consumed by their families.¹⁹⁹ Through chiiki katsudō, men are able to perform the role of primary provider in an undertaking that they find significantly more pleasurable and less stressful than a day at the office. Certainly, as I personally experienced, the entire process of making mochi from start to finish was physically exhausting. However, it also felt rewarding in proportion to the labor that was invested in the activity itself. Social prestige followed for those who could perform activities skillfully. Although men can also derive a sense of accomplishment from their jobs, their wives and children never see the fathers' daily struggles at their places of work. In contrast, chiiki katsudō events let the men show off to their families while passing on bittersweet natsukashii feelings to their children, a topic that the next section will further explore.

¹⁹⁹ Men's performances at community events potentially eclipse women's contributions.

Section 3: The Fiery Spirit of Tradition-Oriented Masculinity at a Yōchien

The displays of masculinity at the mochi-pounding event discussed in the previous section found their equivalent in the antics of an oyaji-no-kai—which I will call the Kashiwada Oyaji-no-kai—at a yakitori or grilled chicken skewer “barbecue” organized through and at a local yōchien. Such masculinities cherish a traditional ethos that recalls the simpler, more intimate past that purportedly existed prior to Japan’s modernization. My field notes for the day open with a description of a condition that dominated the entire event: “Sunny, hot, and humid; I felt as if I were burning to death.”

The event was held in the yōchien’s courtyard, where only a few canopy tents erected over blue tarp provided shade from the blazing sun of an unusually hot day in May. Mothers and some children took refuge beneath these canopy tents, while other children frolicked and squealed as they splashed around in a hole filled with muddy water near the yōchien’s playground. The fathers busied themselves with various tasks, most congregating around the three food-making areas: the yakitori grill, the yakisoba (fried noodles) griddle, and a machine that made popped rice. After locating the man who had invited me and paying the entrance fee, I was asked to assist with cooking yakitori. While the experience itself was interesting and fun, standing over a hot grill was not.

In general, good humor prevailed throughout the day. The fathers joked at each other’s expense with greater familiarity than the fathers at the jidōkan. In contrast to men of the jidōkan, who were only linked to each other insofar as their children attended the same facility, the fathers

of the yōchien were part of a group that regularly meets. As a result, they were clearly used to socializing with one another.

As we grilled the meat, we sporadically conversed between periods of silent concentration. I fielded questions about backyard barbecue parties in the United States and my research project. Like the individuals whom I had encountered at Fathering Japan events, the men of the Kashiwada Oyaji-no-kai also attempted to characterize Japanese fathers as “weird,” a self-portrayal in which they seemed to take pleasure. However, except for the claim that they “drink too much,” few concrete reasons were given to support the argument that Japanese fathers are strange. Ultimately, I interpret such characterizations as a form of self-Orientalization. Especially in a conversation that included cultural comparisons between yakitori and barbecue, they contrasted implicitly their “weirdness” with fathers living elsewhere (Europe and North America) who are not Japanese.

However, the contrasts voiced by the fathers were not limited to the domestic against the international. Many of the men I spoke to positioned Kashiwada Oyaji-no-kai against other oyaji-no-kai; in fact, every oyaji-no-kai that I visited during my fieldwork insisted on its own uniqueness as a point of pride, and Kashiwada Oyaji-no-kai was no exception. The fathers of Kashiwada informed me that their group is rare because most oyaji-no-kai do not actually hold events; rather, they serve as audiences for events organized by the PTA or school.

Others insisted on Kashiwada Oyaji-no-kai’s difference by linking it to past forms of sociality in Japanese society. As the narrative was presented to me, and as has been iterated elsewhere in this dissertation, Japan was once a society of internally interconnected *danchi*,²⁰⁰ or

²⁰⁰ 団地 (danchi).

apartment complexes, or even further back, of villages where farmers shared close ties that went back generations. However, the historically recent mobility of individuals and families for work-related reasons is increasingly breaking up Japan's tradition of so-called "village society" in which small, longstanding social groups bearing "wet" ties of warmth and belonging form the entire cosmos of one social sphere. "Wet" ties have instead been replaced by "dry" contractual relationships embedded in market economy transactions (Slater 2010). For example, a few men launched into a discussion of how in their parent's generation, fellow residents of a danchi, were considered *nakama*, people who are not necessarily friends but who are members of the same social group. In contrast, people living in a danchi today may recognize the faces of other residents, but they may not be familiar with their neighbor's names or personal circumstances. Tenants' status as residents of the same danchi no longer obligates them to form relationships with other residents.

An oyaji-no-kai therefore serves as a place where men can make the *nakama* who were once more likely to form spontaneously in and through their places of residence. In contrast to danchi, oyaji-no-kai draw from a larger pool of possible *nakama*. However, men join the oyaji-no-kai of the schools that their children attend, so in this sense the groups are still tied to a locality. During our conversation, the fathers of Kashiwada affirmed that they joined their oyaji-no-kai for the opportunity to meet new people. Due to the Japanese (male) tendency to limit their acquaintances to work associates, even younger Japanese (men) often live in "worlds that are small" and often unfulfilling.

When I inquired as to how children are affected by the decreased influence of local forms of sociality, the men thought for a bit. They then replied that today "one's children are solely

one's children," whereas in the past, "one's children were everyone's children."²⁰¹ In previous eras, fathers would call out to their neighbor's children to inquire if something was wrong. If a child misbehaved, a father other than a child's own biological father was free to scold him or her. Now, if someone else's children do something wrong, a man usually treats the behavior as none of his business—a situation pantomimed by one interlocutor's holding up both his hands and taking a half-step back.

Additionally, the declining importance of the locality distances children from the neighborhood-based communities that existed in previous generations. As a result, they are free to participate in communities that are not oriented around their *danchi* or neighborhood. When emphasizing this point, one man—whom I will call Kase-san—pointed at various children running by, naming the sports teams—including soccer, football, and baseball teams—in which each child participated. In comparison to the children of the past, Kase-san maintained that children today can participate in many more kinds of activities. An interruption prevented me from inquiring further about this statement. Yet during my fieldwork, I met mothers who transported their children across the city to take dance and piano lessons.

Depending on their stance toward raising children, people either depict Japanese children of the past as less chaperoned and freer to make mistakes and learn from them, or else as having lived and played in ways that involved unnecessary levels of risk. Like parents everywhere, members of Kashiwada Oyaji-no-kai and Fathering Japan both advocate and struggle with the principle of *mimamoru*²⁰² or to “affectionately watch over.” This approach to parenting requires

²⁰¹ This view is not exclusive to fathers participating in *chiiki katsudō*. I have heard it voiced by men and women of different ages.

²⁰² 見守る (*mimamoru*).

parents to observe their children but to refrain from swooping in and rectifying a situation when their children experience or risk encountering failure. Kase-san gave an example: Earlier, his son tried to help make yakisoba, but in the process the boy splashed hot oil on his face. Kase-san said that his immediate reaction was “no problem.” He quickly added, in a tone that sounded slightly defensive, that the surrounding fathers who witnessed the event reacted similarly. Still, Kase-san maintained that his son had a worthwhile learning experience working the hot grill and indeed, even experiencing injury.

While the men at my field sites—both at Fathering Japan and at *chiiki katsudō*—universally endorsed the *mimamoru* approach as positive, their views did not necessarily represent those of the larger population of Japanese fathers. Indeed, there may be some self-selection present: not all of the fathers whose children attend the *yōchien* participated in *Kashiwada Oyaji-no-kai*. One reason, Kase-san informed me, was that they probably felt insecure about participating. Specifically, they could be afraid of attending an event only to wind up sitting alone for its duration. They reduced the chances of this happening to zero by refusing to attend events that, ironically, could lead to relationships that would prevent them from future isolation. As people ascribing to a philosophy of risk-aversion, they may similarly disallow their children the opportunity to take chances. For example, Kase-san suggested that some of the fathers not in attendance were also afraid that their children would get injured running around with other children. This seemed paradoxical to me, since their children already attend the *yōchien*, running around with roughly the same group of children in the same spaces during weekdays.

Contextualizing Nostalgia for an Idealized Past

While informative, this group conversation with Kase-san and the others on Japanese community life in the past requires qualification and perspective. While Japanese men may mourn the loss of their neighborhood communities, these communities were never a truly viable social group for salarymen—a category that includes many but certainly not all participants in *oyaji-no-kai*. The pivot of salarymen to the local community is a relatively recent development resulting from the increasing alienation of employees from their companies under neoliberal policies and the subsequent unsettling of a masculinity based predominantly in the workplace. Yet in the past and even now, excessive work demands and long daily commutes to the office—especially in metropolises such as Tokyo—precluded the salaryman’s participation in *chōnaikai* (Bestor 1991). With a power structure that was hierarchically based on age, *chōnaikai* were instead run by male retirees and local shopkeepers. Ironically, men who participate in *oyaji-no-kai* today generally appreciate the absence of a strong hierarchy, which many consider a welcome change from company pecking orders.

Additionally, the two periods of time that men reference when waxing nostalgic about Japan’s lost past are both idealized and based on selective memory, although the accuracy of their recollection is possibly not the point. First, nostalgic attempts to implicitly reference village life in Japan’s rural past ignore the precarious lifestyle of the peasantry, who were at the mercy of nature, their local lord, and samurai (Hane and Perez 2015; Keirstead 2016). Fathers likely know but conveniently ignore these facts when offering *natsukashii* narratives.

Second, the slice of time between the end of the Pacific War in 1945 and the collapse of Japan’s economic bubble in 1991 was already a period of flux rather than of stable, timeless

tradition. During the same time period, Japanese society witnessed the declining influence of another traditional system of social organization, the patriarchal *ie system* enshrined in the Meiji Civil Code of 1899 (Vogel 2013). Abolished by the Allied occupation following Japan's defeat, the *ie system* had previously made three generational households the basic unit of Japanese law and governed the formal rules of kinship (Ronald 2011)—a process that abolished the other diverse forms of kinship that previously suffused the Japanese social landscape (Ikegami 2001). The *ie system*'s influence—including forms of governance such as the *koseki seido*²⁰³ or the “lineage registration system”—is not entirely absent today (Alexy 2011), but in many ways it is greatly attenuated. For example, the nuclear family has in many localities replaced three-generation households (N. Ogawa and Retherford 1997). In short, the community life that men of the *oyaji-no-kai* experienced as children flourished—in the specific form they most commonly reference—for a short historical period of less than 50 years.

Third, notions of a vanished masculinity that was once strong and secure—one that many Japanese men attempt to recoup by partially grounding their gender identities in their families and *natsukashii chiiki katsudō* activities—are the product of the contemporary father's more precarious employment and uncertain familial relationships. However, salarymen in pre-bubble Japan had their own masculinity-related frustrations and tensions that made them far from self-confident (Skinner 1979). Contributing to this sense of malaise is the post-bubble media-promulgated discourse that labels fathers as “weak, incompetent, or even evil” yet that valorizes women as “unprecedentedly loyal, devoted, and understanding” in a way that furthers men's declining sense of self-worth (Yau 2018, 252). *Chiiki katsudō* performances serve to demonstrate

²⁰³ 戸籍制度 (*koseki seido*).

that men are anything but enervated and debilitated: Japanese men are still perfectly capable of providing for and protecting their families. Displays of skill in traditional crafts and craft-like activities, as well as the whole enterprise of putting on an event, can show families and the local community that fathers are still knowledgeable, competent, and productive. They still have the capacity to lead and to teach their children.

Finally, Japanese women—especially those who have young children—have relationships with other women that mirror the *tsunagari* that men identify as traditional and valuable. Mothers informed me that in contrast to their husbands' inability to relate to other fathers, they have connections to other mothers in their *danchi*, especially to those whose children go to the same school. At one point, I was invited to a get-together at a *danchi* located in the suburbs of Tokyo. There, mothers and their children freely socialized in the public room of the building. For this reason, it may be Japanese men who face a more severe loss of deeply personal “wet” ties, although when families relocate due to a husband or father's job transfer, wives and mothers may lose access to their social networks in their new environments. Building a new network from scratch is a daunting and disheartening task (Jolivet 1997).

Patterns of labor and residence in the Greater Tokyo Area contribute to people's abandonment of “wet” ties for superficial “dry” ties. Tokyo and large cities have spawned so-called “new towns” or “bed towns”—suburban areas built as places for people to sleep at night as they commute to and from the city for work. For many, commuting to work consumes several hours each day, leaving people with even less time for family and acquaintances. However, new towns are far from the only pressure on “wet” ties. The men of Kashiwada also pointed out that

supermarkets have pushed traditional shopping districts or *shōtengai*²⁰⁴ out of business. Family-run businesses in *shōtengai* meant that, like the *danchi* a generation ago, the relationships among people in the area had deep roots. Customers also could form relationships with the more stable, and hence knowable, pool of employees for what were often local businesses. This connectedness translated into safety for children. *Obasan*²⁰⁵ or “aunties,” as well as *shōtengai* staff knew all the local children and their families, keeping an eye out for them to make sure they were safe and out of trouble.

While perhaps the ascendancy of “dry” over “wet” ties is not as uniformly prevalent or devastating as the men of Kashiwada portray it—certainly, some regions in Japan maintain “wet” ties to a much greater extent than others—over the past few decades there has undoubtedly been a sharp trend toward impersonal, contractual relationships in Japanese society (Slater 2010; West 2011). Reflecting the spread of neoliberal values, many individuals prefer to be free of “wet” ties: they find the social obligations entailed to be *mendokusai*²⁰⁶ or tedious and tiresome. Fathers at *oyaji-no-kai* are no exception.

Ironically, despite their ability to wax nostalgic about lost forms of socializing, many of the men to whom I spoke also displayed a preference for relationships that are voluntary. Inherently, such relationships are diametrically opposed to the stifling “wet” they reject that, by virtue of their intensity, involve reciprocity and obligation. Yet they cannot have it both ways. It is perhaps for this reason that communal gatherings are so highly valued. For the men of *oyaji-no-kai*, not merely those in Kashiwada, events involving *yakitori* barbecue and *mochi*-pounding

²⁰⁴ 商店街 (*shōtengai*).

²⁰⁵ おばさん (*obasan*).

²⁰⁶ めんどくさい (*mendokusai*).

are ideal because these social activities mimic “wet” ties under the facade of tradition, simulate a selective interpretation of village society, and remain fundamentally nonmandatory in nature.

Men can stop participating in the oyaji-no-kai at any time, with few if any consequences; women are more likely to be judged if they withdraw from the PTA or *mamakai*²⁰⁷—“mama meetings.”

Making Food and Dancing

After finishing my stint at the yakitori grill during the Kashiwada Oyaji-no-kai event, I went on to assist with cooking yakisoba. The men then encouraged me to watch the machine that made popped rice using pressure to generate an exploding sound and a trail of smoke. The machine itself is called a *pongashi*,²⁰⁸ the “pon” derived from the exploding sound and the “gashi” from the Japanese word for candy.

As with pounding mochi, operating the pongashi gave men a chance to utilize technical skills and strength. The machine was an aging device that required constant adjustment. When the external battery hooked up to the pongashi began to lose its charge, the fathers were forced to adapt by manually cranking the machine as their children watched and waited. Moreover, the pongashi also carried nostalgic value. In fact, many of the parents present described the pongashi as *natsukashii* because it conjured memories of their childhoods. One man waxed on about his childhood memories of eating the popped rice, complaining that the device is rarely seen today. The variety of snacks marketed to children have increased, while the number of manufacturers who make pongashi have apparently decreased, “even though popped rice is delicious.” When

²⁰⁷ ママ会 (mamakai).

²⁰⁸ ポンガシ (pongashi).

asked, he told me that the machine was only brought out for festivals even during his childhood. By dusting off the pongashi and by providing other sorts of experiences, he and many of the other men hoped to create good memories for their children and in the process to share some of their own childhood memories.

Eventually, a man with a microphone announced to the crowd that it was time to clean up, so we all pitched in while the children were kept occupied blowing soap bubbles. As I assisted, I began to notice that some of the men had changed into black shirts with the character *chichi*²⁰⁹ or “father” in white lettering on the back of each shirt. Many men had tied headbands called *hachimaki*²¹⁰ around their foreheads, and they had shed their shoes and socks to walk barefoot on the dusty ground. After participants put everything away, the men began to gather in the middle of the courtyard as families stood around the edges to spectate. After a few of these uniformed men brought taiko drums out from storage, I finally realized what was about to happen.

The performance began, with one of my acquaintances leading the taiko performance, pounding the drum with heavy strokes that reverberated throughout the area. Other men followed suit, chanting and moving their bodies in time with the rhythm. At appropriate intervals, one of two men crouching on the ground next to each taiko would switch places with the drummers, seamlessly continuing the beat. As mentioned earlier, the day was incredibly hot, and watching the performance only made me feel hotter. The beat increased in intensity, and the performers began to switch places more frequently. No longer squatting, they danced in front of the drum for

²⁰⁹ 父 (chichi).

²¹⁰ はちまき (hachimaki).

a few seconds, then twirled away to let one of their partners take their place. The audience, mostly made of women by now, continued to watch—many smiling at the men’s antics. Quickly losing interest, many of the children moved to the playground to splash around with water toys. One man who I had recently befriended at a previous event moved next to me. He told me that of the fathers in the oyaji-no-kai, the performers had the most “fire” in them, and they had practiced every weekend for months. He added me that every Japanese persons “understands” taiko, since it is a common staple of summer festivals.

Once again, the willingness to perform such an intense activity in the intense heat demonstrated fathers’ endurance, strength, stock in tradition, and “hot-bloodedness”—all of which are valued in hegemonic constructions of masculinity. Fathers appeared to enjoy performing masculinity connected to tradition and experiencing the bittersweet emotion of *natsukashii*, but I was unable to ascertain to what extent their families savored the event in equal measure.

There was remarkably little interaction between the fathers of the oyaji-no-kai and their wives and children. In fact, the closest sustained interaction between men and children was perhaps the making of popped rice with the pongashi and a band that at one point performed children’s songs but that still maintained a separation between the performers and the audience. (This music performance contrasts with the interactive concerts given by Papa’s E-hon Raibu, described in Chapter 3.) As with the *mochitsuki*, the boys and girls attending the event were socialized into a gendered division of public space in which men and women largely kept to themselves. The men of Kashiwada Oyaji-no-kai dealt with all aspects of cooking, partaking of the food only after they distributed it to their families. However, women were still responsible

for feeding and taking care of the young children; most of the children who were not infants or toddlers proved capable of entertaining themselves in the company of their friends. The Kashiwada Oyaji-no-kai thus created for adults a largely homosocial event in a normally heterosocial (children's) space.

Although the men's activities at the barbecue did not directly engage their wives and children, the Kashiwada Oyaji-no-kai event appeared to be a success if one saw it as a means for fathers to participate with their families in a community affair. The barbecue appeared to be enjoyable in different ways for fathers, mothers, and children. Moreover, the joint effort of organizing and conducting the event enabled the participating men to strengthen their ties with one another and to make themselves further "known" to the local children. In the best-case scenario, when fathers become familiar with the local children and vice versa, this familiarity translates into greater security for the community—or at the very least, greater peace of mind for parents who believe that more sets of friendly eyes are watching out for their children. However, I was unable to observe the extent to which sporadic community engagement improved safety, even though advocates of *chiiki katsudō* articulated this as a goal. As explained above, the question of whether and in what capacity—outside the *yōchien*—these fathers would feel comfortable interacting with children who are not their own is a complicated question. If my conversations are any indication, some men at the Kashiwada Oyaji-no-kai barbecue would have liked to take a more active role in policing their communities, but they had refrained from doing so because of communal parenting's perceived impropriety under contemporary social norms and the possibility that the men might appear "dangerous."

Section 4: Nostalgia and Traditional Manliness on Display at an Oyaji-no-kai Summit

Background

Wearing his shogun helmet, our general strode over to the enemy team and paced back and forth, bellowing challenges. Apparently satisfied, he returned to the spot where our forces were gathered behind the barricades—a row of flattened cardboard boxes taped to chairs. He issued his orders to all present, but he made a special point of looking at the children assembled in front: At the start of the battle, all forces were to charge forward and take the enemy general's head. Then, victory would be ours.

After the signal was given, I found myself engaging two men at once with my rolled-up newspaper sword. Attempting to pop the balloons tied to their sashes, my efforts were frustrated by the fact that one man had positioned his balloon in the middle of his back rather than at his waist. My sword would never reach as long as he faced me.

I held off the men for some time, but eventually one of the two pulled off my entire sash with his hands. We paused for breath, only to realize that the match had ended while we were occupied. As I retied my sash and returned to my team, I asked a nearby man about who had won the match. Apparently, we had. Some of the dads laughed, saying the enemy general had turned tail and run. Our general joked that the enemy general would flee again during the next round.

This *chanbara*,²¹¹ or sword fight, took place during a national summit of oyaji-no-kai that brought together locally organized groups of fathers from across Japan. The event is held in a different location each year, but fortuitously the oyaji-no-kai of Tokyo hosted the summit during

²¹¹ チャンバラ (chanbara).

my year of fieldwork in the Greater Tokyo Area. Held at a huge, run-down school gym and its adjoining classrooms, the summit was a day full of events including food-making activities, formal presentations, and a wrap-up nomikai, or drinking party.

The national summit of oyaji-no-kai allowed me to witness the practices and interactions of oyaji-no-kai from across Japan, not simply from the Greater Tokyo Area. Despite the many regional differences, insisted upon by the fathers themselves as a matter of pride, the oyaji-no-kai in attendance appeared to share common interests. Posters showcasing the activities of different oyaji-no-kai placed a heavy emphasis on such outdoor activities as camping, festival-going, and playing sports with their children. Other common themes in these self-presentations included cooking hearty foods including curry, yakisoba, and handmade udon; “collaborations” with schools; and creative endeavors, such as building structures out of wood, making haunted houses, or—in the case of one oyaji-no-kai from Kawaguchi in Saitama Prefecture—bringing to the venue a larger-than-life cardboard and papier-mâché rendition of a man taking a bath in an oil drum. The creation had a pink towel on his head, a (paper) wooden bath bucket in his hand, and blue streamers immersing him and representing the water filling the oil drum. The drum itself featured a painting of the Great Wave of Kanegawa. The creation’s mouth was open in a creepily joyful smile, each misshapen tooth individually rendered, and its eyes appeared closed in relaxation.



Illustration 6.1 Oyaji enjoying his bath by Saitama Prefecture, Kawaguchi City, Kamiyaki Elementary School Oyaji-no-kai (Photo by Evan T. Koike)

Additionally, via conversations held throughout the day with men from across Japan, I learned that oyaji-no-kai members shared a view of *chiiki katsudō* as pleasurable and importantly *natsukashii*. Further, the views and performances of men in oyaji-no-kai at times conflicted with the doctrines of larger organizations in Japan’s fathering movement, such as those of Fathering Japan. The national nonprofit nevertheless continues to encourage men to join *chiiki katsudō* based on the argument that enjoyable community activities will lead fathers to develop a greater awareness of and concern for their family’s needs. Like Fathering Japan, the national summit attempted to educate attendees on topics relating to parenting, but the full impact of the lessons was undercut by the playful subtext of the day’s events.

Conflicts as Essential to Chiiki Katsudō

At the national summit of oyaji-no-kai, the large number of recreational activities and the relatively small number of children relative to the father-participants underscored Watanabe-san's characterization of the difference between papa circles and oyaji-no-kai: the former exist for the sake of families, while the latter primarily exist for the sake of the fathers themselves, who enjoy competitions and often perpetuate rivalries. One father, to whom I will refer as Yamamoto-san, explained to me his philosophy on oyaji-no-kai. Fathers consider oyaji-no-kai to be *ibasho*, a term that means “the place where one belongs” or “the place where one can be oneself.” Even after one's children have grown, one can still participate in oyaji-no-kai activities; the significant number of older attendees at the national summit attested to this idea.

Yamamoto-san compared oyaji-no-kai to parent-teacher associations (PTAs). No one wants to participate in their school's PTA. Not only is the PTA an organization filled with all sorts of obligations and red tape, but the roles and leadership of the PTA are also predetermined. The PTA's responsibilities and mandate are likewise set; for example, the PTA communicates with the police on behalf of the school regarding the creation of wider roads. In contrast to this unexciting prospect, participation in the oyaji-no-kai is voluntary and any (male) individual living in the locality is welcome to join. So long as someone takes the initiative, oyaji-no-kai allow fathers to put on the events they want, whether they be camping trips or firework displays. According to Yamamoto-san, oyaji-no-kai are like traditional village gatherings, which, because of a rise in individualism and urbanization, have diminished along with the intimate communal bonds they engendered. Yamamoto-san implied that as successors of village gatherings, oyaji-no-kai recapture a piece of Japan's lost past—though he perhaps intentionally ignored how the rigid,

hierarchical social structures that governed village relationships also encouraged obligations more akin to his conceptualization of the PTA than to an organization based on voluntary association.

Although one must take with a grain of salt the claim that any man living in the immediate vicinity of an oyaji-no-kai can participate in its activities, the national summit of oyaji-no-kai did bring together people with diverse styles and departments. Present at the event were men wearing *happi*²¹² (a traditional kind of short-sleeved coat worn for festivals) or t-shirts emblazoned with the name of their oyaji-no-kai; quiet but intently focused men in plaid button-down dress shirts who looked as if they belonged in an IT department; stoic men in fleece jackets, sometimes with face masks on to protect their faces from the winter cold; and loud, defiant-looking men in biker jackets that reminded me of the *bōsōzoku*²¹³ biker gangs described by Satō (1998). I was particularly taken aback by a rugged-looking man with a mohawk and a vibrant pink happi over *tobi zubon*,²¹⁴ a type of baggy trousers commonly worn by construction workers. During the sword fight earlier in the day, I had witnessed him acting aggressively. However, as he sat near me during lunch, he took a phone call from someone who may have been a work superior or a client because he repeatedly bowed to his invisible interlocutor, and he modulated his voice into a soft-spoken tone often associated with workplace interactions.

If oyaji-no-kai resemble village gatherings of old, as Yamamoto-san claimed, then village rivalries were certainly present. As we were rolling up our swords for the chanbara, one man from Osaka noticed that the newspaper was local to Tokyo. He quipped that a Tokyo newspaper

²¹² 法被 (happi).

²¹³ 暴走族 (bōsōzoku).

²¹⁴ 鳶ズボン (tobi zubon).

would be ineffective as a weapon, to the amusement of the other nearby oyaji²¹⁵ or “pops.” Throughout the day, similar banter surfaced among the oyaji representing various regions. Apparently, some members had internalized the characteristics of the stereotypes associated with the regions in which those members lived. For example, Tokyo denizens were apt to characterize their organizations as lacking in vitality compared to oyaji-no-kai from other regions; they also admitted that the latter were better able to approximate the ideal of longstanding village relationships because they believed that people living in many other areas of Japan were embedded in communities that still exhibited village attributes. For example, Suzuki-san, a man from one of the western districts of Tokyo, founded an oyaji-no-kai with only 11 members. Suzuki-san’s oyaji-no-kai is not unusual: Tokyo oyaji-no-kai are “weak” because the people living in Tokyo are constantly moving around, resulting in a fluctuating and unstable membership. Additionally, according to Suzuki-san, relationships among people are impoverished in Tokyo since one is “completely” surrounded by “people whom you don’t know.” When I inquired further about the ineffectuality of Tokyo oyaji-no-kai, Suzuki-san told me that many fathers at his children’s school are salarymen, and many salaryman consider participation in chiiki katsudō to be “a pain in the ass” because of the time commitment and effort involved. In contrast to Tokyo, oyaji-no-kai from Kyushu and Shikoku are strong. As Suzuki-san explained to me, there are shōtengai in Kyushu and Shikoku where families have lived for a long time, giving chiiki katsudō a generations-old depth.

²¹⁵ 親父 (oyaji).

The Summit Opens: Conveying Diverse Beliefs about Fathering

The day's events gradually transitioned from recreational to educational, and then they returned to recreational. After our conversation finished, Suzuki-san excused himself to go see the food-making activities. Interested as well, I headed outside separately to see dads making food both for themselves and for the small number of children in attendance. The lunch break featured such activities as baking pizza made with dough concocted in soda bottles, mochi-pounding featuring one man wielding the kine while dressed in a Pikachu suit, and roasting marshmallows.



Illustration 6.2 Pikachu hard at work making mochi (Photo by Evan T. Koike)

After lunch ended, everyone gathered in the gymnasium for the “kick-off speech” from a school dean and expert on *hikikomori*,²¹⁶ so-called “social recluses” or “shut-ins,” who have withdrawn from society due to various circumstances, including social anxiety, being the target of bullying, and general disillusionment with society. His talk became an invective against the current generation of children, who, he claimed, are only concerned with themselves. Children today consider it unproblematic to run away when they encounter hardship, and they are spoiled by the convenient lifestyle that their parents provide for them at home. According to the speaker, young people also lack the capacity make choices not because they are indecisive, but simply because they consider the act of choosing to be bothersome. Through displays of apathy, they force authority figures to make decisions on their behalf. As students, these young people have no respect for their teachers and show no willingness to learn. Because the speaker did not specifically discuss how fathers might prevent or address such behavior from their children, his polemic about misguided young people seemed out of place at the oyaji-no-kai summit, although the attendees quietly and politely listened to the speaker. The speaker’s words about the perceived self-centeredness of contemporary youth would prove highly ironic in light of the summit’s strong emphasis on play and the pleasure-seeking behavior displayed by attendees at the after-event nomikai.

What followed next was a series of themed sessions. The event also featured a “play park” for oyaji who brought their children. I was unaware about what the play park entailed because I attended another concurrent session. Titles of the formal sessions included “Connecting with the Community: ‘The Future of Oyaji-no-kai’” and “Teach Me!: How to

²¹⁶ 引きこもり (*hikikomori*).

Create and Manage an Oyaji-no-kai.” The former presentation strongly emphasized how fathers could make *chiiki katsudō* enjoyable; like *Fathering Japan*, which defines “fathering” as “enjoying being a father,” the presentation sought to tie parenting to self-fulfillment. It reinforced this theme via PowerPoint slides citing the “voices of young members”—by which they meant fathers of young children—and dozens of vibrant pictures featuring men and children playing by the beach and in parks, dressing up in various costumes, and cooking curry rice and what appeared to be *dorayaki* (sweet bean paste sandwiched between two pieces of pancake-like bread).

Through my interactions with other attendees during the workshop-like portion of each session, I learned that the other men present were generally welcoming and friendly—with a few exceptions. However, I quickly discovered that men’s stances on issues of paternal involvement in *kosodate* were less coherent than the message articulated by members of *Fathering Japan*—although a few *Fathering Japan* members attended the summit. Perhaps this multiplicity of viewpoints was predictable, given the seemingly greater occupational, age-based, and regional variation present at the national gathering of *oyaji-no-kai*, including from areas considered conservative and traditional. The diversity of beliefs also likely arose from the absence of a unified message at the national summit of *oyaji-no-kai*, which are generally less judgmental than is *Fathering Japan* about how and to what degree Japanese men should involve themselves in their families. Recognizing that parenting styles differ according to families’ needs, *Fathering Japan* nevertheless draws its membership from people who subscribe to its agenda on involved parenting.

Some men appeared to hold views contravening the ideas about gender equality present in the larger parenting movement. One dad laughingly explained that after his daughter finished her *juku* or cram school in the evening, he would pick her up in his car. However, he told his son facing the same situation that “you’re fine, take the train home.” This sentiment may or may not have been shared by the few attendees from Fathering Japan who had older children, but, at the very least, these members never spoke explicitly about whether they treat their sons and daughters differently. During my interviews with them, some members of Fathering Japan admitted that they find daughters cuter than sons and sons more foolish than daughters.

At the oyaji-no-kai summit, a man who looked to be in his 50s voiced his view that gender-based distinctions are necessary. As we descended the school’s stairs after a session ended, he informed me disapprovingly that due to the increasing societal emphasis on gender equality, men and women are becoming too similar. After asking whether I was familiar with the terms for “fatherhood” (*fusei*)²¹⁷ and “motherhood” (*bosei*),²¹⁸ he commented that Japanese men now think they should take on responsibilities in the home and that Japanese women think they should work to earn income. According to this man’s perspective, such changes to traditional gender roles are not good: “Men should be men. Women should be women. This is natural.” As we reached the bottom of the stairs, he noted that his thoughts are only one opinion, and we parted ways.

No one else to whom I spoke at the summit seemed to share this man’s thoughts, which seemed to echo ideas from the era when the salaryman’s and the *senjyō shufu* or full-time

²¹⁷ 父性 (*fusei*).

²¹⁸ 母性 (*bosei*).

housewife's roles remained uncontested. (See Chapter 1.) Nevertheless, the tone of the event and comments by other individuals revealed a value system underpinning the get-together that, if not as traditional as that articulated by the middle-aged man, seemed to view fathering as an outlet for recreation rather than as a serious undertaking. Despite the lectures on parenting at the national summit, a major emphasis was having fun—and this despite the criticisms of the kick-off speaker, who contended that contemporary Japanese youth are more self-centered than ever before.

After the sessions had ended, everyone again gathered in the gymnasium to report on what they had discussed and learned in each session. Following the final few speeches, the master of ceremonies informed everyone—several times—that the *nomikai* to be held in a few hours is the “real *oyaji-no-kai*” and that the venue was expensive to rent. If people returned home now, the master of ceremonies opined, they would forever regret squandering this missed opportunity.

“Crazy” Japanese Fathers Focus on Themselves at the National Summit’s Drinking Party

I therefore resolved to attend the *nomikai*, the culmination of the day’s events. As the master of ceremonies suggested, *oyaji-no-kai* members take pleasure in after-event drinking as they celebrate a successful end to their efforts, whether those efforts are private meetings or public performances. Men attending such celebrations exhibit striking similarities to the salaryman archetype and to configurations of masculinity for which alcohol provides a socially accepted trigger to relax and release one’s inner feelings, seemingly without social consequences (Allison 1994; Dasgupta 2003). Part of the reason for these similarities is undoubtedly the

nomikai “format,” which carries certain expectations about how the event will unfold and how participants will behave—in the same way that a birthday party “format” carries certain flexible expectations in North America (e.g., cake followed by presents).

Admittedly, Japanese society also popularly associates alcohol and drinking parties with college students (McDonald 2009), company workers in general, and male hosts whose performances create seductive fantasy worlds for paying female customers (Takeyama 2010; 2016). However, men tend to do most of the drinking within these first two categories; women are more likely to moderate their intake in most situations. Salarymen, not Japanese women, are the individuals who may be found lying in a street gutter or passed out on the last train home (Borovoy 2005). Alcohol continues to be essential to many constructions of masculinity, including displays of satisfaction at imbibing a cold drink, the ability to hold one’s liquor, and a preference for certain types of alcohol, such as beer and sake. Beliefs about which alcoholic drinks are appropriate for men were, in my observation, never violated at my field sites. Interestingly, in another context, I experienced personally how Japanese men and women police these expectations for men participating in nomikai. When I attended nomikai following charitable events sponsored by a university club in Tokyo to which I belonged, my preference for sweet things led me to choose cocktails and mixed drinks instead of beer, at least when such drinks were available. My college-aged nakama would laugh and comment that I was “cute” and “girly,” as sweet things are popularly associated in Japan with femininity and with children.

Real men drink beer, and the nomikai is the domain of “real men.” Following the national summit of oyaji-no-kai, people congregated in a separate venue and chatted at small, round tables covered with black tablecloths placed around the room. Later used for the toast, bottles of

beer sat on these tables, and a buffet graced the back of the room. Also at the back of the room was a bartender serving various alcoholic drinks and orange juice. As people gradually became more and more intoxicated, they engaged in raucous laughter and jokes, as well as some horseplay. The refrain of the evening was “oyaji are the best!”—which people would chant with gleeful abandon at opportune moments.

At one point, I agreed to say a few words to the crowd during the *nomikai*. An acquaintance suggested that I add a single statement to my speech: “Everyone here is, in the positive sense of the word, crazy.”²¹⁹ While I later felt as if I had validated a self-image that I did not necessarily agree with, the audience loved it. Many individuals approached me afterward, hoping to exchange business cards and contact information. At no other time during my fieldwork did so many people at one time express interest in talking to me.

At the end of the *nomikai*, approximately 80 men in their mid-30s to their 60s as well as one woman stood in a circle and put their arms around the shoulders of their neighbors, forming a ring that encircled the entire room. One man, unable to stand on his own, was supported by the two on either side of him. This help did not prevent his head from sagging forward, and he would occasionally start and lift his goateed chin. Another man wearing a checkered shirt held a glass in his hand and kept drinking as he sang.

Dressed in yellow *happi* coats, two guitarists, a drummer, a keyboardist, and a boy playing a violin stood on a raised stage and began to play “*Sarai*,” a *natsukashii*-themed song that deploys emotion-laden lines, such as “carrying loneliness on my back, I set out on a journey alone” (Misa-chan 2013). The song is a peculiar choice for a gathering of fathers, as it discusses

²¹⁹ “Crazy” in Japanese generally has a negative connotation, but sometimes it can be used positively to denote enthusiasm.

throwing away one's responsibilities: "Unable to abandon a faraway dream, I abandoned my hometown instead" (Misa-chan 2013). One line describes the singer remembering the warm feeling of being in the company of his "young" mother and father as a child, implying that his parents are now "old." However, instead of caring for them in their twilight years, he seeks his fortune while ruminating masochistically on the feeling of nostalgia.

Men's yearning for freedom from social constraints, as expressed by the song "Sarai," is similar to the masculine desire described by Schilling (1993) in his analysis of the long-running movies series "Otoko wa Tsurai yo," or "It's Tough Being a Man," in which the irascible but lovable wandering peddler Tora-san always falls in love with a younger woman whom he charms with his personality. However, Tora-san is never genuinely in love with a particular woman, but rather with an idealized "Madonna." If his Madonna reveals herself to be flesh and blood by turning around and pursuing him, Tora-san quickly makes himself scarce: "He wants the thrill of the first encounter, the passionate dreams of courtship, not the reality of a serious, and possibly permanent, relationship" (Schilling 1993). It is Tora-san's freedom to roam, to love, and to move on when his relationship inevitably fails that the salaryman envies, although he would still never permanently trade places with Tora-san (Gill 2002).

Most of the men at this nomikai seemed to know the lyrics by heart; voices rose to hit the chorus's high notes, and a few men jumped up and down as if excited or throwing a tantrum. The group grew more energized, and some men uttered cries and exclamations during the brief pauses in the lyrics. All around me I saw a variety of facial expressions: smiles reflecting amusement, half-crazed grins that were partly the product of too much alcohol, stern faces of

concentration, and a grimace on one nearby man who seemed almost to cry as he choked out the lyrics.

When the song ended, people raised their hands over their head and clapped. A few roared statements that I could not understand. An announcer proclaimed the end of the national summit of *oyaji-no-kai*, which he claimed was a huge success. He then called for a round of *banzai*, a Japanese expression that is equivalent to “hurray” but that literally means “ten thousand years.” Everyone raised their hands over their head and called out “*banzai!*” before dropping them and repeating the celebratory gesture twice more.²²⁰

While it was clear that the *oyaji* had no ill intentions, one could view the *oyaji* preoccupation with the self-absorbed song “*Sarai*” as the pursuit of self-fulfillment from a privileged position. Caught in their own world and swept up in the emotion of the moment—which, admittedly, I was too—the display was a culmination of a day in which fathers largely focused on the “play” and “fun” aspects of parenting as ends in themselves. Unlike the leaders and members of Fathering Japan who asked fathers to laugh for their families’ sakes, these *oyaji* laughed and nearly cried for and about themselves. In this sense, participants in the summit were similar to the fathers described by Roberson (2002) who exercised the male privilege of selecting when and how to become involved as parents, namely the “fun” elements.

Nevertheless, even a fun-filled *oyaji-no-kai* could eventually lead some fathers to become more involved in their families. Men at Fathering Japan confirmed to me that fun was what drew them into a more involved relationship with their families. While the practices of *oyaji-no-kai*

²²⁰ The modern usage of the three “*banzai*” cheer developed out of Japanese nationalism as a sign of respect for the Meiji (1868–1912) emperor (Makihara 2011). While the cheer is arguably not synonymous with values of the kind the fathering movement as a whole promotes, it is not unconnected to a particular view of a more traditional (nationalistic) past.

often skew toward self-satisfaction, many oyaji-no-kai remain part of Japan's parenting movement, if only on the margins.

Section 5: Enriching the Community with Sadano Papa School

My First Papa School Meeting in Sadano

Location: The Free Space Room at Sadano's Civic Activity Center

Group: The locally run Sadano Papa School headed by Saito-san

Start Time and Date: 7:00 PM in December 2016

I arrive early and sit at the entrance of the Civic Activity Center in Sadano, a pseudonym that I have given to a city in a prefecture bordering Tokyo. Shortly thereafter, Saito-san appears with his 9-year-old daughter in tow and thanks me for coming to tonight's meeting of the Sadano Papa School, a group that strives to educate and enrich entire families. I follow him to the Free Space Room, a large, carpeted area mostly occupied by tables of various sizes that allow for gatherings of between four to 12 people. Around the room's perimeter are two doors to different conference rooms; a row of private stall-like booths; a computer corner; some bookshelves housing books and flyers; and a reception desk behind which the center's staff work.

As I later discover, the Civic Activity Center is a company established to act as an intermediary between Sadano's city government and local organizations. The Civic Activity Center's mandate is to support civic activities and youth programs with the overall goal of contributing to a prosperous Sadano community. Sadano Papa School's use of the Civic Activity Center's space is not unique among Japanese grassroots groups focused on parenting, which also avail themselves of the local infrastructure and financial support offered by city governments.

As we walk to the Free Space Room, Saito-san introduces me to Kairi-chan—a cheeky girl who is comfortable talking to adults—placing his hand on her head. Sitting at one of the tables, he remarks with displeasure that people probably will not bother to attend. Kairi-chan

chimes in with repetitions of her father’s words: “They won’t come. They never come.” I chuckle at her comment, and she looks at me with a slightly pleased expression. Kairi-chan asks for Saito-san’s cellphone, which she plays with as he fills out a form. He later hands this form over to the Civic Activity Center’s staff in order to reserve our table for the meeting.

Saito-san voices his dissatisfaction with the city hall’s funding for their activities—a complaint that Saito-san will express on several other occasions this evening—as well as the staff’s general confusion regarding Sadano Papa School’s goals. Their objectives are spelled out in the papa circle’s 2017 application for financial support, which just so happens to be our topic of discussion for the evening:

Description of Business:

Lecture programs that lead to the improvement (quantity and quality) of papas’ kosodate.

[Definition of] Quantity: An increase in time spent performing kosodate at home.

Quality: An increase in the community’s interest in sharing in kosodate.²²¹

Target Audience:

All papas involved in kosodate and pre-papas²²² [expectant fathers].

Individuals (including mamas) who are interested in supporting papas’ kosodate.²²³

²²¹ ■事業内容

パパの子育ての「量&質」アップに繋がる講座プログラム

※量：家庭内で子育てにかかる時間増／質：地域でシェアする子育てへの関心増

²²² プレパパ (pure papa).

²²³ ■対象者

・子育てに関わる全てのパパ、プレパパ

※パパの子育てに関心のある方（ママ含む）

The application later qualifies the above definition of “quality” to encompass addressing the indifference currently shown to other people’s children by parents in the community.

Otherwise, I find Sadano Papa School’s application fairly easy to understand. It contains a list of previous activities, a list of proposed events, a budget, and suggestions for improvements to the papa circle’s structure and activities (e.g., increasing the number of papa circle members, developing popular lectures, and scheduling events for different times and days of the week so that fathers with unusual schedules can participate).

Eventually, other men join the group, and the papa circle meeting commences with little ceremony. All told, eight men participate in a meeting that lasts over two hours. A round of introductions by Saito-san includes information about each attendee’s occupation. Many of the fathers are employed at media and software companies; when Kairi-chan hears that one man works at a company that produces video games, she blurts out, “I want one!” The focus on occupation is unusual for a *chiiki katsudō* group, where men generally do not mention their employment status or positions, and these have negligible bearing on the participants’ social interactions.

Apparently, Saito-san’s interest in fathers’ work and hobbies stems partly from his desire to cut costs for Sadano Papa School. Saito-san is keen on using the expertise of papa circle members to develop lectures that members will perform as a service, obviating the need to pay them speakers’ fees from the papa circle’s meagre proposed budget of 120,000 yen (1,105 USD). A small portion of the proposed budget is reserved for popular lecturers who can attract a crowd (e.g. Ando-san, who, two years earlier, gave a lecture at Sadano Papa School and would later reprise this role in 2019).

However, high-profile figures command speakers' fees of around 15,000 yen (138 USD) for a few hours' worth of material. Famous individuals can therefore only be called in a few times each year, especially when the papa circle must budget for the miscellaneous expenses involved in putting on a lecture: parking fees, printing expenses, supplies (e.g., ink and stationery), renting the lecture venue, and storage space. Contrast the papa circle's situation with Fathering Japan's revenue stream (see Chapter 2), and—even setting aside the difference in organizational scale and mission scope—one can begin to understand the financial limitations faced by many local groups that want to make a difference in their communities.

After we finish our introductions, we begin to discuss Sadano Papa School's budget and activities. Specifically, we weigh the group's need to charge admission fees against how such fees would impact attendance; to collaborate with other parenting groups; to reach out to an audience of working mothers; to hire a licensed childminder to watch children during events; to advertise the group's existence within the local community; to evaluate the relative cost of different event venues; to change the papa circle's registered status at the Civic Activity Center in order to obtain a storage locker; and to grapple with the reality that every year, the amount of money that Sadano Papa School receives from the city government via the Civic Activity Center decreases. The city presumably bases this fund reduction on the idea that the longer a group has been established, the more responsible it should be for subsidizing its activities, and the less financial assistance it should need from the city. Partway through our discussion, Saito-san's partner arrives to pick up the now sleeping Kairi-chan. Saito-san laughs and pokes her. Kairi-chan groans and shifts in her seat, but she eventually gets up and leaves with her mother.

The Struggle to Interest Fathers in Sadano Papa School

The last attendee—the effusive Kato-san—then arrives more than an hour and a half late. Kato-san is a member of Fathering Japan, and Saito-san—who is not a member—is aware of this fact. With a look of concern on his face, he asks Kato-san about the number of attendees that Fathering Japan draws to its lectures. I discover that Saito-san both organizationally and philosophically looks to Fathering Japan’s example through this and other minor remarks during the papa circle meetings and through our interview many months later. He comments that Sadano Papa School may borrow Fathering Japan’s words, but he implies that his group is better situated to have an effect on the relationships between families in his community; Fathering Japan riji concur with Saito-san’s assessment when they encourage their members to get involved locally. (See Chapters 3 and 4.)

With Kato-san’s arrival, we transition from talking about logistics, bureaucratic processes, and finances to a more general conversation about such topics as the goals of Sadano Papa School and potential themes for lectures. As the Civic Activity Center is nearing its closing time, we move to an izakaya to continue our conversation. There, we delve into a discussion about individual family circumstances and parenting problems. For example, one man complains that he has trouble helping his children study: the way that students are taught to write Japanese characters, or *kanji*,²²⁴ differ from when he was a child. The other men quickly agree, admitting that they are often at a loss when asked kanji-related questions by their children.²²⁵ After wrapping up the conversation and reiterating that next year’s goal is to recruit members who are

²²⁴ 漢字 (kanji).

²²⁵ Many parents in North America will doubtless sympathize with the plight of Japanese parents who discover that the way in which a school subject is taught has significantly changed over the years.

not (initially) interested in kosodate, we pay and leave the izakaya. Once outside, we wish each other a good rest of the year and then split into two groups headed toward separate train stations.

I would go on to participate many more times in Sadano Papa School's monthly meetings, to have my profile featured on their official website, and to be part of the online discussion group for core members. At the time of my participation, the papa circle was still trying to find its footing. Established in 2010, Sadano Papa School began by engaging in volunteer efforts, although the group's focus has now entirely shifted toward hosting lectures. In the wake of the Tohoku region's 2011 earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear power plant meltdown, Saito-san and his fellow fathers gathered much-needed batteries to alleviate power shortages: people in the areas affected by the earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear reactor meltdown needed batteries in order to power their radios and flashlights. He and his fellow fathers also traveled to Tohoku to read picture books to displaced children and to cook food for them. According to Saito-san, the entire volunteer experience prompted the fathers in Sadano Papa School to discuss seriously their own kosodate practices and the importance of men's visibility and approachability in their local communities.

Today, the guiding philosophy of Sadano Papa School is rooted in Saito-san's own experiences as a parent, which Chapter 7 will detail. While Saito-san holds great ambitions, his efforts to expand the papa circle's influence have met with little immediate success. I witnessed and heard of ongoing attempts to recruit more regular members, generate interest among parents living in Sadano, collaborate with local college students in creating the papa circle's website, and gain the financial support of a real estate company with a vested interest in increasing Sadano's

livability. When I left Japan, Sadano Papa School had not made any significant progress in these endeavors.

Part of the problem facing papa circles is identified to me by Kato-san during our interview. I initially met Kato-san at his well-attended workshop on picture books, which was performed as a “service” to Sadano Papa School (in other words, free of charge). Kato-san works in the publishing industry and is so passionate about children’s picture books that we spend much time during each of our three-hour interviews discussing his philosophy on picture books and their influence on children’s cognitive development.

Kato-san lives in Sadano, but he first encountered Saito-san and the future members of Sadano Papa School when he was sent as an emissary to Sadano by Fathering Japan. The city of Sadano had petitioned the nonprofit for a speaker to assist with a series of lectures aimed at fathers and covering such topics as cooking and kosodate practices in the local community. At the end of this course, the attendees decided to create their own lecture series and wrote down what they wanted to learn about parenting. From there, Sadano Papa School was formed with the encouragement and financial assistance of the city. The emphasis on acquiring actual parenting skills again exemplifies Watanabe’s distinction among papa circles, which aim to benefit the entire family, and oyaji-no-kai, which place a premium on dads having fun and drinking together. The lesser emphasis on having fun at Sadano Papa School partially explains why the group has a low number of core members compared to many of the oyaji-no-kai that I encountered in the Greater Tokyo Area.

However, according to Kato-san, the bigger problem facing Sadano Papa School is that the group’s message is inadequately inclusive of the local population’s diverse needs. Sadano is

divided into many different districts; most members of Sadano Papa School live in the central district of high-rise apartments occupied by people with young children. (See Saito-san's interview in Chapter 7.) However, other districts are primarily populated by people whose families have lived in Sadano for generations. Kato-san explains that some of these places are downtown areas, while others boast a lot of nature and greenery:

Everyone lives in different places. Even though it's the same Sadano, their interests and needs are different. At least a little bit. But Saito-san, without really thinking about these things, is aiming for the same kind of change [across the city]. The more one focuses on the middle district, the more people's needs become similar. But the broader one's focus, the more people will become interested [in Sadano Papa School]. [If this latter outlook] doesn't become one of the papa circle's core values, then I think that Sadano Papa School won't be able to empathize [with people from other areas in the city].

Feelings of Inadequacy and Envy: Sadano Papa School and Fathering Japan

During our second interview, Kato-san mentions that all seven members of Sadano Papa School know of Fathering Japan but that only he and one other individual are members of the nonprofit. When I inquire about why they are not members, Kato-san speculates that the men of Sadano believe that participating in Fathering Japan would require too much time and effort. He adds that Sadano Papa School members are reluctant to join because they see the nonprofit as a high-level organization, comparing it to the exceptional Yomiuri Giants baseball team. Like the

Yomiuri Giants, Fathering Japan is a group of “winners,”²²⁶ as exemplified by men such as Kawashima-san, who achieved exceptional results as the president of a prominent company, receives praise from his subordinates, headed his local PTA, maintains a harmonious relationship with his family, and now leads the IkuBoss Project. (See Chapter 4.) Kato-san proclaims the following:

You can't imitate that. He is, in this sense, a significant obstacle [for people who would otherwise be interested in Fathering Japan's activities]. There is absolutely no way that everyone can become like Kawashima-san. I definitely can't become like Kawashima-san. On the other hand, I'm not jealous of Kawashima-san, but there are definitely people who feel jealous of Kawashima-san. He has won in life.

Thus, Sadano Papa School members and other fathers who identify as “people who are not winners”²²⁷ do not join because from the outside, Fathering Japan appears to be an organization for “superstars”²²⁸ and “super papas”²²⁹ but not “regular fathers.”²³⁰ However, my experience at Fathering Japan suggests that there are plenty of so-called regular fathers present. Kato-san concurs: “there are a lot of different types of people at Fathering Japan.”

According to Kato-san, Ando-san is aware that Fathering Japan's message will not spread if the nonprofit is publicly perceived as an elitist organization. Consequently, Ando-san is trying

²²⁶ 勝ち組 (kachigumi).

²²⁷ 勝ち組じゃない人 (kachigumi jyanai hito).

²²⁸ スーパースター (sūpāsutā).

²²⁹ スーパーパパ (sūpāpapa).

²³⁰ 普通のお父さん (futsū no otōsan).

to address this image by making use of the news media, by reaching out to diverse types of fathers, and by giving talks to such papa circles as Sadano Papa School which, as this chapter shows ethnographically, are more open to learning about engaged fathering than are oyaji-no-kai. Papa circles are therefore better collaborators with Fathering Japan, whose riji boast levels of success that are potentially off-putting not only to local fathers, but even to the nonprofit's own members. Kato-san points out that the decision to open board meetings to regular members is part of the riji's efforts to prevent themselves from being seen as celebrities, as well as to avoid secrecy in how they make decisions. (See Chapter 2.) Finally, Kato-san offers one additional idea about how Fathering Japan can improve its image: to further lower Fathering Japan's perceived barrier to entry and to model a more diverse array of parenting behaviors, Fathering Japan should also include salarymen who have become engaged fathers on their board of directors.

Chapter 7: Individual Japanese Men Making Sense of Fatherhood and Families

Section 1: Japanese Masculinity's Tenacious Connection to Paid Work

This chapter devotes itself to examining survey data about the work-life balance that my interlocutors experienced during my research period as well as to personal narratives about parenting, spousal relationships, and self-discovery. Drawing primarily upon interviews and surveys conducted during my research, Chapter 7 advances the arguments laid out in previous chapters by turning from Japan's nonprofit scene and local community activities to the interplay for individual Japanese fathers between their private lives and their work.

Fathers involved in Japan's parenting movement selectively appropriate into their gender performances some practices associated in Japan with femininities and alternative masculinities, as previous chapters demonstrate. However, the practices of older, more traditional masculinities persist among Japanese men—especially those employed as salarymen—although the men articulate their values in new ways. One of the most salient and enduring of these rearticulated values remains Japanese masculinity's deep-seated connection to work (Dasgupta 2003; Miyajima and Yamaguchi 2017).

The persistent connection in Japan between masculinity and employment, combined with the push for greater paternal involvement, has given rise within fatherhood-focused groups to concerns over the issue of work-life balance. More broadly, work-life balance is also a hot topic in certain segments of Japanese society. While not the focus of this chapter, women face even greater pressure than men to reconcile paid work with their roles as parents and partners. The

importance of work-life balance to women's well-being has spurred several initiatives by Fathering Japan's Mothering Project, including the recurring Role Model Cafe and Mothering College events that cover how women can advance their careers while engaging in kosodate or parenting. Japanese working women have long struggled with the idea of work-life balance even before the Japanese language borrowed the phrase from English; in the early twenty-first century, the Japanese use of *work-life balance*²³¹ originally referred to supporting the child-care activities of working women (Work-Life Balance, Co. 2018). In contrast, men's attention to the topic is relatively recent, gaining greater prominence under former Prime Minister Abe's efforts toward work-style reforms beginning in earnest around 2015. Still, even the Japanese government's 2017 Work-Style Reform Implementation Plan²³² referenced *work-life balance* exclusively in relation to improving the labor-force participation rate of women and the elderly (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare 2017). Due to persistent beliefs in Japan prescribing men's way of being in the world, any pressure on men to strike a balance often continues to originate in men's personal preferences or in their partners' expectations rather than in cultural or societal conventions. In short, work-life balance is a pet project for men, but it is a collective goal for women.

Nevertheless, a concern with work-life balance occasionally punctuates the narratives of my male interlocutors. Their attempts to achieve work-life balance and to connect with their families are complicated by their own and Japanese society's conceptualization of work and family as mutually exclusive worlds that exert conflicting gravitational pulls. While interlocutors

²³¹ ワークライフバランス (*wāku raifu baransu*).

²³² 働き方改革実行計画 (*hatarakikata kaikaku jikkō keikaku*).

describe both orbits as capable of conferring purpose and a sense of self-fulfillment, men recognize that their work relationships are generally instrumental in nature, while they acknowledge that familial relationships can be more fulfilling but a good deal messier and more uncertain than work relationships in terms of expectations, responsibilities, and emotions.

As discussed earlier, how interlocutors split their time between work and home is often beyond those individuals' control, and Japanese fathers' attempts to increase their involvement in the nuclear family must contend with the hegemony of workplace culture. However, as the following sections show, many Japanese men who work in corporations are capable of exerting agency in ways that problematize and even subvert the behavior expected of white-collar workers. Section 2 examines a survey that I administered to interviewees in order to better understand how men in Japan's parenting movement conceptualize the time they spend on work and private life, and the section compares these men's responses to data reported by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) based on numbers reported by Japan's Statistic Bureau. Sections 3, 4, and 5 then voice and analyze the stories and practices of three of these men and their families who, to varying extents, participate in Japan's parenting movement and who try make the best of their respective situations within contemporary Japanese society.

Section 2: Analyzing Japanese Men's Reported Hours of Unpaid Labor

Survey Method

Before this chapter examines in-depth ethnographic examples of how some of my interlocutors relate to their families, it assesses an overview of how men involved in the Japanese parenting movement perceive their own juggling of company time and time with family. During my interviews, I solicited time-use data from 20 of my male interlocutors, who documented their daily schedules for me.²³³ When permitted by the flow of conversation—usually near the beginnings of our interviews²³⁴—I handed the men two pieces of paper. Each sheet of paper had a large circle printed in the center. I asked interviewees to diagram their daily activities on a pie chart, using one circle for weekdays and the other for weekends. While I showed interviewees a diagram of my own workday—since I initially found that some needed me to clarify my request—I otherwise let them develop their own categories. As they wrote down their schedules, I asked follow-up questions in order to solicit further information. For example, if a father wrote “chores” as a category, I inquired about what kinds of chores he typically performed in his household and had him note those specific activities.

The strategy of allowing interviewees to devise their own categories and time intervals carried both advantages and disadvantages. The advantages of this method related to the survey's

²³³ I was not confident that I would receive a sufficient number of responses if I were to develop a time-use survey and distribute it to the Fathering Japan mailing list. Because of the constant use of the Fathering Japan mailing list by numerous, persistent academics seeking data for their research projects—and by companies developing products for fathers—potential Fathering Japan respondents had survey fatigue, according to comments from some of my interlocutors. Therefore, I decided to administer simplified time use surveys during my interviews. These surveys also served as the basis for discussions.

²³⁴ In some cases, I did not have interlocutors fill out these surveys if I knew beforehand that our interview would be short because of the person's schedule or if I wanted to prioritize soliciting other information and perspectives.

goal, which was not only to examine interlocutors' self-reported practices quantitatively, but also to comprehend qualitatively the interviewees' mental constructions of their schedules. I was better able to pursue the latter goal by having interlocutors develop and explain how they organized their days. In contrast to the blank pie charts that I presented to my interviewees, researcher-authored categories listed on time-use surveys can fail to correlate with the personal circumstances of survey takers. While admittedly more efficient for comparative purposes, these defined categories reflect the researcher's understanding of the types of daily tasks that are important or routine. The categories also include the researcher's assumptions about the structure of a typical day in a typical family that the researcher then applies to a specific day, which may or may not have been typical. Such time-use surveys force survey takers to adjust their own documentation of their lives to fit into categories that they may consider irrelevant or incomplete realms of experience.

Nonetheless, the results of my survey come with multiple caveats. Unlike surveys distributed to a large pool of respondents, my small survey examined the schedules of only 20 men. Additionally, interlocutors' freedom to design and draw their own categories led to a relative lack of quantitative precision as compared to other survey types, such as time-use diaries. Therefore, we should interpret the results of my survey as providing insight into how some men in the fathering movement spend their time; because I asked people to report their schedules for a typical day, the data collected reflect interlocutors' general sense of their typical activities rather than a more rigorous logging of time diaries.

Another disadvantage of my survey method was that it sometimes led to difficulty in my identifying and separating activities that interlocutors had grouped together but that researchers

would normally consider different types of activities, such as hygiene and leisure. (See the discussion of these activities below.) While useful for examining how individuals think about their activities, a pie chart was not as conducive as other survey methods to separating and analyzing the proportion of an interlocutor's day spent in what researchers regard as categorically different activities.

Because of my survey method's disadvantages, I adopted the following system when analyzing my data quantitatively: in order to compare my interlocutors' schedules with those of the general Japanese population, I assigned each time interval diagramed by respondents to one of the five categories in the OECD's Time Use data set for 2020: *paid work or study* (which includes commute time),²³⁵ *unpaid work*,²³⁶ *personal care*,²³⁷ *leisure*,²³⁸ and *other*.²³⁹ In cases where my respondents listed two or more activities of different categories within the same time chunk, I divided the time equally for simplicity's sake.

The OECD's 2020 data for Japan draws from Statistics Bureau Japan's 2016 Survey on Time Use and Leisure Activities (STULA). This national survey collected its data from two types of questionnaires sent to Japanese households, both including two days' worth of time-diary

²³⁵ "Time spent in paid work or learning activities includes: paid work (all jobs); job search; attendance of classes at all levels of instruction (pre-primary, primary, secondary, technical and vocational, higher education, extra or make up classes); research/homework; travel to and from work/study; other paid work or study-related activities" (Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development 2020).

²³⁶ "Time spent in unpaid work includes: routine housework; shopping; care for household members; child care; adult care; care for non-household members; volunteering; travel related to household activities; other unpaid activities" (Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development 2020).

²³⁷ "Time spent in personal care includes: activities required by the individual in relation to biological needs (sleeping, eating, resting etc.); performing own personal or household health-care and maintenance or receiving this type of care; travel related to personal care activities in relation to spiritual/religious care; doing nothing, resting, relaxing; meditating, thinking, planning" (Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development 2020).

²³⁸ "Time spent socialising; attending cultural, entertainment and sports events; in hobbies, games and other pastime activities; participating in sports and outdoor activities; using mass media; performing other leisure activities" (Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development 2020).

²³⁹ "Time spent in spiritual and religious activities and in civic obligations; or in unspecified activities" (Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development 2020).

forms. Respondents over the age of 10 in approximately 88,000 Japanese households completed these forms, accounting for their own activities during each 15-minute interval in a day.

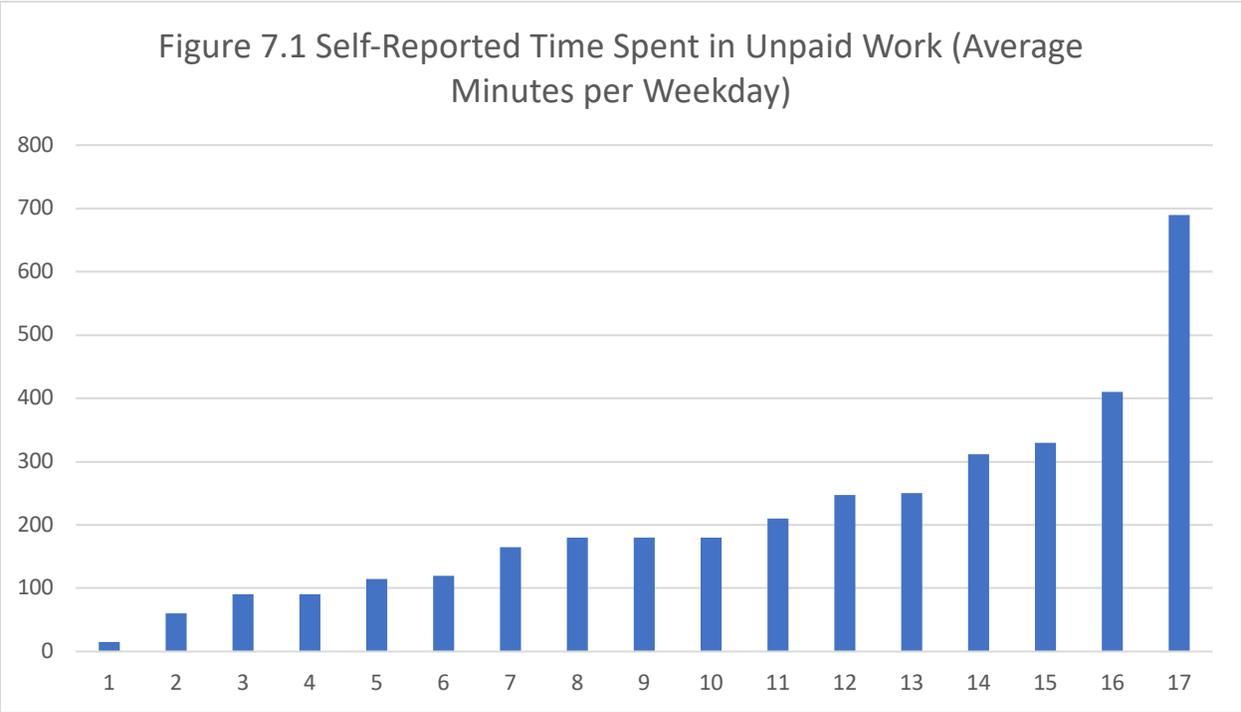
Finally, I found that I needed to remove from my time-use evaluation three of the 20 total surveys completed by male interviewees hailing from the Greater Tokyo Area. Two interlocutors' responses left large blanks in their reported daily schedules. The third individual's special circumstances rendered him an outlier: as this chapter later describes, my interlocutor Saito-san is stationed by his company in a remote location, and he lives away from his family most of the time. In the end, the numbers below derive from the responses of 17 distinct male interlocutors living in the Greater Tokyo Area.

Differences between Interviewees' Time Use and That of the General Japanese Population

The following table compares the results of my survey with OECD statistics for time use by Japanese men and a breakdown of men's responses about time spent performing unpaid labor. Once again, the numbers derived from my interlocutors' responses provide insight into rather than represent precisely how some men in Japan's fathering movement spend their time:

Table 7.1 Time Used for Daily Activities by This Study’s Interlocutors Compared to That of Adult Japanese Males in the General Population (Self-Reported Average Minutes per Day)

	Paid Work (or Study)	Unpaid Work	Personal Care	Leisure	Other
Reported by 17 Interviewees in 2016–17 (workdays)	270–870 Avg: 658.53	15–690 Avg: 214.38	240–600 Avg: 467.26	0–180 Avg: 68.47	0–180 Avg: 31.35
Reported by the OECD based on the 2016 STULA	452	41	613	292	43



Astonishingly, my interviewees in Japan’s parenting movement performed between 15 and 690 minutes of unpaid work per weekday; only one individual performs less than the average for the general population (15 minutes). Interviewees’ average of 3.6 hours of unpaid work per weekday is especially significant given that the OECD reports that Japanese women engage in 3.7 hours of unpaid work per day. The unusually high levels of unpaid work among my interlocutors may partially result from the fact that stay-at-home dads and men who are househusbands as a “side job” are overrepresented among my interviewees, just as greater numbers of stay-at-home dads are more prevalent in Japan’s parenting movement and in Fathering Japan than they are in the general population. Nevertheless, even after removing the

one man who identified as a stay-at-home dad (whose story appears in Section 5) and the three men who identified as part-time househusbands, I found that my interviewees performed an average of 1.8 more hours of unpaid work than did men in the general population as reported by the OECD.

Interestingly, despite performing more unpaid labor than the average amount for Japanese men in the general population, my interlocutors living in the Greater Tokyo Area also performed more paid work. According to the weekday data alone, my interlocutors (excluding the one full-time stay-at-home dad) averaged 11.4 hours of paid work and work commutes on weekdays.²⁴⁰ Aside from the stay-at-home dad, who worked 4.5 hours per day, the least amount of paid labor performed was 8.5 hours, while the most was 14.5 hours. Hence, none of my interlocutors worked less than the standard eight-hour workday, and 13 individuals worked at least two hours more than eight hours. Many formal and informal conversations indicated that time allotted for work is nonnegotiable for fathers in the parenting movement: even companies that portray themselves as progressive are less than willing to relax their grip on employees. (See Chapter 4.) At one Fathering Japan event addressing the topic of excessive overtime, an audience member remarked that his company appeared on the list of event sponsors, yet employees at his workplace found it difficult to ask for permission to go home because “many people are worried about being fired.”

Because living in the Greater Tokyo Area involves significant commutes, transit to and from work may account for my interlocutors’ higher than average hours of paid labor when compared to OECD data that does not differentiate according to region. However, fathers’

²⁴⁰ The median value is 11 hours and 30 minutes.

reported transit times are roughly average for the Greater Tokyo Area. Seven of my interlocutors did not specify their transit times but instead folded those hours into the general category of *paid work*. However, those who diagramed a separate time interval averaged 2 hour and 11 minutes in transit. On the other hand, men and women living in the Greater Tokyo Area commuted an average of 1 hour and 46 minutes to and from work in 2015, the highest of any group surveyed by the NHK Culture Research Institute (2016).²⁴¹ Long commutes in the Greater Tokyo Area are the result of workers' living in the suburbs and taking the train to central Tokyo each workday. Living outside the metropolis is cheaper, and, according to my interlocutors, more conducive to raising children because Tokyo's suburbs and exurbs have more family-oriented environments and communities.²⁴²

Overall, the results from my time-use survey suggest that interviewees in Japan's fathering movement spent more time on housework and child care than is typical of men in the general population. These fathers also spent more time at work but less time engaging in personal care, leisure, and "other" activities.

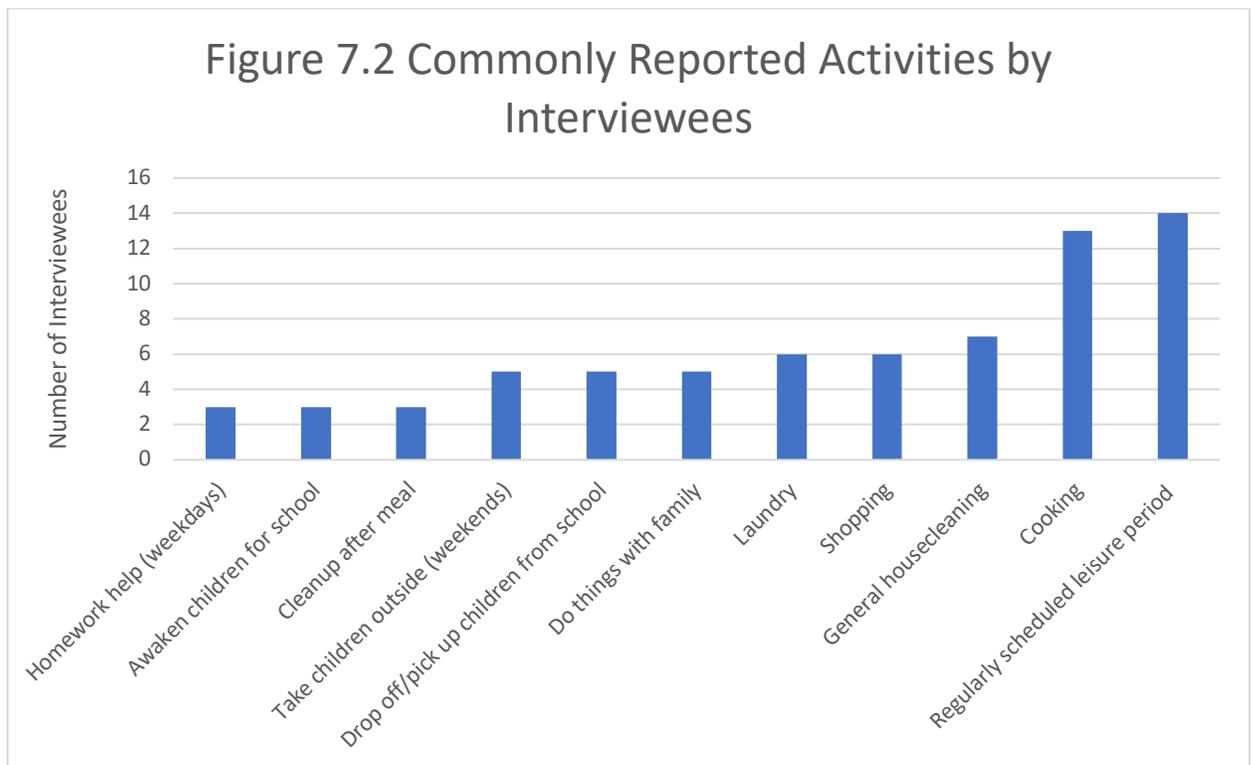
Patterns Evident in Interviewees' Reported Time-Use Categories and Activities

Interviewees' responses revealed distinct patterns in the types of activities they listed and the ways they grouped those activities. Significantly, the data that I collected suggest a fulfillment of Fathering Japan's call to unearth the fun of parenting as well as the general tendency of fathers—

²⁴¹ The data available online from the NHK Culture Research Institute (2016) distinguish among regions but not between genders. The average commute time for male workers could be even higher than 1 hour and 46 minutes because the average commute time for female workers is likely lower than the average for both genders combined; Japanese women are more likely than their male counterparts to choose workplaces that are geographically close to their homes (Tsuya et al. 2005).

²⁴² Technically, Tokyo is not a city but a prefecture made up of 23 special wards. The Greater Tokyo Area is a term used to refer to the Tokyo Metropolis and to its neighboring prefectures.

in such places as Japan, the United States, and the United Kingdom—to prioritize recreational child-care activities over potentially more stressful and strenuous child-care activities (Beitel and Parke 1998; Makino 1987 in Ishii-Kuntz et al. 2004; Such 2006). Specifically, 14 men marked particular periods in their daily schedules during which they played with their children. Less common were men (just three individuals) who specified time intervals when they checked their children’s homework. As my interviewees’ responses revealed, many child-care activities did not have assigned times, nor did the men estimate how much time they typically spent on the activities. This reporting makes sense given the way that parenting demands flexibility on the part of fathers and mothers: parents performed child-care activities, including changing diapers and discipline, as the situation necessitated. The chart below shows my interviewees’ most commonly reported activities:



Cooking was the most commonly reported house chore among my respondents (13 individuals included this activity), a contrast to the activities of men from previous generations who, stereotypically, did not enter the kitchen. (See Chapter 1.) Aside from preparing food, men most commonly listed forms of paternal involvement that conformed unsurprisingly to their children's schedules: namely, school-related activities during the week and recreational activities on the weekend. On weekends, five men specifically mentioned taking their children outdoors to such places as the pool or the park. On weekdays, three individuals helped their children with homework, three awakened their children for school, and another five either dropped off or picked up their children from school. Five individuals explained that they do things together as a family; four of the five confine these family activities to the weekend.

All but three of my interviewees scheduled periods of leisure at some point during the week; men's reported activities showed the greatest diversity in this *leisure* category. For example, some fathers' hobbies included strength training at the gym, drinking coffee and taking it easy, playing the melodica, watching television, taking care of pet fish, growing vegetables, reading, and browsing the Internet. Additionally, if respondents labeled periods of entertainment, they variously referred to the intervals as "free time," "my time," or "private time."

Interestingly, such responses from my interviewees contrasted with a prominent narrative that I heard at my field sites. Namely, the fathers present at my field sites, including some individuals whom I would later interview, mentioned in informal conversations that many men employed full-time are generally too busy to have hobbies or to maintain hobby-related social networks. Admittedly, academic research generally supports this argument (Dasgupta 2013; Hidaka 2010), although Fuess (2012) points out that the amount and kinds of leisure (e.g., active

or passive) fluctuate over time in Japan. However, my interviewees' diverse responses about their own leisure practices, as well as their reported average of 1.14 hours of leisure per weekday, seem to suggest otherwise.

Fathering Japan's influence could partially help to explain why men report individually their engagement in leisure despite the belief that working men generally lack free time—and even though men may face social stigma if they fail to occupy themselves sufficiently with activities that Japanese society considers constructive or profitable. Personal pursuits fulfill the directives of Fathering Japan and *chiiki katsudō* on the importance of hobbies to a well-rounded person. All other things being equal, fathers in Japan's parenting movement consider other men who are well-rounded to be more attractive than salarymen who devote excessive time to their jobs for many reasons. First, men see fathers who have hobbies and who are involved with their families as more resourceful than men with a more limited range of activities. When workplace identities and relationships vanish post-retirement, such individuals can turn to other enterprises for a sense of self-fulfillment. In this way, they are future-proofing their lives and can avoid becoming stereotypical retired men who lie around their houses with too much free time on their hands. (See Chapter 1.) Second, individuals in Japan's parenting movement, particularly *chiiki katsudō*, respect the passion of people who thoroughly engage in different activities; lecturers at Fathering Japan suggest to their audiences that such individuals have higher life satisfaction. Third, men in Japan's parenting movement appear to admire other men who achieve a work-life balance that includes hobbies because it demonstrates the individual's skill in efficiently managing multiple, competing demands.

Finally, as I observed firsthand, men with diverse interests have more avenues to connect with other fathers than do men who maintain a singular purpose. At Fathering Japan and *chiiki katsudō*, individuals rarely tell stories about their work situations, so men with compelling hobbies and stories have more topics of conversation upon which to draw when they engage with other men. In fact, I noted during visits to field sites that men with hobbies relating to the family receive acclaim from their peers. For example, I witnessed the attention of fathers in Sadano Papa School on one man in the process of becoming versed in prenatal massage, as well as on one father considered an expert on picture books. (See Chapter 6.) Even the members of various *oyaji-no-kai* groups appreciated individuals who could integrate their hobbies into *chiiki katsudō* activities, such as men who were capable of carving flutes out of wood or bamboo-copters (a toy that flies into the air when spun) and giving them to children.

One Fathering Japan member—Itou-san—had a reputation as a chef par excellence. He not only runs a food blog, to which he claims to have posted every day without fail for 15 years (this appears to be true), but he also acts as an evangelist hoping to spread his philosophy of “papa cooking”²⁴³ across Japan. Papa cooking is not so much a set of techniques as a state of mind. It involves cooking not for oneself, but for one’s family. According to Itou-san, Japanese men often make simple meals, food that pairs well with sake, or hearty food that leaves them satisfied; this activity is what Itou-san calls “men’s cooking.”²⁴⁴ However, papa cooking takes more thought and time—because, for example, spicy curry is “bad” for small children according to Itou-san—and one cannot undertake such a task as a mere hobby. Certainly for Itou-san,

²⁴³ パパ料理 (papa ryōri).

²⁴⁴ 男の料理 (otoko no ryōri).

cooking is no longer just a hobby: he occasionally appears as a cooking expert on television and radio programs, and he is also a featured lecturer at papa schools. A few Fathering Japan members half-joked that Itou-san was planning to parlay his increasing prominence into his own nonprofit one day. Perhaps such a nonprofit is unnecessary, as Itou-san already runs his own company that teaches fathers to make dishes in accordance with papa cooking principles. These classes are being held over Zoom and YouTube during the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to the precepts of Itou-san's papa cooking, a father's mission is to feed his family by sensing in advance when his wife and children will be hungry and timing meal preparation accordingly. It is not enough that food simply be tasty or fancy, but one must also consider the "TPO," a Japanese acronym using the English words "time, place, occasion." I noted the difference between Itou-san's philosophy and the food prepared by parents at the *chiiki katsudō* events described in Chapters 5 and 6 as well as by one interlocutor who volunteered that the meals he cooked for his family on the weekend included yakisoba, pasta, and ramen. All these noodle dishes are relatively simple to make compared with the food that Japanese society expects mothers to make, such as the varied, colorful delicacies tastefully arranged in *bentō* lunch boxes that mothers send with their children to school (Allison 2010).

Regardless of whether the men followed the ideals of papa cooking, making meals was the most common form of unpaid work reported by my 17 interlocutors. Thirteen of these men indicated that they cook: eight fathers made breakfast or dinner, while another five made breakfast and dinner. However, meal preparation was not the only task commonly reported by interlocutors. Seven individuals mentioned laundry, and seven mentioned general housecleaning

activities that they regularly performed. Three individuals highlighted washing the dishes as their responsibility.

Ultimately, interviewees' surveys indicate quantitatively that these interlocutors spent greater amounts of time performing domestic tasks than did men in the general Japanese population. Further, the surveys suggest that different men pay different levels of attention to the details of household labor and child care. Some Japanese fathers approached tasks in an uncomplicated or more relaxed fashion, such as by always cooking noodle dishes for dinner or engaging in child care primarily through recreational activities. However, others specified how they made the beds, put their children to sleep, or washed, dried, and folded laundry. Although they are only a snapshot of how 17 men in Japan's parenting movement reported their time use on a typical day of the week, these surveys suggest that to different extents, some Japanese fathers have heeded the call from Fathering Japan and other parenting groups to become more involved with their families and homes.

Section 3: A Devoted Father Living Away from His Family

The outlier among my interviewees who filled out a time-use survey, Saito-san offers perhaps no better example of the ways in which paid work separates Japanese men from their families. Saito-san's situation also illustrates the lengths to which the most devoted Japanese fathers will go to be with their families.

Soft-spoken Saito-san and I meet at a cafe for an interview on a cool January afternoon in 2017. As the married father of a 9-year-old daughter named Kairi-chan, Saito-san is the driving force behind Sadano Papa School, a group of local fathers who promote paternal involvement in their community. (See Chapter 6.) Saito-san's perspective on fatherhood is shaped by his interest in children, which originated both in his part-time job as a college student working as an amusement park mascot and in the fact that Saito-san's daughter was a hard-won prize. Initially unable to conceive children with his wife, Saito-san underwent fertility treatments that finally rewarded him and his wife with their daughter. Now in his late 40s, he is relatively open with his fellow fathers about this experience.

Saito-san works in the sporting industry, but he is evasive about identifying the position he occupies within his company of approximately 800 employees. Earlier in his career, Saito-san made a choice that permanently affected his standing within the company hierarchy. This choice was a statement of his personal values: he rejected *tanshinfunin*,²⁴⁵ or a job transfer in which a worker lives apart from their family. Job transfers in general are a common practice within Japanese corporations, which aim to give employees a broad set of skills and experiences. Unlike

²⁴⁵ 单身赴任 (tanshinfunin).

North American corporations that hire and foster specialists, Japanese corporations cultivate generalists who gradually gain a broad overview of their respective companies. The advantages of employing generalists might not be initially apparent to Western eyes; however, when such employees rise to managerial positions within Japanese corporations, they ultimately possess a strong understanding of how diverse company operations fit together.

In 2008, Saito-san's company created a system under which employees could refuse a job transfer to another city. However, employees who signed up for this system then faced severe penalties. First, they took a 20 percent pay cut; the result was a significant reduction in the participating employees' incomes. Additionally, these workers were no longer eligible for promotions, effectively freezing their salaries in place.

Despite the costly consequences of participating in the new program, Saito-san began to contemplate signing up for the tanshinfunin refusal system after Kairi-chan was born later in 2008. He solicited the opinions of the other employees who had already enrolled in the program, and they cautioned Saito-san that the pay cut had sharply decreased their motivation at work. Despite lingering concerns about how a salary reduction would affect his ability to provide for his family, Saito-san decided to register for the system around 2009. Fortunately, he did not experience the drastic decline in motivation reported by his coworkers.

Saito-san and his wife bought an apartment—a common strategy for Japanese families who intend to settle down in an area. He began actively involving himself in chiiki katsudō, becoming the head of the association for his living complex and establishing Sadano Papa School. As a result of his activities and his attempts to advocate for paternal involvement at

home, Saito-san soon became well known in his residential community and at Kairi-chan's school.

In 2013, Saito-san's company abruptly eliminated its job transfer refusal system. At the same time, the office in Tokyo where Saito-san had been working decided to reduce its personnel with the goal of dissolving local operations by 2015. These changes further sealed the fate of the three employees at the Tokyo office, including Saito-san, who had enrolled in the company's now defunct system. Hearing this news, Saito-san began to consider switching employers. However, Saito-san recognized that job opportunities are scarce for people, like himself, who are in their forties. According to Saito-san, Japanese companies view older hires as "hard to use" because they are not as malleable or obedient as a "shiny new employee" who is fresh out of university. Additionally, employers are concerned that older recruits will be unhappy about accepting lower salaries than those they had earned from previous employers. As is the case for many employees around the world, a worker's length of tenure at a Japanese organization helps to determine his or her pay.

Consequently, Saito-san says, in 2014 he began to distrust his company. He had taken a 20 percent pay cut as part of the opt-out system, losing millions of yen over the course of three to four years. Saito-san began to wonder, "Why am I even coming to work?" He comments that ironically, in contrast to his coworkers' warning from years before about the opt-out system causing employee malaise, the abolition of the opt-out system rather than his participation in it made him lose his motivation. While Saito-san does not explicitly name his feelings, he implies that he experienced a sense of futility after realizing that his company would force him to engage in tanshinfunin despite his best efforts. Moreover, he would enter tanshinfunin with a salary that

would be lower than if he had accepted a job transfer early on and begun accumulating promotions.²⁴⁶ In response, Saito-san says that he then distanced himself even further from his company, putting even more of his efforts into *chiiki katsudō*.

Saito-san's levels of participation in *chiiki katsudō* are unusual. Although Japanese fathers rarely contribute significant volunteer hours to their children's schools, Saito-san became the chairperson of the parent/guardian's association at his daughter's preschool. Everyone knew him as "Kairi-chan's papa." Even now, Saito-san participates in his local papa circle when he can, working on the group's website while he is away from the Greater Tokyo Area. Noting the discrepancy between his presence in his community and his profile at work, Saito-san remarks: "Somehow, I became famous . . . but I [am not] famous at my company. [He laughs.] I've been at my company 20-something years, and I'm not famous, but in this area I'm very I'll be just standing around, and someone will greet me, 'Oh, Saito-san, hello.'"

Ultimately, Saito-san decided to stay with his company, which compelled him to accept a *tanshinfunin* in 2016. Today, Saito-san lives unhappily in a prefecture approximately four hours from the Greater Tokyo Area by *shinkansen*²⁴⁷ or bullet train. He tells me that at first he considered taking his entire family with him. However, when he inquired about when he could return to Tokyo, his work superiors remained suspiciously silent. Saito-san therefore anticipated that his company would rotate him constantly among distant positions. He sought the advice of coworkers whose families accompany them during job transfers, and they stressed the strain on their children's education caused by their families' constant moves. Frequent location changes can be especially disconcerting when a family has found a school that meets their children's

²⁴⁶ Saito-san did not specify whether his company canceled his pay cut when it canceled the opt-out program.

²⁴⁷ 新幹線 (*shinkansen*).

needs. Saito-san's coworkers also mentioned the psychological difficulty that a family faces when family members feel as if they never have a permanent home.

On the other hand, the physical and emotional distance brought about by leaving one's family behind because of *tanshinfunin* can push relationships to the breaking point. According to Saito-san, many men at his company have families on the verge of collapse. Saito-san tells me that these employees see this state of affairs as the inevitable outcome of following company orders: "They [the employees] think, 'That's just life.'" Therefore, after accepting the job transfer, Saito-san decided to work hard at keeping his family together despite the three members' geographical distance from each other on most days. Every week, Saito-san commutes to Tokyo a total of eight hours round-trip on the shinkansen. Each trip costs 20,000 yen (approximately 185 USD), which Saito-san regards as a significant amount; as he calculates verbally the costs of his commute during our conversation, Saito-san grows increasingly exasperated, before ultimately releasing all the built-up tension with a simple, resigned "oh well." Saito-san is extremely grateful for his partner's understanding: "If my wife's values were different, she would say to me, 'It's okay if you don't come home. It's a waste of money, so you can stop.'"

In contrast to his partner, Saito-san's coworkers fail to understand his motives: "They ask, 'Why are you so desperate to see your family?' But from my perspective, 'Why don't you want to see your families?'" This is a rhetorical question because Saito-san soon answers his own query. Most fathers who undergo *tanshinfunin*, he maintains, "for one reason or another, never had much enthusiasm for children or *kosodate*, or else their love with their wives has cooled

somewhat.” Stationed apart from their families, such men do not make special efforts to visit “home” because they are perfectly content living alone, free from most familial responsibilities.

Saito-san is quite proud of his efforts to participate in family life despite the distance and effort. While in Tokyo, Saito-san is highly active around the house. He estimates that he spends 14 hours a day engaged in such activities as cooking, shopping, cleaning, helping his daughter with her homework, playing games with his family, and taking a bath with his daughter—a practice that he plans to end next year, as he believes that Kairi-chan will be too old to take a bath with her father.

However, when I inquire about how his daughter Kairi-chan views his tanshinfunin, Saito-san explains that Kairi-chan bases her interpretation of his presence on her friends’ views. Despite his absence for most of the week, Kairi-chan’s friends see Saito-san at home more frequently than they see fathers in other families. The friends ask Kairi-chan: “Why is your father around all the time? Does he have a job?” However, these are more questions borne of curiosity than they are criticisms of Saito-san. Kairi-chan’s friends enjoy playing with Saito-san and see his presence in the home as positive. Drawing on her friends’ impressions, Kairi-chan “vaguely”²⁴⁸ understands that their father-daughter relationship is somehow special and sometimes “becomes full of herself,” Saito-san wryly comments.

Saito-san adds that it may come as a shock to Kairi-chan when he starts coming home less frequently next year: “She’s small now, so I come back every week, right? Next year I will gradually start to come home less, and someday I will only come home once a month.” He worries that she will not understand his reasons for this transition: she is growing older (and, by

²⁴⁸ 薄々 (usuusu).

implication, she will become more independent). Saito-san also reports that, paradoxically, he is traveling to Tokyo more frequently this year than he did previously; he is commuting four times instead of three times a month. He complains to me that coming home every week “is too much money, but recently I was sad, sad, I wanted to see my family.” In attempting to reconcile Saito-san’s sometimes divergent claims about his own motivations for keeping his family together, I sense that he may be returning home weekly more to fulfill his own needs and sense of self than to assist with his family’s collective challenges.

Section 4: The Oda Family's Spousal Dynamic

Ambitious Oda Emi-san and analytical Oda Ken-san are a young married couple in their late thirties whom I befriended during my fieldwork. The parents of two boys ages four and two, Emi-san and Ken-san struggle to balance their careers with family life and recreational activities. Emi-san is a human resources development consultant, while Ken-san works reluctantly as a salesperson.

I met Ken-san and Emi-san at Fathering Japan; Ken-san had recently joined the nonprofit, and Emi-san occasionally accompanied him to events. Emi-san and Ken-san's relationship and practices provide insight into how young parents cope with the challenges of raising children in contemporary Japan. Their lives also illustrate how some Japanese parents' views mirror Fathering Japan ideals, such as the nonprofit's stance against authoritarian fathers.

Decision-Making and the Division of Domestic Labor in the Oda Family

Conducted separately, my interviews with Emi-san and Ken-san reveal the importance of communication to the couple's decision-making. When I ask about how this process plays out, Emi-san remarks that "I feel like we talk and think about things together as a family, whether it's about work or anything else. In the case of my parents, the right to make the final decision was my father's, but we [Ken-san and I] talk it out and decide together."

During my conversation with Ken-san, he concurs regarding the importance of joint decision-making, but he adds additional details:

KOIKE: What do you do when you have a difference of opinion (with Emi-san)?

KEN-SAN: We don't just talk about it, we put it down on paper. Write it out.

KOIKE: Why do you write it out?

KEN-SAN: Because we'll forget. [He laughs.] Also, if we just have a conversation, our emotions tend to get the better of us, so we write it out objectively [sic] as an opinion.

KOIKE: Do you write it out separately? Or in the middle of a disagreement?

KEN-SAN: We write it out while we're fighting. [He laughs again.] If we don't do it together, then neither of us will calm down, and of course operating on emotions alone isn't productive; it doesn't produce a constructive answer. We both understand this. I don't think there are any unemotional humans, but even if we become emotional, we need to calmly think about our next steps during our discussion, so we write our thoughts down.

KOIKE: What do you do after you calm down?

KEN-SAN: As we're talking we generally calm down and listen. We're both thinking about the direction that we should go, or rather about what's best for our family. Only our ways of acting and thinking are different, and if we both understand this, and we share information . . . If we don't translate it into action, it's hard to take our next action, so we think about how we should act in order to get closer to our ideals.

Here, Ken-san implies that he and Emi-san share a set of ideals for their family. The source of spousal conflicts stems from a difference in desired methods for achieving these ideals. While he does not explicitly spell out these ideals, Ken-san cites education and health as

priorities for his family. He further reveals that he hopes to grow as a person together with his children, aspiring to a parent-child dynamic that resembles a friendship characterized by a “flat,” or level, relationship based on mutual understanding rather than by a hierarchical relationship.

Contrasting his parenting approach to that of his own parents, Ken-san says that he felt restricted by his parents, who, without providing convincing explanations for their rules, forbade him from doing various activities when he was a child. Ken-san wants his own children to speak freely because “I’m not the final authority, I’m not perfect. So if I make a mistake—I make a mistake—and I should be able to hear about it from my kids . . . well, not ‘should,’ but more like I don’t mind if they tell me.” Even so, Ken-san admits that it remains a parent’s responsibility to teach their children about society’s rules.

Independently, Emi-san voices the same sentiments that Ken-san has expressed. She too hopes for a relationship with her children that resembles friendship, mentioning again her aversion to how her own father held full authority in her family of birth. Emi-san describes her relationship with her father, who enforced an absolute family hierarchy in which he occupied the position of the patriarch, followed in authority by his wife and then his three daughters. According to Emi-san, during her childhood, her father would explode immediately at anything that he found displeasing. Excessively violent, he frightened Emi-san. Their relationship changed slightly when Emi-san became an adult; she still found him scary, but she consulted him on work-related matters because he was “an extremely clever person.” After mentioning that he currently has dementia, Emi-san does not speak more on this subject. In contrast to her father, Emi-san’s mother has always been kind, and Emi-san implies that this quality made her mother vulnerable to “bullying” by her husband.

Like Emi-san's father, Ken-san—by his own admission—can be quick to anger, and he strongly dislikes this tendency in himself. He tells me that he is working on managing his anger; because of his own experience as a child, Ken-san believes that scolding his children without first understanding their motives “is no good.” In contrast, Emi-san's greater ability to treat her children “like friends” is presumably possible due to Ken-san's role in meting out discipline, particularly when their four-year-old son is misbehaving. (See Chapter 5.) Nevertheless, a “flat” relationship remains the Oda couple's ideal, one that will perhaps become more realizable when their children are closer to adulthood.

As with their accounts of family decision-making, Emi-san and Ken-san offer similar descriptions of the division of household tasks. When I ask about how their family splits domestic labor, Emi-san simply remarks, “Actually, he does more than I do.” When asked to explain his household responsibilities, Ken-san replies in this way:

Well, I'll do things like washing the utensils before going to bed, and occasionally the laundry. . . . Actually, scratch ‘occasionally.’ For the most part, my wife does the laundry. Yes, but my wife doesn't do the small things, like washing the sheets or washing the pillow cases. Whether she doesn't realize that they need to be done [Ken-san laughs] or whether she doesn't feel the necessity of doing them, I don't know, but she doesn't do them. [He laughs again.] I do them. Well, I do them when I realize that they need to be done. That's about it. For the most part, I now do the preparations for dinner.

Ken-san's remarks echo but do not completely mirror a common complaint that I heard women mention at my field sites: that even when men become actively involved in domestic labor, mothers and wives continue to perform most of the "unseen" chores, or nonroutine tasks, as well as those tasks that involve cognitive labor. Unseen chores generally require behind-the-scenes work that otherwise goes unnoticed by other family members unless such tasks remain unfinished. Examples of unseen chores may include labeling children's school supplies at the beginning of the school year, managing household inventory, and keeping track of family and individual schedules. Yet in the Oda family, the father is at least partially engaged in some unseen chores due to his greater attention to detail. On the other hand, the Oda family enjoys an unusual situation in that they employ household help. Unlike most Japanese families, the Oda couple outsources many of its domestic tasks, including child care and housework.

Outsourcing: Emi-san and Ken-san's Atypical Use of Hired Help within the Home

According to Emi-san and to members of Fathering Japan with young children, Japanese parents are often unwilling to employ babysitters because they find it scary and dangerous to have strangers watch over their children. Seemingly compounding these fears (as I observed during my fieldwork), the Japanese media frequently create a bleak whirlwind of news features covering incidents of child care gone wrong. Emi-san also credits "bad news" in the media with further reinforcing anti-babysitting beliefs. However, she maintains that "mothers who are rigorously working are relatively more likely to use babysitters." As a woman who now claims to enjoy a life that includes a productive career, a close-knit family, and leadership of an

independent study group aimed at enhancing the social life in her community, Emi-san relies on a babysitter to carve out time for her activities.

She and Ken-san use a website to locate potential babysitters, many of whom hold licenses that qualify them to work in preschool. A rating system on the site allows parents to further narrow down potential candidates. However, Emi-san says that the family opts for their go-to babysitter when she is available: “She’s a cute big sister-type who’s a college student, has a child-care worker qualification, and provides a sense of security. My son says, ‘I love you!’ to her, and we decide on our babysitter based on our kids’ reactions.”

In our conversation, Emi-san speaks minimally about her family’s use of other forms of household assistance, such as the uncommon practice of hiring cleaners; Ken-san proudly tells me during our interview that they have recently purchased a robotic vacuum cleaner that can clean their floors autonomously. According to a report written by the Nomura Research Institute, Ltd. (2015), only one percent of the more than 41,000 Japanese respondents surveyed in 2014 used housekeeping support services. Two percent have used these services in the past, 70 percent know about their existence but have never used them, and 27 percent have never even heard of housekeeping services. Yet despite the Japanese reluctance to outsource household tasks, 90 percent of those who did hire housekeepers were satisfied with the services received. According to the Japanese families who employed housekeepers, the benefits of doing so most commonly relate to the services’ reducing the physical and psychological burden of household chores, increasing life satisfaction, and making more time for family communication by reducing the time spent completing other tasks (Nomura Research Institute, Ltd. 2015).

Among the reasons that most Japanese people do not use housekeeping services, the most commonly mentioned are the perceived high price relative to income—hinting at the relationship between class and the kinds of families who can readily take advantage of outsourcing services—as well as the prevalence of resistance to the idea of a stranger entering one’s house, the belief that such services are not necessary because the family can deal with its own chores, and an opposition to leaving the housework to others (Nomura Research Institute, Ltd. 2015). Most of these reasons originate in the Japanese conceptualization of household space, which has remained relatively consistent over the decades. As Bachnik (1992) details, the inner house serves as a private sanctum where the family admits only the inner circle of relatives and friends. For this reason, house parties are rare in Japan. People prefer to meet at restaurants or outside venues rather than expose their inner lives to potentially judgmental eyes. Therefore, when Emi-san and Ken-san invited me into their home, I recognized the invitation as a significant gesture of friendship—even though their use of hired help may indicate that the Oda family is quite comfortable inviting non-family members into their house.

Finally, for the Japanese, hiring a housekeeper might signal to the world that a family is incapable of taking care of its own affairs. Women are particularly susceptible to such judgment. Allison (2010) describes a comparable phenomenon surrounding *obentō*,²⁴⁹ or lunch boxes: Japanese society expects the mothers of schoolchildren to craft *obentō* contents that consist of nutritionally balanced food ingredients artistically arranged into cute designs or seasonal themes, and the children’s teachers, the students, and the Japanese mothers themselves evaluate those efforts daily. Failure to create beautiful *obentō* risks mothers’ stigmatization as “bad” or

²⁴⁹ お弁当 (*obentō*).

“incompetent;” similarly, a failure to deal internally with household chores might signal a dereliction of duty in the eyes of society and lead women to blame themselves for failing to live up to cultural ideals of motherhood and femininity (Charlebois 2014).

Surnames and Mukōyoshi: Ken-san on Marrying into the Oda Family

Although most Japanese couples derive their surname from the husband’s side of the family, “Oda” is the surname of the wife’s natal family. Known by the nickname Ken-san at Fathering Japan, the husband in the Oda family took his father-in-law’s surname upon marriage, a practice uncommon in contemporary Japan (Inuma 2021). More precisely, Ken-san’s name changed to Oda Kentarō from Shibata Kentarō,²⁵⁰ his birth name.

Historically, Japanese men took their father-in-law’s surnames when they were brought into a family as *mukoyōshi*,²⁵¹ or a son-in-law adopted as the household successor. Despite the general preference for male heirs of direct descent, Japanese society widely accepted the practice of families’ taking mukoyōshi when those families lacked capable male heirs. Ultimately, the success of the family trade and the continuity of the family line—preserved by taking a mukoyōshi in instead of marrying a daughter out—were more important than ensuring that a male heir of direct descent succeeded the family headship (Hendry 2011 [1981]).

However, Japanese society saw the position of mukoyōshi as disadvantageous for the men in question; such individuals held an ambiguous status in their adoptive families, who often compelled the men to prove their worth (Hendry 2011 [1981]). Under Tokugawa Period (1600-1868) practices codified in the now-abolished Meiji Civil Code (see Chapter 6), men outranked

²⁵⁰ Both of these names are pseudonyms.

²⁵¹ 婿養子 (mukoyōshi).

women, older individuals outranked younger ones, and those born into a family outranked people brought into that family through marriage or adoption. As adopted men, mukoyōshi struggled to find their standing and navigate the power dynamics of their new families. Japanese society therefore perceived men's becoming mukoyōshi as a last resort for sons who expected to receive little to nothing in inheritance from their families of birth. In fact, a well-known proverb cautioned men against becoming mukoyōshi: "If you have three go [about a pint] of rice, do not become a *yoshi* [mukoyōshi]" (Bachnik 1983, 174; Benedict 1989 [1946]).

The practice of taking a mukoyōshi continues into the present, particularly among family businesses in Japan. Prominent families that have taken mukoyōshi include Toyota, Kikkoman, and Suzuki. In fact, the CEO of Suzuki is famously the fourth consecutive mukoyōshi to marry into the Suzuki family and head its company (Oi 2012). Today, the involved parties often interpret the adoption of a mukoyōshi as a business transaction: a family gains a male heir with desirable skills, connections, and experience, while the individual in question can expect a leadership position.

However, such was not the case with Oda Ken-san. His became an Oda not for economic gain but because taking the name "seemed interesting" and, he hinted, a matter of fate. Ken-san felt that he was meant to take Emi-san's surname because he met her while participating in the Oda *juku*²⁵² (cram school), a course that taught business skills and was led by an Oda-Sensei who was not directly related to Oda Emi-san. Equally important, Ken-san's decision to leave behind his original surname involved his understanding that "in Japan, we see the oldest son as the family successor." Since he has an older brother, Ken-san expects his brother to shoulder the

²⁵² 塾 (*juku*).

responsibility of continuing the family line. In contrast, the Oda family did not have any male heirs who could carry forth the family name:

KEN-SAN: My wife only has female siblings. She only has two younger sisters, and somehow as the oldest daughter, it feels like she needs to protect her line[age], or to take care of her mother and father. That's why I thought it wouldn't be bad to become an Oda. [He laughs.]

KOIKE: So you had a conversation about this?

KEN-SAN: Yes, we did. While we were eating with her [Emi-san's] mother, it came up that "Oh, by the way, we haven't decided yet, have we?" And when I said that being an Oda would be okay, my wife's mother was really happy, so we decided that's what we would do.

KOIKE: What did the people around you think about your decision?

KEN-SAN: Um, they didn't seem to notice, but the procedures were a pain. I had to change my name on my passport and bank account. It was a hassle to change my name on everything.

KOIKE: The same thing that most women do when they marry?

KEN-SAN: The same thing. That's why women have it rough. [He laughs.]

Ken-san's Conversion to Engaged Fatherhood

As Emi-san tells it, Ken-san was not initially interested in the child-rearing process when he first became a father. He was—and still is, she maintains—concerned with himself and his personal needs. Following the typical practices of the salaryman, he often returned home from

work extremely late or not at all after their first child arrived. Emi-san would prepare her son's meal as well as Ken-san's meal and bath—endeavors she describes as mentally draining.

The impetus for Ken-san's change of heart was Emi-san's articulation of her ambitions. Realizing that it was impossible for her to keep going in this manner for reasons of mental health, she insisted on returning to work after having taken maternity leave. In response, Ken-san suggested that she try to adjust to home life so that the task of raising a child did not fall on him. "It was infuriating," Emi-san laughs. "I asked him repeatedly why I had to be the only one whose career suffered." What followed was a "battle" that Emi-san jokes about in alarming terms: "I felt as though I was going to be killed. I don't know. I don't know, but I probably felt that I was in danger." [She laughs.]

Emi-san eventually returned to work and later became pregnant with their second child. She says that around this time, "inside his head, he probably realized that it was impossible for me to take care of two kids by myself. He felt that it would probably be good to start getting involved." Ken-san eventually took to *kosodate*, and now the tables have turned: Ken-san is the primary caregiver in the family. Although his growing awareness that parenting activities can be enjoyable and worthwhile ultimately triggered Ken-san's transformation into an involved father, the result is that Ken-san has shifted from a workaholic salaryman to someone who loudly voices his desire to quit his job. Today, it is Ken-san who must, during difficult and tiring times, remind Emi-san to "do more" *kosodate*.

Summing up their past spousal challenges, Emi-san explains with a hint of dissatisfaction that "somehow, it seems as if he doesn't really remember. He revised his memories so that he

was an amazing papa from the very beginning.” She then remarks in practical tone of voice, “Well, it’s fine. We’re happy now, so it’s fine.”

Whether he remembers his early fights with Emi-san or not, Ken-san does not mention them to me during our interview. Querying Ken-san about the origin of his interest in kosodate, I discover that he does indeed have a different narrative revolving around his aversion to work and the discovery of his talents:

Even before we had children, I think I was probably bad at work. No good at all. It’s hard to deliver results. Unless I worked harder and spent more time than other people, it was difficult to produce results, though I probably wasn’t doing what I was good at. That’s why in the first place, I didn’t have a positive image of work. . . . Probably, I’m currently better at [the tasks and work inside the house, such as] cooking, cleaning, doing laundry. So I probably shifted my consciousness in that direction.

“I Hate My Job”: Ken-san’s Subversive Work Practices and Thoughts on Time Use

Today, like other men at Fathering Japan who are willing to behave somewhat independently of societal expectations, Ken-san puts less effort into his work and holds less respect for his company than does the stereotypical salaryman. While Ken-san still derives satisfaction from successfully catering as a salesperson to his clients’ needs, he still seeks ways to circumvent expectations. For instance, Ken-san avoids overtime as much as possible, instead opting to pick up his children from preschool.

Additionally, he regularly skips company *nomikai*,²⁵³ or drinking parties, in favor of spending time with his family. When asked about why he avoids *nomikai*, Ken-san wryly remarks that he does not see the necessity of going; the same people are always in attendance, and he doubts that his presence will increase company productivity. He tells me that his children need his attention instead. When I inquire about how his coworkers and boss interpret his behavior, Ken-san reveals that they do not openly voice criticism, but he suspects that they do not think well of him.

Intrigued, I ask more about why Ken-san dislikes his company—an assertion that he often makes at Fathering Japan events. Ken-san's response to my question suggests that he does not see how his paid work complements fatherhood in the ways advocated by Fathering Japan's work-life balance initiatives. Nor does he view the workplace as a site where fatherhood-based skills are transferable in the manner suggested by the Ikuboss Project. (See Chapter 4.) Rather, Ken-san maintains that work is an obstacle that prevents him from being a good father to his children.

More specifically, Ken-san clearly expresses to me that his job renders him unable to adjust adequately to unforeseen circumstances involved in parenting, citing a situation that occurred the week before our interview when his youngest son became sick and Ken-san's job prevented him from seeing to his son's health needs. Further, Ken-san objects to the ways in which work not only restricts his time but also impinges upon his children's time. Every weekday, he must begin his commute at eight in the morning in order to arrive at his workplace

²⁵³ 飲み会 (*nomikai*).

at nine, leaving Ken-san little time to prepare himself for work and to “force my kids to change their clothes and to quickly eat their food.”

“Children only have freedom when it’s convenient for their parent and their jobs,” Ken-san remarks. “They aren’t able to sleep according to a child’s needs or to change clothes and eat at their own pace. Well, it may be difficult for three- or four-year-old children to control things by themselves, but I hope—I want parents to have a little more respect for children’s spare time. But when you work for a company, no matter what, the nine-to-six workday is set in stone. During this time, doing things for children is really difficult.”

Despite this perspective, Ken-san has already proven that he is skilled at finding ways to circumvent company expectations in order to meet his personal desires and family needs: our interview is itself part of Ken-san’s subversive work practices. Ken-san has scheduled the interview for a workday, and we are meeting at a restaurant in a mall. He rejects my attempts to pay for his lunch, instead insisting on paying for both of our meals with his company credit card—as if I were his client.

Section 5: The Struggles of a Stay-at-Home Dad

In general, kosodate attracts men in Japan's parenting movement because of a confluence of factors that may include men's preexisting interests, personal values, partners' expectations, and life circumstances. While men such as Saito-san may be predisposed to active involvement in fatherhood, others discover their interest in child care almost by accident, like Ken-san. Tabata-san is one such father. When circumstances forced him into the domestic sphere, he struggled initially but later learned to thrive. The case of Tabata-san also illustrates the anguish that Japanese men experience when they are unable to fulfill their ideals concerning masculinity.

Tabata-san is an influential member of Fathering Japan who, while not a *riji*, serves as a lecturer and unofficial leader in the nonprofit organization. From the first time that I saw Tabata-san laughing and joking with his fellow fathers in the minutes before the start of an event, I recognized that his apparently open, talkative manner would make Tabata-san an excellent candidate for an interview related to my research. I meet Tabata-san on a weekend morning at a café. We talk for four hours; both of us expected a much shorter interview, but the conversation seems to carry itself forward effortlessly. His story appears to prompt a rollercoaster of emotions in himself: Tabata-san laughs at one moment, then slips into a pained reflection the next.

Grappling with Unexpected Illness: Tabata-san Makes Necessary Changes to His Lifestyle

Currently in his fifties, Tabata-san is a stay-at-home dad who is extremely active in *chiiki katsudō* and the Fathering Japan subgroup *Shufu no Tomo*. (See Chapter 4.) Working as a successful salaryman in the IT industry, Tabata-san developed in his thirties a physical illness

affecting many of his internal organs. In response, Tabata-san made several important lifestyle changes: he abandoned his habit of smoking and quit his extremely demanding job. Despite his best efforts at regaining his health, Tabata-san eventually confronted the fact that he was never going to make a complete recovery.

This realization compelled Tabata-san to reexamine his spousal relationship and, like the other men described in this chapter, his relationship with himself. In particular, he began to worry about Tabata Kyoko-san, the woman whom he had married only a few months before his diagnosis in the late 1990s. Because she is 10 years his junior, Tabata-san worried that he would soon become a burden on her economically and emotionally. Eventually, he sat down to discuss with Kyoko-san the conclusion that he had reached. According to Tabata-san, he said to her, “Let’s divorce. Let’s separate. Let’s start over. There are other people out there, aren’t there? If you’re 23 years old now, in 10 years you’ll be forced to constantly take care of an old man, a geezer. If you think that you can’t do that, will you please divorce me?”

As he bowed his head to ask for a divorce, Kyoko-san punched him savagely in the head. Looking up in pain, he saw the result of what he now regards as thoughtless words presuming that Kyoko-san would consider divorcing him because of his illness: “She was crying. She hit me, and she cried . . . [Tabata-san pauses speaking to me and appears to address an imaginary Kyoko-san.] I’m sorry . . . [He resumes narrating his story to me.] She is a person with a very strong heart. I thought I understood that, but I made a huge mistake. She was angry with me, angry with me. She told me: ‘Ok, I get [the situation]! You stay at home; I’ll go earn the money.’ [He laughs.] It was a very manly statement [from Kyoko-san]. So, from then on, I became a househusband.”

Yet at the time, Tabata-san did not fully understand what becoming a househusband entailed nor what he would have to sacrifice in the process. Despite his partner's proclamation, Tabata-san had not really listened to Kyoko-san's proposal. Tabata-san admits that he assumed that he would continue to work as a freelancer and that his wife's paid work would be her "hobby." He says that he certainly did not consider the possibility that a young woman could fill the shoes of an older man such as himself; Tabata-san convinced himself that the current situation was only temporary: "It was unthinkable that a girl who was still wet behind the ears could suddenly begin to bring in the money. Well, it was a feeling like 'try to see what you can do, and if we have children, you'll come back to the home, right?'"

Grappling with Depression: Tabata-san Loses His Sense of Purpose

Kyoko-san began working as a freelancer at a design company while Tabata-san recuperated at home. Because of this situation, Tabata-san quickly found himself unable to live up to his image of self-respecting manhood. Describing himself as part of the "older generation," he was reluctant to let go of hegemonic masculinity and the notion that a man must be his family's primary provider and window to society (i.e., the world of paid employment). It would take two years for Tabata-san to fully accept that this work arrangement with Kyoko-san was permanent. For Tabata-san, this dark period in his life caused him to suffer silently, but he was unable to say anything to Kyoko-san. He felt helpless and again contemplated divorce. He even considered suicide.

When he had embarked upon his role as a stay-at-home husband, Tabata-san felt self-conscious when performing household chores traditionally considered the purview of women. If

his body was in relatively good condition after waking up in the morning, Tabata-san would put on his business suit and tie before washing the dishes. If he did not put on the suit, “My heart would not calm down. If things stayed like this, I would become a person permanently separated from society. I strongly wanted to return to my company, just once. I wanted to work [outside the home].”

For Tabata-san, the suit not only signaled that he still possessed the qualifications of a respectable salaryman, but the professional attire also helped to maintain his desire to return to paid work. Perhaps more than anything else, Tabata-san feared that he would accept his situation and become complacent: “In order to hold onto these feelings, I tightened my necktie and put on my suit. And then I did the laundry. I washed the dishes. I went shopping. If I wore my suit while I went shopping, it was as if I had been ordered to do so by my wife.” In essence, Tabata-san suited up to act out the role of a stereotypical Japanese husband who, due to an extreme reluctance to associate himself with anything domestic, must be coerced by his wife to engage in even the most basic household tasks. He implies that he was concerned about public appearances, so his suit-wearing was an effort to preclude any questions from other people who encountered him, the assumed head of household, in the unusual act of grocery shopping during the middle of the day. In doing so, Tabata-san aligned himself symbolically with hegemonic masculinity and protested his incorporation into the gendered household sphere.

This performance and attempt at self-therapy lasted for only half a year. According to Tabata-san, he failed at deceiving himself: from the beginning, he recognized that his actions were an “inefficient” use of his limited energy. He eventually stopped wearing a suit, but this wardrobe change deprived Tabata-san of a way to cope with his distress. For the next two years,

Tabata-san continued his anxious, uneasy lifestyle, and his bodily health declined further. Every week he would remain in bed for three or four days at a time, and gradually he found it harder and harder to go outside.

The results of his blood tests further exacerbated Tabata-san's depression. After taking his prescription as advised for a month, Tabata-san's doctors were unable to tell whether the medication was working or not, and they advised him to continue his treatment until they could determine its effects. He began to feel that he was merely his doctors' experiment.

Coping with Kyoko-san's Success: Tabata-san Resigns Himself to Being a Househusband

Witnessing Kyoko-san's success only deepened Tabata-san's sense of despair about his own inability to work outside the home. During our interview, Tabata-san explains that Kyoko-san worked hard at a job that she loved, and she was an exceptional graphic designer. In her first year of employment, she began to climb the company ladder rapidly and in a way that Tabata-san describes as "unthinkable." Responsible for keeping track of the family's finances—a position traditionally associated with women in Japanese households—Tabata-san was greatly impressed by Kyoko-san's income, equivalent to that of an administrator at a large company. Moreover, all signs suggested that her income would continue to increase.

Balancing the household books soon presented Tabata-san with an opportunity for soul-searching. Tabata-san asked himself, "Which is more efficient? Is it more efficient to somehow heal my body, to once more go to work and earn an income? Or is it more efficient to not think about my job, to not think about work, and, instead, as my wife's backup, to help increase her income? Which is more efficient? I realized that it was this: to assume the role of her backup so

that my talented wife could keep earning promotions. If I did this, our household's income would increase.”

After years of struggling with his existential crisis, Tabata-san confronted the fact that even if he could miraculously recover, he would reenter the workforce in a disadvantageous position; he would have a large blank spot on his resume and at best a position near the bottom of the corporate ladder. Most likely, Tabata-san would never achieve even a fraction of his wife's success. Moreover, the stress and demands of the corporate world could further jeopardize his health. Even if his body appeared fine, Tabata-san would undoubtedly feel anxious that he would soon deteriorate physically.

Notably, in his narrative, Tabata-san uses language and criteria heavily associated with Japanese hegemonic masculinity when he describes his decision to accept the domestic sphere defined as feminine. Specifically, Tabata-san emphasizes how, using the metric of money, he chose the most logical course of action given his family's circumstances. Tabata-san justifies his pivot from paid employment to household work by explaining that he weighed the *efficiency* of each work option, and he used four times the word *efficient*,²⁵⁴ which signifies a value most often associated with hegemonic masculinity. Further, Tabata-san couched housework not in terms of its contribution to the basic functioning of families, but rather in terms of its relationship to the market economy. In our interview, Tabata-san emphasizes how he experiences financial success vicariously through Kyoko-san. Finally, Tabata-san implies that his mental reckoning represented a shift to an “active” stance toward the domestic sphere, one that contrasts with his previous years of illness and passive languishing in the home. By actively relinquishing his attachment to

²⁵⁴ 効率がよい (kōritsu ga ii).

the salaryman ideal and by embracing a different purpose, Tabata-san took control of his life: he again attached himself to productive society, but this time as a behind-the-scenes supporter whose contributions are integral to Kyoko-san's success. Therefore, articulating his powerlessness in terms of choice has been Tabata-san's key to regaining power over himself and to re-masculinizing otherwise practices socially defined as feminine.

Further, Tabata-san's narrative suggests that he never truly derived satisfaction from working as a salaryman. Rather than finding personal fulfillment through salaryman practices, he valorized being a salaryman. In contrast, Tabata-san the househusband finds the practices of fatherhood to be rewarding in themselves.

Wrestling with Social Perceptions: Tabata-san Undergoes a Metamorphosis

After reaching the decision to abandon his personal work aspirations, Tabata-san's next steps challenged social conventions. By his own account, Tabata-san decided that he needed a physical manifestation of his determination to be a househusband permanently just as he had needed to wear his suit at home to keep alive his hope of rejoining the regular workforce:

TABATA-SAN: I decided to set it in stone. That way, I'd make it so that I could never return [to the work world]. So, I asked myself, what's the best way to do this? Yes, I've got it. I'll dye my hair blond!

KOIKE: Why did you dye your hair blond?

TABATA-SAN: In Japan at the time, roughly 20 years ago, the only blond-haired people around were criminals. . . . If I dyed my hair blond, I'd make it so that I couldn't return to society

[i.e., the world of paid employment]. I'd display my conviction to become my wife's backup, and no matter how society saw me, I wouldn't care. I had felt anxious and uncertain because I was worried how people—how my neighbors—saw me.

In short, Tabata-san's decision to change his hairstyle was tantamount to discarding his concern for societal perceptions. According to Tabata-san, Kyoko-san had always suggested that "other people don't matter. Let's just think about us." However, dying his hair in defiance of social conventions was perhaps a more literal interpretation of her words than she had expected, although Kyoko-san did comment that Tabata-san looked good as a blond. Nevertheless, Tabata-san's strategy worked well: he realized that "wow, I've become so carefree inside just by dying my hair blond."

Tabata-san informs me that after he adopted the guise of an outcast and troublemaker, he lost interest in how he appeared to others. This indifference was fortunate because some of his neighbors cried in astonishment when they first saw the new Tabata-san, while others actively avoided him. More importantly for Fathering Japan's cheeky subgroup Shufu no Tomo, which Tabata-san later helped to establish, the sudden change in people's attitudes toward him—brought about by a simple cosmetic change—gave him insight into the absurdity of catering to others' expectations. As he says to me, "Ooooooh! I'm crazy."

Tabata-san's metamorphosis led to another surprising development: "I started to recover from my illness." The doctors were puzzled, but his blood test numbers did not lie. Having come to terms with his situation, Tabata-san staunchly proclaims that "I am a shufu [househusband]. I don't care what anyone else says."

Today, both inside and outside the house, Tabata-san sports an apron instead of a suit as a performative, proud statement of his status as a shufu. He is the father of a seven-year-old son, Yuuta-kun, whom he takes to soccer practice after our interview ends. In overcoming his existential crisis, Tabata-san has reconfigured his gender identity to incorporate as key practices the domestic responsibilities that Japanese society continues to associate with the feminine. Yet his gender performances still express such masculine values as efficiency, a rejection of the conventional, and a sense of independence—albeit an independence built on Tabata-san’s dependence on his wife. Like the men in Bach’s study on Danish stay-at-home-dads, Tabata-san illustrates how “claiming unconventionality is perhaps the easiest way to demonstrate autonomy and hereby masculinity” (2017, 352).

During my interview with him, Tabata-san nevertheless acknowledges his past vulnerability and insecurities. Moreover, he reveals in his narrative how Kyoko-san’s insight, emotional support, and exceptional skill at work were key to Tabata-san’s recovery from depression and self-doubt. Tabata-san’s self-characterization is striking when juxtaposed against his past aspiration to be a stereotypical salaryman who relentlessly endures stress and hardship in order to provide for his family, to succeed at work, and to boost his own ego. For health reasons, Tabata-san could not live up to this ideal. However, he now displays a different kind of leadership and ego as part of the Shufu no Tomo, where he professes almost defiantly a lack of concern for how society regards househusbands even as he works to change these perceptions.

Inverting Heteronormative Labor Practices Does Not Entail a Reversal of Parenting Roles

Although a large part of our interview is devoted to the Shufu no Tomo (see Chapter 4), Tabata-san and I also spend time discussing his parenting philosophy and his relationship with Yuuta-kun. Tabata-san explains that the parenting practices in his household tend to be gendered normatively, while tacitly acknowledging that the family could reverse some practices given the Tabata family's inversion of the usual dynamic between primary income earner and homemaker. Indeed, his narrative contains a tension between Tabata-san's ideas about gender and his fathering practices.

This tension becomes most evident in our discussion about the significance of speech, vocabulary, and tones of voice when parenting; Tabata-san often veers toward arguments that make me realize, yet again, that my interlocutors may advocate for gender equality as part of their nonprofit activities, but their understandings of gender and gender equality often diverge from my own Western views. For example, when discussing how to read picture books to children, a topic that Tabata-san teaches to mothers as a Fathering Japan lecturer, Tabata-san informs me that mothers' voices are better suited to reading books that instruct children about proper language, pronunciation, colors, and shapes. In contrast, he believes that fathers' voices are better at stimulating the imagination and conveying the diverse meanings that a word can possess. Intrigued but also alarmed at a logic that reserves so-called higher-level thinking for men's voices, I inquire further about his reasoning.

Tabata-san's explanation focuses on a child's relationship to the male or female parent's voice rather than on any inherent quality of men or women's voices. Citing an unspecified researcher on the human brain, Tabata-san claims that this relationship is shaped during the

period of pregnancy. Tabata-san explains to me that a mother's voice forms a particular relationship with her children, who hear it while in their mother's womb. A mother's voice therefore conveys a sense of security and reassurance. For this reason, children hate to hear their mothers' raised voices because angry tones violate children's sense of a communication that normally imparts comforting emotions. According to Tabata-san and the unnamed researcher, children therefore subconsciously block out the angry voices of mothers, making mothers less effective at scolding children than fathers.

In contrast, as Tabata-san explains, a father's voice comes from "the outside" during pregnancy, and it is less likely to reach his child. Consequently, father's voices are novel and attention-inducing—but also less familiar and hence scarier—making them more effective at imparting new information, scolding children, and eliciting apologies for misbehavior. Hypothetically, if father's words were those audible to children during pregnancy, the positions of fathers' and mothers' voices would be reversed. However, one study suggests that fetuses respond to both parents' voices with an increased heart rate, and moreover that newborns are more likely to turn their head toward their mother's voice than their father's voice (Lee and Kisilevsky 2014).

In addition to describing the ways in which a parent's gender affects how a child perceives language and tones of voice, Tabata-san explains to me how gender influences the amounts of time that each parent spends in shaping the parent-child relationship and in making a child feel confident or at home in the world. Time spent together fosters a sense of familiarity and comfort. According to Tabata-san, most children spend 40 weeks with their mothers during pregnancy, so pregnancy creates an initial, inherent discrepancy between mother-child time and

father-child time. Additionally, even given the recent changes in Japanese society, most mothers tend to spend more time with their children than fathers do after children are born.

I challenge Tabata-san to apply to his own family circumstances his time-based ideas about different kinds of parental roles. However, Tabata-san admits that he is unable to do so. Tabata-san's theories about time cannot explain his own family dynamics. Kyoko-san returned to work after two weeks of maternity leave; stay-at-home dad Tabata-san's cumulative time with Yuuta-kun now easily exceeds Kyoko-san's time. One can see this in Tabata-san's response to the time-use survey described in Section 1. Tabata-san spends 690 minutes, or 11.5 hours each weekday engaged in child care and house chores. He even specifies on his survey the three-hour category of "spend time with my son" on weekdays as well as the six-hour category "spend time with my family" on weekends.

However, by Tabata-san's own account, and despite the significant amounts of time that he spends with Yuuta-kun, Tabata-san remains the "scary" parent and Kyoko-san the comforting one. While Tabata-san may have accepted househusband-hood, he still falls into the traditional role of the strict father-disciplinarian who provides a harsh scolding if, for example, his seven-year-old son attempts to cross the street while the pedestrian signal is red. However, in contrast to the emotionally distant fathers of previous generations, Tabata-san makes sure to show his affection for Yuuta-kun. Tabata-san sets a clear cutoff point for his scolding: Tabata-san will make his point, ask his son to "pinky promise" to behave, and then let go of the issue. He will then give his son a big hug: "even though he's been crying, the moment I stop scolding him (and give him a hug), my son will grin and say, 'Dad, let's play!'"

I ask Tabata-san about whether the hug is important, and he immediately affirms that this is the case. When I inquire further about his reasoning, Tabata-san thinks for a bit before responding: “Well, scolding is ultimately for the sake of the child, isn’t it? In the process, you vent your feelings. But when people vent their feelings, they continue to carry those feelings around with them afterward. [Tabata-san groans, imitating an exasperated voice.] But when you give a hug, it’s like ‘let’s end it here.’ [Tabata-san claps his hands in a gesture that reinforces this message.] At the same time, it’s not just about your feelings. You’re also trying to convey to your child that ‘no matter what happens, I’m on your side.’ Your hug means ‘I’ll never let go of your hand; I’ll never let go of your hand because I’m your parent.’”²⁵⁵

²⁵⁵ Historically, Japanese people have not expressed affection for children through hugs, but hugging is not the only way to connect emotionally and physically with children.

Conclusion

In examining Japanese nonprofit organizations that encourage men's involvement in their families and in presenting the views of individual participants in these organizations, my study makes multiple contributions to the existing scholarly literature on the performances of masculinity in Japan and on Japan's third sector. First, this dissertation's investigation of how Japanese fathers of young children struggle to meet both their families' needs and their employers' demands further deepens anthropological and academic knowledge about the fraught nature of hegemonic masculinity among salarymen (Dasgupta 2013; Hidaka 2010; Ishii-Kuntz 2002). This study also shows how hegemonic masculinity inevitably influences even those men who reject it, as evidenced by Japanese househusbands, such as my interlocutors Tabata-san and Katakura-san, who remain unable to conceptualize or describe their activities without using as a foil the archetype of the white-collar worker.

Additionally, although other research on Japanese fathers examines how nonprofit organizations interact with individual families and their values, such studies do not interrogate how local living conditions and communities shape those nonprofits' strategies and people's practices. My multi-sited ethnographic approach compares across branches of a national nonprofit organization, within community-based groups, and in individual families how Japanese men perform—or wish to perform—masculinity related to fatherhood. Because this study takes into account the government motives, corporate interests, and social and demographic pressures that influence messaging by groups promoting engagement by Japanese fathers, it provides a

more comprehensive, nuanced picture of shifting gender ideologies and performances related to parenting than have previous studies.

In analyzing the effectiveness of Fathering Japan's attempts to spearhead social change, I argue against other scholars' contention that Japanese nonprofit organizations possess only a weak potential for political advocacy (Knight 1996; A. Ogawa 2010; Pekkanen 2006); my findings show how Fathering Japan taps into its extensive network to deliver appealing messages to local and national governments, companies, and parents and how these messages have the capacity to reach millions of Japanese people. These findings align with those of other researchers who demonstrate how the operations of Japanese nonprofits support the Japanese government's neoliberal outsourcing of public services (Okada et al. 2017; Okuyama, Ishida, and Yamauchi 2010).

Finally, while this dissertation focuses chiefly on one set of familial and social concerns expressed by fathers of young children, the text outlines the contours of a vast, decentralized social movement that lies beyond the scope of any single research project. In what I term Japan's *parenting movement*, such parties as mothers, fathers, students, city halls, nonprofit organizations, and schools labor separately and together to transform Japan into a more family-friendly society that reduces barriers to raising the children who will perpetuate the nation and its culture. Fathering Japan is but one node in this network of actors, albeit a significant one. Other participants in the parenting movement and their agendas are potential subjects of my future research.

In recent years, this parenting movement has gained traction among the Japanese population owing to increased social attention on issues of gender equality, the economic need

for employers to accommodate diverse work styles, and the changing values and priorities of individual parents. Further, messaging and efforts by such nonprofit organizations as Fathering Japan and local community groups focused on fathering—whose members are the subject of this study—have helped to promote fathers’ engagement in the lives of their children. Concern over the nation’s low birthrate has prompted the Japanese government to encourage men’s participation in household affairs. The operating assumption underlying these endeavors is that men’s greater involvement in household chores and child care will reduce the burden on women, who remain primarily responsible for domestic labor under prevailing gender norms. However—and perhaps ironically—many of these new approaches to encouraging active fatherhood have reinforced some heteronormative ideas and practices because nonprofit messages have their own problems and persistent gender ideology continues to serve as a filter through which people see the world. Additionally, men vary in their willingness and ability to engage in *ikuji* and *kosodate*, producing a continuum of gendered performances. These performances range from fathers who wholeheartedly embrace parenting, to those men only interested in having fun interactions and whose nominal acceptance of greater gender equality in the household is a “masculine compromise,” or making minor concessions in order to redefine their familial role in a way that symbolically preserves their dominance (Choi and Peng 2016). Efforts to engage fathers have also run up against entrenched gender ideologies and systemic, structural inequities that will take decades to change if challenged only incrementally.

At the same that it is trying to reverse the nation’s declining birthrate, the Japanese government has demonstrated an interest in women’s workforce participation that has arisen less from a concern for gender equality and more from fear of an imminent worker shortage and a

resulting economic decline (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare 2017). The Japanese government's attempts to channel money and propaganda into social change have fallen flat, while legal reforms have often missed their marks or have not gone far enough in addressing structural issues to make much difference. For example, the 2015 Act on Promotion of Women's Participation and Advancement required companies with more than 300 employees to draft concrete plans for improving gender equality in the workplace and to collect data about their female employees and managers. However, the law did not contain any provisions for the quality control or enforcement of these company-authored plans (Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office 2016). Meanwhile, company structures continue to privilege married men who are free from any responsibilities to their families (Oi 2021). Additionally, the tax and social security systems continue to penalize women who work full-time: when their husbands can no longer claim them as dependent spouses, women must pay higher taxes, pensions premiums, and health insurance. Many families therefore benefit from women limiting their working hours and instead devoting time to their families (Shutō 2021).

Into this arena of structural inequalities, enter nonprofit organizations that deal directly or indirectly with gender issues, such as Fathering Japan, which act as liaisons between ordinary citizens and the powers that be. These nonprofits focused on active parenting engage in educational outreach in hopes of effecting a shift in the practices and consciousness of the general population. Occupying an intermediary position between the government, corporations, and individual families, Fathering Japan is navigating and addressing multiple parties' competing desires in its bid to remain a major player in the public discourse on family and social issues.

Nevertheless, Fathering Japan and other affiliated organizations promote to their audiences and members a more engaged form of fatherhood that finds self-fulfillment in families and local communities. Fathering Japan's influence can subsequently be felt in *chiiki katsudō* or community engagement, another layer of Japan's parenting movement; in the Greater Tokyo Area and to a lesser extent in other Japanese prefectures, many leaders of local father's groups have in some capacity been influenced by Fathering Japan or another similar organization. However, the relationships among the various levels of Japan's parenting movement are complex, as *chiiki katsudō* groups often enable practices that at times overlap with, and at times contradict, the priorities of nationally and regionally oriented nonprofit organizations—which themselves may profess inconsistent ideologies.

Self-selecting fathers who participate in nonprofit organizations or *chiiki katsudō* associations may themselves display varying levels of commitment to the values advocated by such groups. Many men also face structural barriers that prevent them from fully realizing their desired lifestyles and relationships. On the whole, however, men influenced by Japan's parenting movement appear to be more invested in their families and households than are men in the general population, incorporating into their gender identities and performances the practices that Japanese society continues to associate with women and femininity.

Thus, while the various agents of Japan's parenting movement share certain generalized values and goals, including supporting children's growth and loosening the grip of work on men's lives, the interpretation of and precedence given to these values and goals may differ among actors. Diverse and far-reaching, the parenting movement occasionally branches out to issues that are consistent with interests in social inclusion but that are not directly related to

parenting. One example is the Tiger Mask Foundation, a nonprofit organization that engages in public outreach on behalf of children living in orphanages and that provides financial assistance to youth who age out of Japan's orphanage system at the age of 18. Initially a Fathering Japan project, the Tiger Mask Foundation is today its own independent nonprofit organization that continues its affiliation with Fathering Japan. Many Fathering Japan members have leading roles in this subsidiary nonprofit; for instance, Ando-san is the head of Tiger Mask Foundation. The nonprofit is so named because the first person to donate money to the foundation—to the tune of 10 million yen (approximately 90,300 USD)—was the widow of Kajiwara Ikki, the author of the highly influential Tiger Mask manga that was serialized between 1968-1971. The manga tells the story of a reformed, formerly villainous wrestler who wears a tiger mask in the ring and donates his winnings to the orphanage in which he was raised. Leaders and members of Fathering Japan see value in supporting the Tiger Mask Foundation because it follows from their interest in protecting vulnerable groups of children. Certainly, children without parents face significant disadvantages in all aspects of life.

Organizations such as the Tiger Mask Foundation made me realize that there is much left to explore in Japan's parenting movement. While considerations of time and length forced me to limit the scope of my dissertation, I collected data on the relationship between Japanese schools and local parent associations, on Japanese mothering groups, and on the organized activities of Japanese college students who are not parents but who are nevertheless learning about and practicing child care.

Additionally, the coronavirus pandemic that reached Japan in 2020 (COVID-19) may have forcibly changed Japanese family dynamics as people self-quarantined and as companies

compelled employees to work from home. No longer able to excuse themselves from housework and parenting because they are physically absent, Japanese fathers may have altered their practices to accommodate their new lived realities. From across the Pacific, I have read articles suggesting that many Japanese fathers are becoming more involved in child care and chores as a result of company work-from-home policies (Shoji 2020; Rinnai Corporation 2020), while other online articles suggest that COVID-19 has merely thrown into sharp relief the existing gendered division of domestic labor, leading to the recent phenomenon of *corona divorce*²⁵⁶ (Bengoshi Dot Com 2020; Eda 2020). The effect of COVID-19 on gender equality and parenting issues in Japan remains uncertain, but the resulting social and cultural shifts offer a potentially productive point of departure for further research.

In the same way in which it has altered social and economic situations for families across the world, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought about major changes to my field sites and to the families I interviewed in Japan. Always striving to be at the forefront of social discourse on the family, Fathering Japan is addressing the pandemic-related concerns of parents, offering a mailing-list column advising parents who are anxious about returning to work physically, a tax forum answering questions about how the pandemic's financial impact will affect the funds that Japan allocates to raising children, and invitations to a lecture and workshop on giving birth during the pandemic. (For this last event, Fathering Japan has collaborated with Sourire, a consulting company advancing Japanese women's participation in the workplace.)

Additionally, Fathering Japan has adapted the ways in which it reaches audiences. Already skilled at the use of digital platforms, the nonprofit has turned to Zoom and YouTube

²⁵⁶ コロナ離婚 (corona rikon).

live streaming to disseminate its messages. Similarly, Sadano Papa School is employing Zoom, opening the possibility of reaching non-local participants. I hope to examine these new topics and methods of delivering content, as well as to what extent the nonprofits are targeting new audiences and how Japanese parents are receiving the parenting movement's ideas and values in the aftermath of the pandemic.

The successful shift to new platforms appears to have kept Fathering Japan and other parenting organizations alive and relevant, positioning these groups to capitalize on topics of interest to a population currently struggling with new wrinkles in their human relationships and with increased levels of stress. Despite Ando-san's pronouncement that the goal of Fathering Japan is to render itself irrelevant, the nonprofit and its associated organizations have many social issues left to address. Parents will always struggle with how to best raise their children and how to relate to one another. For this reason, Japan's parenting movement will remain relevant for the foreseeable future, and all evidence suggests that its leadership will guide its continuing outreach and the evolution of its mission to encourage engaged parenting. In the case of Fathering Japan, accomplishing this goal means further refining its efforts to increase the number of smiling, involved fathers throughout Japan.

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