

Identity work unintended? The “quiet” revolution of the middle class housewives

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Abstract

Unleashing the power of the seemingly powerless can be a significant resource for social reforms. Yet marginalized actors embedded in a highly institutionalized environment may not consciously seek change as they may be content in their prescribed roles within the social structure. Recent work by institutional scholars calls for more attention to the everyday actions of less powerful actors and to examine how they can potentially change institutions. Role identities, which are both taken for granted by role incumbents, and which underlie society’s expectations of those incumbents, can be considered social institutions. How do relatively low-power, role-constrained actors break through their social constraints in a highly institutionalized environment? Our case study of Japanese housewives involved in a social enterprise illuminates the micro processes through which role conforming actors were able to break through institutional constraints by enacting their identity in new domains. Such action triggered an emergent identity work process of learning and sensemaking that motivated further domain-expanded action. Our findings add an emergent perspective to notions of institutional work in the form of identity work.

Key words: Identity work, gender role identity, role boundary expansion, institutional work

Introduction

“The exercise of power is determined by thousands of interactions between the world of the powerful and that of the powerless, all the more so because these worlds are never divided by a sharp line: everyone has a small part of himself in both” - Vaclav Havel.

Unleashing the power of the seemingly powerless can be a significant resource for social reforms. Yet marginalized actors embedded in a highly institutionalized environment may not consciously seek change as they may be content in their prescribed roles within the social structure. How do relatively low-power, role-constrained actors break through their social constraints in a highly institutionalized environment? To address this research question, we build on and extend the concept of identity work as a type of institutional work (Creed, Dejordy & Lok, 2010; Lok, 2010; Watson, 2008). The concept of institutional work describes “the purposive action of individuals and organizations aimed at creating, maintaining and disrupting institution” (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006: 215). Institutions are norms, beliefs, rules and patterns of behaviour that have the “status of taken for granted facts” (Barley & Tolbert, 1997: 99). They “provide stability and meaning to social life” (Scott, 2001: 48), and guide behaviour formally and informally by establishing what is comprehensible, what is appropriate and what is allowed. We consider role identities to be institutions: they are both taken for granted by role incumbents, and they underlie society’s expectations of the role incumbents at the same time. Current research on identity work, however, focuses more on the inward “process of continuously forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising self-constructions” (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002: 626, see also studies by Creed et al., 2010; Snow & Anderson, 1987; Watson, 2008) within a specific institutional environment, rather than “creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions”. The paths from individual level identity work to structural change have

rarely been illuminated. Research on identity work at the collective level, meanwhile, has focused on how members of a marginalized group struggle to resist social stigma or to enhance the social value of an existing identity (Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock 1996; Taylor and Whittier, 1992), or on how institutional entrepreneurs create collective identities to rally support for a political agenda (Hunt & Benford, 1994; Maguire & Hardy, 2009). How individual identity work is enabled within collective settings has rarely been examined (Snow & McAdam, 2000). Most of these studies, moreover, share an assumption that individuals or groups conduct identity work when discontented with the status quo of their institutionalized identity. Yet, individuals who accept and embrace their identity may not even be conscious of their marginalization, as the power over them may be systemic (Lukes, 1974). How can contented but constrained actors engage in identity work?

In this research, we explore the process through which embedded, role conforming actors expanded their role boundary into new domains in a highly restrictive social context, through a case study of middle-class housewives in an internationally recognized Japanese social enterprise called the Seikatsu Club (also referred to as the Seikatsu Club Consumers' Cooperative, or SCCC). When the club formed in 1965, the influence of middle-class housewives in Japan was virtually confined to home and children through a prescribed and taken-for-granted identity of "*ryosai-kenbo*", or "dutiful wife and nurturing mother". While the institutionalized gender role has been viewed as a constraining factor preventing Japanese women from being taken seriously in the "public domains" of business and politics, the Seikatsu Club case demonstrates how this very institution became a resource for women to break through their role constraints.

Through our analysis of the Seikatsu Club, we developed a model of emergent identity work which illustrates how highly constrained actors can expand their domain of influence by taking

action consistent with their identity in new domains, triggering a process of learning and sensemaking that motivates further domain-expanded action. Our findings add an emergent perspective to notions of identity work as institutional work (Creed, et al., 2010; Lok, 2010; Snow & Anderson, 1987). The spiralling cycles of role boundary expansion we observed illustrates how individuals can gain influence by enacting their role values in new domains and thereby enlarge their role identities. The change process we observed was non-conflictual, unlike many in the social movement literature. Our findings contribute to the literatures on identity work and institutional change, illustrating an evolving process by which low power actors can change their own self-conceptions and the institutionalized role expectations that constrain them.

Theoretical framework

Role-identity as resource

Roles are “bundles of norms and expectations” (Baker and Faulkner, 1991: 280) – “the building blocks of social systems and the summation of the requirements with which systems confront their members as individuals” (Katz & Kahn, 1978: 219-220). Roles thus encompass the institutional directives that guide and constrain incumbents. The concept of role identity in identity theory focuses on understanding and explaining how social structures affect self and how self affects social behaviors (Stryker, 1980; Stryker and Burke, 2000). The term “role identity” implies duality: role is external, linked to social positions within the social structure; and identity is internal, “consisting of internalized meanings and expectations associated with a role” (Stryker and Burke, 2000: 289). Thus, a role is a social prescription for behavior, while identity is self-understanding (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). When a role becomes internalized and adopted as a component of the self, an “identity” or “role identity” is said to have been established (McCall & Simmons, 1978; Piliavin, Grube & Callero, 2002).

Baker and Faulkner (1991) advanced the concept of “role as resource” to allow room for the agency of role incumbents in affecting role structures, suggesting that a role can be a resource in two senses. First, a role defines and signals a person’s social identity and enables others to classify, understand and anticipate a person. It therefore can be used as a resource to claim legitimate membership in a social community, with attendant rights and obligations. Secondly, a role grants access to social, cultural and material capital that incumbents can exploit to pursue their interests. Roles thus provide resources that can be drawn upon by individuals doing identity work (Creed, et al., 2010).

Identity work as institutional work

Identity work as institutional work. While institutional research tends to focus on the relationships between organizations and the fields in which they operate, studies of institutional work have examined how actors affect institutions (Lawrence, Suddaby & Leca, 2009; Powell & Colyvas, 2008). For example, Zietsma and Lawrence (2010) showed how environmentalists attempted to disrupt the institutionalized practices and boundaries of the forest industry, while the industry attempted to maintain and defend them. Given that role identities are often highly institutionalized, they may be the target of actors’ institutional work to disrupt, maintain or change them. Identity work directed toward changing institutionalized roles is institutional work. Identity work can serve either the needs of individuals or those of people in a group (Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock, 1996).

Identity work at the individual level. Studies of identity work at the individual level have focused on how individuals construct and affirm identities, and resolve identity contradictions. People use a variety of techniques to make identity claims, create creditable images of themselves, and repair damaged selves (Creed, DeJordy & Lok, 2010; Snow and Anderson,

1987; Watson, 2008). As a result of an actor's identity work, the actor's self-concept as well as others' role expectations of the actor may change, potentially affecting the actor's ability to claim power (Simpson & Carroll, 2008). A study by Snow and Anderson (1987) showed how homeless people constructed more positive personal identities to counter stereotypes, while Creed and colleagues (2010) examined gay/lesbian ministers' struggles with the contradiction between their sexual orientation and institutionalized heterosexism within the Church. Other studies focus on how managers reconcile their self with their socially constructed managerial roles (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003; Watson, 2008). These studies illuminate identity work as a type of institutional work, generally starting with an internal conflict or dissatisfaction with the extant role identity, and focus on how individuals resolve role contradictions (Creed, et al., 2010) or create an alternative identity (Snow and Anderson, 1987). What has not been examined is how relatively low-power actors conforming to their roles may engage in identity work, intentionally or unintentionally, that can lead to change in their institutionalized role identity.

Identity work at the collective level. A structural symbolic interactionism perspective implies that identity is, to a large part, a joint accomplishment (McCall and Simmons, 1978; Strauss, 1959; Stryker, 1980), as social life involves social groups and coordinated action (Brissett & Edgley, 1990; Schwalbe & Mason-Schrock, 1996). Hence a concern with personal identities “requires a serious parallel concern with shared, or collective identities, viewed through time.” (Strauss, 1959, 175). Collective identity can be defined as “an individual's cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution” (Polletta & Jasper, 2001, pg. 285). The majority of studies on collective identity are associated with social movements, or “new social movements” in which identity, rather than class, is considered a core element. They may involve movement activists creating a collective identity to rally support for

a political agenda, such as the peace and justice movement (Hunt & Benford, 1994). It can be a conscious collective effort to protect an identity, such as the men's (Schwalbe, 1996) or women's movement (Ferree & Mueller, 2004). It can also be an identity struggle by a marginalized group, such as the gay and lesbian movement, to resist the stigma imposed by society (Taylor & Whittier, 1992). While scholars have suggested the possibility of self-change in social movements, the focus has been on the alignment between the self and collective identity of the social movement (Kiecolt, 2000; Snow and McAdam, 2000). How individuals who strongly identify with their institutionally prescribed role-identity inadvertently change that very institution has rarely been examined.

In the following study of the Seikatsu Club, we investigated the identity work of Japanese middle class housewives in expanding their role boundary from the private domain to public domains. Our study shows how seemingly lower power, role constrained housewives could use their role as a resource to enlarge their role identity from "dutiful wife and nurturing mother" at home to active citizen and economic agent in society, while maintaining consistent role values.

Method

Empirical Context

An overview of the Seikatsu Club. The Seikatsu Club in Japan is "a unique organization of its kind, combining formidable business and professional skills with strict social and ecological principles and a vision of a community- and people-centered economy" (Right Livelihood Award web page). "Seikatsu" means "life." Founded in 1965 as a women's voluntary association to address issues affecting their day to day life, the Seikatsu Club has evolved into a social enterprise anchored in women's initiatives and values to improve the quality of life, build a better community, and change unhealthy social trends. From a community-based, voluntary

group of 200 Tokyo housewives aiming at buying better quality milk at lower prices, the Seikatsu Club has grown into one of the most successful social enterprises in Japan, with 30 consumer cooperatives, over 300,000 members (99.9 percent women), and sales of approximately 1 billion US dollars in 2008. Seikatsu Club members also formed the “Seikatsusha Network,” a grass-roots political group addressing social and environmental issues which has placed close to 150 representatives, all women, in local assemblies. The Seikatsu Club Group Movement also gave birth to workers’ collectives, “an alternative form of work” challenging the masculine work structure and culture in mainstream Japan Inc. By 2007, over 600 workers’ collectives with 17,000 workers (95 percent women) had annual sales of 150 million US dollars. In recognition of its contribution to social transformation, the Seikatsu Club was given the Right Livelihood Award, often referred to as “the alternative Nobel Prize,” in 1989, and one of 50 Community Awards given in honor of the 50th Anniversary of the United Nations, in 1995.¹ We focused in this case study on the first twenty five years of Seikatsu Club’s history, as those years presented the crucial stages of Seikatsu Club’s rise to an internationally acclaimed social enterprise, as signified by the Right Livelihood Award in 1989. While the Seikatsu Club Movement has contributed to various changes in political, social and economic structures, launched new organizational forms, and made changes in the food and household products used in Japan, the focus of this study is on its contribution to the change in the role-identity of middle class Japanese women, from a restricted, private role as family caretaker to more active public roles in Japanese society, with political, economic and social facets.

¹ Quantitative data presented here on the Seikatsu Club has been collected from documentation at the Policy Research Institute within the Seikatsu Club Consumer Cooperative Group, and from the website of the Right Livelihood Award (<http://www.rightlivelihood.org/>).

Gender role segregation and the ryosai-kenbo role identity in post-war Japan. After the initial years of democratization under American supervision following WWII, Japan focused on economic recovery through massive industrialization, leading to a prolonged period of rapid economic growth beginning in the 1960s. Accompanying this growth was structural change in employment and urbanization as workers moved from primary sectors like agriculture and fishing to manufacturing or service sectors in cities. The middle class ideal created under the Meiji modernization process was personified in “salarymen” (the gender was specific) working virtually all their waking hours in large corporations, contributing to the national quest for productivity and efficiency. To support the corporations, a social structure represented by the motto: *otoko wa shigoto, ona wa katei*—“men for work, women for family”— was designed which left the private domain of family affairs completely in the hands of salarymen’s wives. Women’s devotion to the family in performing the idealized role of the “professional housewife”, was considered an indispensable enabler of the economic miracle (Sievers, 1983: 57).

The *ryosai-kenbo* role placed middle class housewives in a relatively isolated, enclosed world consisting of their husband, children, and a few close relatives and friends, living in residential areas in the cities or suburbs. Economically and socially, women had lost their connection to the public domains and their roles as citizens and economic agents. Consequently, the knowledge and wisdom generated from day to day family life were not drawn upon as resources in improving the political and economic systems (Sato, 1988: 217-218).

The Seikatsu Club was founded against this backdrop in 1965. Initially focused on collective buying of consumer products at better prices, the club’s manifesto stated a social intent to form an “autonomous, democratic entity” utilizing women’s power as gatekeepers for the well-being

of their families, to “right the wrongs of the society” (see Manifesto and Principles of the Setagaya Seikatsu Club, Appendix 1).

Data on the Seikatsu Club

Sources of data. The bulk of the data analyzed in this paper was collected from the archives of the Policy Research Institute for the Civil Sector, a research agency under the Seikatsu Club umbrella. These data include newsletters of the Seikatsu Club during the formative years, reflections written by members on their Seikatsu Club experience, journals and notes kept by the hans (the neighbourhood units for collective buying), and anniversary reports of the Seikatsu Club, all in Japanese. The first author of this paper also conducted interviews in Japanese with a dozen Seikatsu Club officers/veterans, each lasting 90 to 120 minutes in 2009. The first author and a research assistant, a native Japanese speaker, then translated and back-translated the interviews and the Japanese archival documents. Information and insight generated from the interviews, though subject to retrospective biases, facilitated the collection and comprehension of archival data, and at the same time allowed us to record the interviewees’ experience with the Seikatsu Club first hand. Secondary sources also provided rich data on the early years of the Seikatsu Club and its evolution, as they featured numerous member reflections, quotations from interviews, and summaries of survey data on the Seikatsu Club. These included a memoir written by one of the founders (Iwane, 1979), a collection of essays written about the Seikatsu Club (Sato, 1988; 1996; Nishikito, 2008). Several academic articles, which often illustrate female participation in politics (Gelb and Estevez-Abe, 1998), social services (Oka, 2000) and sustainable development practices (Dyck, 1994; Takitane, Da Silva & Pedrozo, 2005), were also studied for insights and perspectives.

Scope of data. As in studies of many collective movements, we were aware that our theorizing may be applicable only to a minority group of active participants of the Seikatsu Club activities. According to a large scale survey conducted in 1984, 13.2 percent of Seikatsu Club members were identified as active participants based on the number of activities they participated in, whereas 54 percent participated in only a few activities, and 32.8 took part in no activities other than collective purchase (Yamasaki & Wada, 1988, in Sato, 1988: 254-255). Active participants tended to be older than the member average—in their 40s instead of the average range of 30 to 39—and were emerging out of their intensive child-rearing years as the youngest child entered school; they had relatively higher household income and few held full-time jobs; they tended to have lived in the neighborhood for a relatively long time, and thus were deeply rooted in local networks (Sato, 1988, pg. 256). The identity work and role boundary expansion process that we describe, however, may be applicable, though in varying degrees, to more than just the active participants, as close to 40 percent of the members in the survey indicated that becoming a Seikatsu Club member had broadened their horizon to the society (Sato, 1988, pg. 227).

Analytic process

As the focus of this study is to capture change processes, we followed Langley's approach (1999), conducting our data analysis in multiple stages.

Stage 1: Organization of data. We first constructed chronological lists of key milestones and public campaigns of the Seikatsu Club Group Movement, such as the milk campaign and the

soap movement, based on archival documents of the Seikatsu Club and SCCC² (Appendices 2 & 3). We used these activities to document the domain of action of the club over time.

Stage 2: Mapping of data. In the second stage we used a grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to identify emergent themes in the micro-narratives of individual club members as they described their motives for membership, club activities and reflections over time. Key first level themes included performing the *ryosai-kenbo* role, connecting with similar others, realizing causal effects between actions and outcomes, acquiring new knowledge, reflecting on self and collective, recognizing power of self and collective, rationalizing for role expansion, and action in new domains. We then moved to a further level of abstraction, grouping first order themes into second order themes and model constructs, identifying action, learning, sensemaking and role boundary expansion as the key steps in the micro-processes of individual identity work in a collective setting. “Action” refers to individuals’ engagement in sets of organized activities. As the starting point of the multi-cycle process of identity work of the Seikatsu Club housewives, action began with enactment of the institutionally ascribed role within the *han*, the collective buying group of 6-10 members living in the same area. As the cycles progressed, action happened in expanded role domains. “Learning” refers to the process through which individuals acquired new knowledge, skills and values while engaging in various activities. “Sensemaking” refers to individuals reflecting on and giving meaning to their experience. In our research context, action, learning and sensemaking involved using role identity as a resource. “Role boundary expansion” refers to individuals’ engaging in activities beyond the boundary that had previously been ascribed to their role, i.e. claiming new roles in expanded domains. Table 1

² Seikatsu Club and SCCC were used interchangeably in this paper, in reporting activities and events after 1968, when Seikatsu Club took on the form of a consumer cooperative.

presents exemplars of textual evidence supporting the iterative steps of action, learning, sensemaking and role boundary expansion.

Stage 3 – Interpretation of data. Abstracting across multiple micro-process narratives based on repeating sequences, we developed a model of emergent identity work (see Figure 1) illustrating a multi-cycle, spiralling process of action, learning, sensemaking, and further (domain expanded) action. Through these cycles, the housewives continuously re-aligned their self-image with the results of, and the meaning they ascribed to, the activities they took part in as Seikatsu Club members, and expanded their role boundary through actions in new domains. Our model illustrates a multi-cycle process of emergent identity work that results in an enlargement of self-identity at the micro level, and acceptance of expanded roles for women in society.

Insert Figure 1 and Table 1 about here

Spiralling cycles of identity work in a collective setting

Women in post-war Japan had internalized the institutionally prescribed ideal of womanhood embodied in the ideology of “dutiful wife and nurturing mother”, and identified strongly with their roles as manager and protector of the family. Due to the limited domain of the *ryosai-kenbo* role identity, Japanese middle class housewives might easily be dismissed as powerless, especially as agents for social change. However, these housewives were uniquely positioned to create a better life for Japanese families because their role clearly charged them with taking care of family well-being. These housewives had the time and inclination to get involved in issues related to family well-being, such as food and household products’ price and quality, their local

environment, and other issues. More importantly, as manager of the family finances and consumption, professional housewives had a reservoir of practical knowledge.

The Seikatsu Club was formed by a young socialist couple named Shizuko and Kuniyo Iwane who intended to unleash the power vested in the role of middle class housewives, “to utilize women’s strength to reform our way of life, to become actively involved in activities for the progress of our society” (Manifesto and Principles of the Setagaya Seikatsu Club, 1965, see Appendix I). The typical Seikatsu Club member was a woman living in a middle or upper-middle class neighbourhood, raising young children or approaching the conclusion of that life stage, with a “white collar salary-man” husband (Sato, 1988, pg. 246). While most members joined the Club solely to address private concerns (Sato, 1988), a significant number, as reported above, went through a transformative process as a result of participating in Seikatsu Club activities. Over time, those women became leaders and activists for the social causes of the Seikatsu Club, and it is their identity work that is the focus of this study. While the Seikatsu Club, at least initially, was not intended to change the role of the middle class housewife in Japanese society, our findings suggest that Seikatsu Club activities led to the expansion of the housewives’ role boundary and enlargement of their role identity, without challenging institutionalized role values. We elaborate this change process in the following sub-sections.

Playing the role - Action to address day to day concerns

Most women were motivated to join the Seikatsu Club mainly to improve the quality of life for their family through “safer, fresher food;” “assured raw materials/origins of the products;” “lower price;” and “convenience in getting the products delivered” (Sato, 1988: 226). The Seikatsu Club began with the collective purchase of milk: “it was about being able to drink milk

at a lower cost; it linked directly to the daily ‘kitchen’ matters of housewives” (Iwane, 1979: 15). In post-war Japan, milk was considered an essential item for a healthy family diet, yet milk producers frequently increased the price and some sold milk contaminated by harmful chemicals. Hence, being able to buy safe, quality milk at a lower cost enabled middle class housewives to improve their role performance. The housewives’ involvement in the Seikatsu Club activities arose from a desire to perform their institutionally prescribed roles, not challenge them.

“I was approached by my neighbor in the same apartment: ‘Do you want to join the Seikatsu Club? You can buy milk cheaper if you join.’ However, I found it very difficult to quit buying from the milk shop I had been buying milk from for a long time. On the other hand, my kids drank 3 to 4 bottles of milk a day, and if we (parents) want to drink milk too, the expenses would be too much for us to manage ...I was not sure what I should do. Then I heard from the news that if you drank milk every day you wouldn’t get cancer so easily.... So I made up my mind and took the courage to turn my back on the milk shop and joined the Seikatsu Club Consumer’s Cooperative.” (member reflection in SCCC Newsletter, No 60, 1970. 9. 15).

The lady cited below, like many others, was initially unaware of the social agenda of the Club:

“While I thought SCCC helps us to buy (and deliver) safe products, I was surprised to find out that it was a social movement to change the way we live. I did not want to have anything to do with a “movement” - and I did not think about a cooperative as a “movement”, even in my dreams! ... Really for a long time I thought the slogan “to change the way of life” was overly arrogant – how could we say only Seikatsu

Club members were living a proper life?” (Interview transcript of a Seikatsu Club member, Sato, 1988: 387).

Yet as many Seikatsu women got involved in the collective buying activities, they embarked on a journey of learning along with other housewives, and together they came to realize what influence they could exert through their actions.

Using the role - Learning and sensemaking in a collective setting

The collective buying activity of Seikatsu members differed from normal, more individualized housewife practice, yet the *ryosai-kenbo* identity functioned as a resource for Seikatsu members as it both legitimized club members’ actions, and created a common bond to connect members with similar others in the neighborhood to form the base unit for collective buying. At the same time, the association with the Seikatsu Club Consumer Cooperatives set the women within a new context, with its own norms derived from cooperative principles (International Co-operative Alliance, 2007). This context allowed them to learn and connect their actions to greater meanings.

“Facing the reality of rising prices, increasing occurrence of harmful food products, distribution systems that favor producers, and a society that neglects consumers, if we want to fight against it by ourselves, we feel totally powerless.... one person’s effort does not go very far, and no matter how good something is, to proceed with one person is not going anywhere. Through the *han*³ we are not only buying

³ The han system operated in such a way that the head office of SCCC decided on a list of items, received pre-paid orders from the hans, ordered the goods from suppliers, delivered the goods to the drop-off points of each han, and the han divided the orders among its members. In each han, a leader (hancho) coordinated all the buying activities, with members taking turns with delivery, accounting, contacting, or being in charge of specific products (Sato, 1988, pg. 46-50). Hans were created out of the practical consideration of how to efficiently distribute more items to a larger number of members. With this system, the head office could handle a relatively large number and quantity of items with few people and little operating capital, translating into savings for members.

products cheaper, it is important that we talk about various things in the *Han*. Through participating in those *han* meetings, we can safeguard our interests (and our family's) in a lopsided society, and make the first step to change that society". (Member reflection, 1968, in *Ozei Watashi*, No. 1: 39-40).

Club members were expected to investigate the production and distribution of consumer materials to ensure quality products, and develop new product sources if old ones were not satisfactory. Furthermore, members were expected to conduct the administration of the Club, and recruit more members if they wanted to buy different items⁴. These new activities did not attract institutional sanctions because they were legitimized by the housewife role: members' actions supported the institutionalized role values of protecting their families' interests.

Through their participation in Seikatsu Club activities, housewives realized there was greater meaning behind the buying and consumption of products. Their learning and sensemaking was facilitated by the *hans*, which not only enabled collective purchase, but also served as "networks in which communities were formed, conversations were made, and discussions deepened" (Iwane, 1980: 12-13, cf. Sato, 1988: 20). Together, Seikatsu housewives began to question the lifestyle they took for granted, and think and act differently about how they, as the protectors of their family's welfare, could improve their lives. First they realized their own ignorance:

"When we received the first delivery of our collective purchase, I came to the realization that as the purchaser for the family, we housewives knew too little about the products. Retailers just took what the wholesalers said [about the products] and passed

⁴ The various activities were recorded in the recollections of Seikatsu Club members in *Ozei Watashi*, No. 1 to 3.

that on to us, and we consumers just believed in whatever the shop people told us when buying the products.” (Member reflection, SCCC Newsletter, No. 8, 1968. 05. 12).

Club members then investigated their products’ supply chains, sharing their knowledge about the products they consumed through the Club newsletter. They learned that “the milk they had been drinking was not necessarily real milk,” and “the detergents they used could be harmful to themselves, their children, and their children’s children through their harmful effects on the environment” (Sato, 1988: 219). Learning that their private domain was not as safe as they thought motivated them to develop their own “consumption materials”⁵ from trusted suppliers.

They began to connect with suppliers for essential household food items, such as rice, meat, eggs, etc. A housewife described her experience on a trip to the egg farm:

“The first thing I learned in the egg farm was that eggs were made by people as much as by the hens who laid them ... The nice-looking eggs in the supermarket were not due to better feed, but due to the use of chemical to wash the eggs after they were gathered. The egg yolk color could be artificially manipulated by putting additives in the feed... We divide eggs into large, medium and small (paying different prices), but that has nothing to do with their quality. Seeing how our egg farmer raised the chickens made us realize what constituted “good quality eggs”, what environment, feed and management practices were needed to produce such eggs.” (member reflection, 1971, in Ozei Watashi, No. 1: 56.)

⁵ Instead of “consumer goods,” Seikatsu Club refers to the products they carry as “consumption materials” to stress the use-value rather than the sale-value of the products.

Through such pursuits, members achieved their first level of learning about products and their production processes. They then engaged in sensemaking, realizing that to perform well in their roles as “dutiful wives and nurturing mothers,” they had to extend their influence to “right the wrongs” in society, so that they could protect their family’s welfare in the present and future.

Claiming new roles - Domain-expanded action, learning, and sensemaking.

As principal caretakers of the family, the housewives’ role expertise in the life domain gave them the legitimacy to claim the role of change agents in the “way to live.” As Shizuko put it:

Inflation is affecting us, women in charge of the kitchen, the most. The Seikatsu Club was created to address those life concerns with our own actions. ... So we need to be involved, to speak up about our needs, and to decide the direction for our actions. These are our issues, our families’ issues... It is a matter of course that women need to protect the interests of our family. But limiting ourselves within the family boundary is not the best way to achieve happiness and harmony for the family – our family’s well-being is linked to the progress of the society... Seikatsu Club is a vehicle for women to influence society. (Seikatsu Club Newsletter, No. 12, 1966. 05).

Becoming involved in managing the supply chain of essential daily consumption items became the first boundary-expanded action of the housewives, a natural extension of their roles as the manager of family finances and purchases. The campaign to purchase better quality milk at a lower cost at the origin of the Seikatsu Club, for example, had expanded until housewives were involved in the whole milk supply chain, working with farmer cooperatives, raising cows in urban neighbourhoods, setting up and running processing facilities close to dairy farms to ensure freshness, distributing milk in the most efficient packaging format through the neighbourhood

networks, and encouraging “all natural” milk consumption in the family (member reflections, 1969, *Ozei Watashi*, No. 1, pg. 47-48; member reflections, 1978, *Ozei Watashi*, No. 3, pg. 45-46). Such a process converted the housewives from mere consumers to economic agents to promoters of social well-being through the practice of “local supply, local consumption”.

Seikatsu women did not stop at addressing the supply chain. Deeper questions were asked, which led to further learning and sensemaking, and continued action in expanded domains:

How do the various issues SCCC members face in their day to day life, and the issue of product prices, link to the issues in the society? What are our responsibilities in solving those issues? (member reflection, 1974, in *Ozei Watashi*, No. 2: 12).

Complaints of hand eczema caused by synthetic detergents sold by the Club triggered the housewives to learn about the harmful effects of toxic chemicals in the detergent, not just to their families, but also to the environment and the health of future generations. SCCC stopped carrying synthetic detergents altogether, but also launched a public campaign to ban the production and sale of synthetic detergents in Tokyo and Yokohama, where the Seikatsu Club operated at the time (1970s). When their appeals were rejected, the Seikatsu women realized they needed to gain influence within the dominant structure. They formed the Seikatsusha Networks, a new form of grass-roots politics (Takabatake, 1993: 207), in 1978 to run for representation in local governments. By 1987, Seikatsu Club members had won 33 seats (Sato, 1988: 252). Though only a small percentage of Seikatsu women were elected to public office, the movement to achieve representation connected many Club members to the public domain, as active citizens.

The success of the political campaign also allowed the Club to enter the economic domain. In the mid-1980s, the Seikatsusha Network representative in Kawazaki City proposed that a soap

plant be built in the city to address concerns about detergents. She gained the mayor's support, and a plant using recycled oil to make soap was built with the capital from Seikatsu families in the city (1000 yen per family), on land granted by the city, and with Seikatsu women running it.

Tension with the dominant structure continued to exist, yet rather than deterring the Seikatsu housewives, it pushed them to rationalize what they had to do further to pursue their cause. A Club member reflected:

When I was collecting signatures in support of the 'Soap Movement' to make a direct appeal (to the government), a man said to me: 'who do you think is feeding you?' Also, I had to mind what my husband would think when I put in precious time and money pursuing the social movement. In order to have a real say, to be taken seriously, we needed economic power [independence]. (Sato, 1988: 405-406).

One way to have economic independence is through paid work. However, the Seikatsu Club housewives were critical of the mainstream way of work, i.e., how their husbands worked, which demanded total devotion to corporations at the expense of involvement in the life domain. To pursue economic independence without giving up either their traditional *ryosai-kenbo* role or their newly acquired role of active citizens, Seikatsu Club women created workers' collectives - "cooperatives created by workers living in a community, which recognize the products and services needed by people living in that community. Workers work not as employees but [as equal share owners who] possess equal rights and equal responsibility in their work" (Seikatsu Club Consumers' Cooperative brochure). Through workers' collectives, the housewives achieved "autonomy economically, socially, and as a human being", and worked toward

improving quality of life for families and society. As a SCCC member who started a workers' collective providing lunch boxes put it:

We cannot contribute to the society by just eating safe products ourselves. As we have participated in the Seikatsu Club movement, we want people in the community to consume safe food as well. Therefore, we make lunch [using safe ingredients] (member recollection of WC experience, Kanagawa Workers' Collective Union 10 Year Anniversary Publication, 2000, pg. 52).

An enlarged role-identity for middle class housewives

Changed perception of self within an enabling collective

The Seikatsu women did not set out to challenge their role. However, through interacting with other housewives within the han, the Seikatsu women reflected on their role, and the Club's, in improving their "way of life." Even though they were proud of their role as housewives, the Seikatsu Club housewives started to see that they could play a larger role in the society. Our data suggest that in expanding their domain of action, members loosened the role boundary that constrained them and saw themselves not just as family caretakers, but as active citizens and economic agents. The change in self identity started with the questioning of the existing order:

Participating in Seikatsu Club allowed us the opportunity to express our 'self identity'. What we did was being recognized. Inside the family (house), whatever we did was considered "a matter of course", not recognized even a little bit. ... On the table where my husband read his front-page news, wasn't I the one who fought for the economic issues through meat and vegetables? Does my husband really understand anything about politics or economics deep down?... There is a difference

between people who say “I am a housewife” and draw the line and people who want to go beyond that line... Since I had the chance to be involved in Seikatsu Club, I wanted to ride on it to achieve something... to have a light inside me to guide my path. (Member’s interview transcript, Sato, 1988: 387-392).

Through the action, learning and sensemaking process, this member went from passively accepting her institutionally prescribed role identity to realizing what she could accomplish by applying her “housewifely knowledge and skills”, leading to a change in self concept. The same member described her experience starting a workers’ collective for prepared food:

We are doing everything, from cooking to delivery to accounting. I was very surprised to find that I could actually handle accounting quite well without external help, even though I had only handled the very cumbersome family finances up to now. I discovered a new facet within me. Working in the workers’ collective was an interesting experience. Seeing myself change was another interesting experience. ... I will not escape back to the safety net of being a housewife with everything provided for. It is a matter of pride. (Member’s interview transcript, Sato, 1988: 390-392).

Changing their self perception, however, did not mean abandoning their traditional role identity, but instead, it reinforced it. An elected representative elaborated how she saw her role:

I am not only a representative of the Seikatsu Club, but a representative of all ‘*Seikatsusha*’ [i.e. housewives]. I wanted to let people know the reality that the day to day life of housewives was being controlled by politics, and I wanted to change that reality from the standpoint of a housewife. (Sato, 1988: 253).

In expanding their role boundary from the private to the public domains, the Seikatsu Club women proudly held onto their housewife identity, and the social campaigns they pursued as a collective were very consistent with, and legitimized by, that identity. They received feedback from society as they extended their boundaries. Their role, as reflected by their social environment, shaped their self-understanding, or identity. The Seikatsu women realized that to change “the way to live” and “the way to work” in post-war Japan, they needed to go beyond the secluded private domain of the family to become active participants in public domains. Such a realization was the outcome of a spiralling process of action, learning and sensemaking in ever-expanding domains. As a perhaps unintended, yet naturally emerging outcome, such a process enlarged the role identity of middle-class housewives, giving them the power and legitimacy to effect social change.

Gaining acceptance for the enlarged role identity.

In a highly institutionalized environment, the reconstruction of one’s role identity involves not just updating one’s own self-portrait, but also having the expanded role accepted by others. The domain-expanded actions undertaken by Seikatsu Club housewives had created some tension within the family, as the housewives recalled their family members’ reactions to their involvement in Seikatsu Club activities. Objections, however, soon turned to resignation, and progressed to recognition and acceptance. A Seikatsu Club officer talked about her experience:

When I came home late at four or five [in the afternoon], my husband was not so happy ... he objected to me becoming a branch officer. Yet when I became the chair of the Consumption Materials Committee, he was no longer objecting ... Even though he said ‘do it without affecting the family [responsibilities]’, he once and a

while would tell my son 'your mother is doing something worthwhile'. (Member's interview transcript, Sato, 1988: 278).

When another housewife told her husband about her anger in the mis-handling of catering in school, her husband reacted by saying "if you are so upset about it then you should speak up." When she decided to take up an officer position in a Seikatsu Club branch, however, her husband objected because she was not home all the time. Determined to stay involved, she talked to her husband repeatedly about the meaning of her work: "My husband still hates the fact that I am not home all the time. ... However, as I move forward in pursuing various activities, my husband also seems to be gradually moving forward with his thinking." When she was asked to represent her branch in the SCCC board, she was surprised by her husband's consent; he even suggested installing a telephone answering machine as a gesture of support. Her son in primary six also spoke of his support: "Mother, it is great that you've gotten Father's support. What you are doing needed to be done [is really meaningful], and the meaning will be lost if you cannot continue to pursue it" (Member's interview transcript, Sato, 1988: 286).

Beyond the family unit, the women's attempts to expand their role-identity were sometimes rejected, as the detergent supplier's dismissal, the politicians' rejection of the soap campaign appeal, and the comment from the man who said "Who do you think is feeding you?" suggested. However, the women's success in running for seats in local governments through the Seikatsusha Network, and the popularity of the workers' collectives started by members in local communities attested to their eventual success in gaining acceptance for their expanded role. As we have described, the change in the Japanese housewives' role identity occurred through an iterative cycle of action, learning, sensemaking and role boundary expansion. Though we presented the cycle in a seemingly logical order of progression, the process we describe is

dynamic in nature and the steps are not necessarily sequential. Table 2 provides two complete illustrative examples of how the transformation process took place.

Insert Table 2 about here

Discussion and conclusions

We have examined the process by which highly embedded, marginalized actors expanded their institutionally-prescribed role identity by enacting it in expanded domains. Our model of emergent identity work (Figure 1) outlines how actors who take action consistent with their role identities in expanded domains trigger a process of learning and sensemaking that leads to a spiralling process of role boundary expansion. In this process, actors not only changed their own self-concept, but also others' expectations of their institutionally-prescribed role. Our research findings contribute significantly to the literatures on identity work, institutional change and social movements.

Emergent Identity Work as a Process of Domain-Expanded Action, Learning and Sensemaking

Studies of identity work as institutional work tend to either focus on how individual actors struggle with, and, within limits, influence the institutionalized image and expectations associated with their role identity (Creed et al., 2010; Snow and Anderson, 1987; Watson, 2008), or how institutional entrepreneurs engineer the construction of new collective identities through social movements, to frame the need for change and legitimate new logics (Lounsbury, 2001; Rao, Monin & Durand, 2003; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). Hence studies of identity work, both at

the individual or collective level, bear a strong tone of “strategic intent”. Little has been done to examine how identity reproduction in new domains can lead to identity change.

The Seikatsu story shows that embedded actors reproduced their role identity in expanded domains may become exposed them to new learning, which may trigger individual and collective sensemaking, opening new possibilities for agency. Having once expanded their role domain, the housewives could see possibilities for expanding it further. They initiated social campaigns to protect their family, community and environment from harmful substances in the products they consumed. They took part in politics so that their voice for social change could be heard. They participated in business activities to provide resources for their social actions and to design more family-friendly work arrangements, consistent with their role values. At each step, they reproduced their role identity in an expanded domain. By doing so, they not only changed their perception of themselves, but also others’ perception of their sphere of influence.

The emergent identity work we observe in the Seikatsu Club women is consistent with the central argument of structural interactionism in that individuals are motivated to formulate plans and achieve levels of performance or activity that reinforce, support, and confirm their identities, and that the process is a two way street: “the self operates in choosing behaviours and the behaviours reinforce and support the self” (Burke & Reitzes, 1981: 84). It was that two-way street that made the spiralling cycle of role-expanding identity work possible. People learned using the outcome of action (feedback) to revise their belief systems (Weick, 1979). Though perhaps unintentional in the beginning, the inter-related, ever domain-expanded actions had profound consequences on how the Seikatsu women saw themselves, what they believed they were capable of and what they believed was appropriate for them to do. When Seikatsu members noticed the effects of their actions in new domains, they reinterpreted themselves and

their roles to be consistent with their experience. The expanded role identity helped to motivate and sustain them as they took increasingly bold social actions. As such, our study explores both “how individuals construct evolving understandings of themselves amid social situations” (Alvesson, Ashcraft, & Thomas, 2008: 16), and how that emergent identity work changes others’ perceptions of the boundaries of their socially-prescribed role. We thus show how emergent identity work can change an institution (the role identity) constraining an embedded actor.

From maintenance to change: Non-conflictual institutional work

Few studies have examined how institutional maintenance by embedded actors can lead to institutional change, a seemingly illogical phenomenon. Collective actions in the Seikatsu case started with the individual housewives’ desire to better perform their institutionally prescribed roles. The *ryosai-kenbo* role identity was both highly institutionalized and highly valued: it provided the women with an honoured, if isolated, place in a society that emphasized conformity. Yet if roles are merely reproduced, they are more likely to be maintained than to change.

The opportunity for change, however, occurred when actors began to take role-consistent actions in expanded domains. Research into boundary work has suggested that boundaries are usually highly contested, and when collectives attempt to expand their territory (Gieryn, 1983; 1999), they usually encounter conflict. This was not the case for the Seikatsu women – they faced very little external sanction or domestic conflict for two reasons. First, the women were doing their duty by participating in Seikatsu activities, as they consistently performed the values embedded in their highly legitimate *ryosai-kenbo* role. The role justified their boundary-expanded action both to the housewives themselves and to others. Second, the housewives were *not* invading someone else’s territory, but creating their own new space. No other groups in Japanese society

seemed to be concerned with the same issues. While their actions required some change from others (some suppliers, city governments, husbands and others), the changes needed were not in the core domains of those other actors. In a sense, by acting on their own concerns rather than agitating for others to do so as a typical social movement would, Seikatsu women created an alternative space for their domain-expanded action, in which they were the primary members.

In looking at the intersection of gender and social movements a number of studies have suggested a distinctive, non-conflictual form of grassroots activism. Studies find that the leadership and strategies of women's movements often resort to family ties and family and church gatherings for collective mobilization (Blee 1991, Robenett 1997). A number of female-led, grass-roots movements have created evolutionary social change and expanded women's roles. For example, the *vaso de leche* program that emerged from Lima, Peru in the 1980s had a transforming effect on the role of women in urban and rural communities in Peru (Peredo, 1995). Similarly, the work of Shiva (1997) in promoting a form of micro-credit with seeds led to an enlarged role for rural women in advancing biodiversity. Mello e Souza (2008) has described the ways in which women's traditional gender roles, especially as mothers, were revised as a result of their involvement in networks of activism. Does the Seikatsu Club illustrate a Gilligan-esque "different voice" of change (Gilligan, 1982) based in feminine values of nurturance and low conflict? It would be interesting for future research to explore such a possibility further.

Individual identity work within a collective setting

As role identity is considered a social object (Mead, 1934: 267-93, 306-19), it is shared, socially recognized, and defined by action (Callero, 1985). The interaction between individuals' role-identity and the collective activities they pursue has received relatively little attention. The

Seikatsu Club case tells a story of individual identity work enabled by a collective, whose legitimacy was grounded in the taken for granted, institutionalized role identity of participants. Responsibility for the “life domain” was vested strongly in the role-identity of the middle-class housewives, as represented by the *ryosai-kenbo* ideal. Confined within the walls of the family, however, the Japanese middle-class housewives could not have unleashed the power vested in their institutionalized role identity. The Seikatsu Club Consumer Cooperative, as a self-managed, democratic entity, allowed them to pursue issues of common interest and devise collective solutions. Members’ active, voluntary participation in the organizing and operation of the SCCC, from recruiting members, to identifying responsible producers, to initiating local community campaigns for better health and a better environment, allowed them to break away from the “private” domain of the family to the “public” domains of business and politics, and expanded their role-identity from “dutiful wife and nurturing mother” to economic agent and active citizen.

Snow and McAdam (2000) pointed out that while personal identity has been considered the key concept in the new social movement literature, there has been greater concern with the rituals and processes through which collective identities were developed and maintained (Schwalbe & Mason-Schrock, 1996; Taylor & Whittier, 1992), with relatively little attention devoted to examining how personal and collective identities relate to one another. Our study delves into this complex relationship. The congruence between the personal and collective identities in the Seikatsu Club case from the start, based on institutionally endorsed role values, served as the enabling platform for individuals to carry out role boundary expansion work without either attracting sanctions externally or experiencing identity conflicts internally.

Conclusions

Studies of institutional change often focus on institutional entrepreneurs who create or change institutions to “realize interests they value highly” (DiMaggio, 1988: 14). Embedded actors reproducing their roles are dismissed as “cultural dopes”, who may not even be aware of their marginalized status because they take existing social structures for granted (Lukes, 1973). There have been, however, recent calls by institutional scholars for more attention to the everyday processes of less powerful institutional actors to examine how they can “both sustain and prompt shifts in practices and conventions” (Powell & Colyvas, 2008, pg. 277). Recent literature on institutional work (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006) has offered some insights on how individual actions can influence structural change. Our case study of the Seikatsu Club reveals the micro processes through which low power, highly role-constrained actors were able to break through institutional constraints and gain power through a process of action, learning and sense-making, triggered by enacting their roles in new domains. The identity work carried out by the Seikatsu women eventually led to a change in role expectations towards women in the society.

Our study may have limited empirical generalizability in that it is based on a single case study of members involved in a successful social enterprise, in the specific cultural context of Japan. Yet, our study holds theoretical and practical promise for our understanding of the emancipation of low-power actors: even when such actors are so conditioned by their roles that they cannot envision acting contrary to them, they may trigger a reflexive identity work process simply by acting in new domains. The middle-class housewives in Japan also faced similar constraints as other low power groups in different societies. The successful “quiet” revolution of middle-class housewives in Japan sheds new light on an emergent, non-conflictual change process that can be of reference for future research and practice on social change.

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Figure 1: Model of Emergent Identity Work

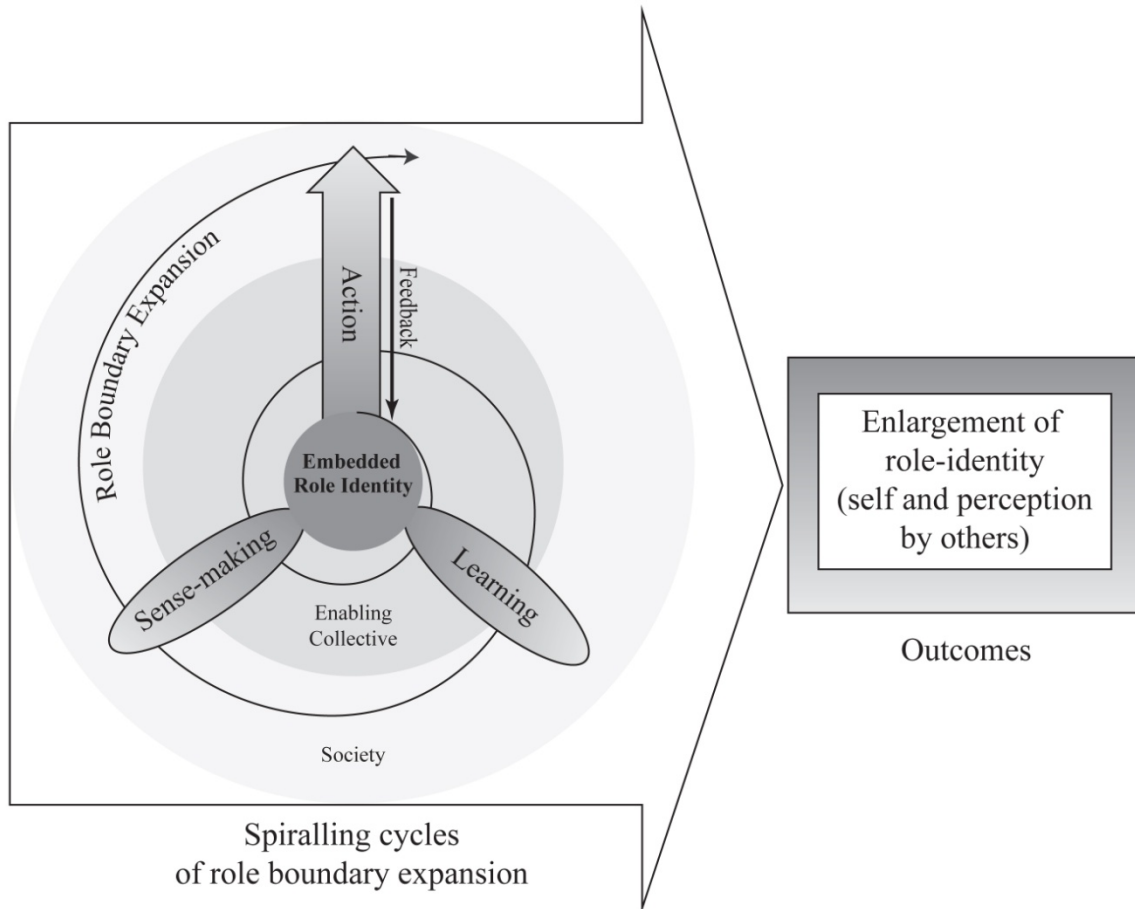


Table 1: Data Exemplars for First Order Themes Linking to Second Order Constructs

First Order Themes	Exemplars from the Data	Second Order Constructs
Performing the ryosai-kenbo role	<p>“... Just based on my friend saying: ‘SCCC will do delivery for the heavy things you buy’, and I ended up joining [the Seikatsu Club]. At that time, with my three kids all very young, shopping was really taxing. “This would solve my problem!” was how I felt.” (transcript of a member interview, Sato, 1988: 387).</p> <p>“I was approached by my neighbor in the same apartment: “Do you want to join the Seikatsu Club? You can buy milk cheaper if you join.” However, I found it very difficult to quit buying from the milk shop I had been buying milk from for a long time. ... Then I heard from the news that if you drank milk everyday you wouldn’t get cancer so easily. ... So I made up my mind and took the courage to turn my back to the milk shop and joined the Seikatsu Club Consumer’s Cooperative.”</p>	Action
Connecting with similar others in performing Seikatsu Club member duties	<p>“At that time, I was raising two kids, aged 2 and 4. For their sake, I really want to be able to buy the Seikatsu Club eggs and milk, so I took my 2-year old son with me and knock at people’s door to persuade more people to join the Seikatsu Club.” (member recollection, 1982. 07, in Ozei Watashi, No. 3, pg. 66)</p> <p>“Not long after joining the Seikatsu Club (I) attended the general meeting. The chair person of the meeting is a ‘professional housewife.’” (Sato, 1988, pg. 281)</p> <p>“ ... I went with 50 other Seikatsu Club member in a study trip to the chicken farm supplying our eggs.” (member recollection, Ozei Watashi, No. 1: 56).</p>	Action
Realizing causal effect between actions and outcomes	<p>“When we received the first delivery of our collective purchase, I came to the realization that as the purchaser for the family, we housewives knew too little about the products. Retailers just took what the wholesalers said [about the products] and passed that on to us, and we consumers just believed in whatever the shop people told us when buying the products.” (member reflection, SCCC Newsletter, No. 8, 1968. 05. 12).</p> <p>“When the Consumption Materials Committee (CMC) first started, ... we bought some pyjamas from a producer. When washed, they totally lost their shape, and we received many complaints. The CMC called for a meeting with the producer, and discussed with them about the functionality, durability and design, exchanging ideas in how to solve the problem. That was a great learning experience for us. The goal was not on taking an order or launching a complaint, but on creating something that is of value for consumption.” (member recollection in The 20th Anniversary Publication of Seikatsu Club Kanagawa, 1991: 111).</p>	Learning
Acquiring new knowledge through performing the roles	<p>“The first thing I learned in the egg farm was that eggs were made by people as much as by the hens who laid them... Seeing how our egg farmer raised the chickens made us realize what constituted “good quality eggs”, what environment, feed and management practices were needed to produce such eggs”. (member recollection, Ozei Watashi, No. 1: 56) .</p> <p>“ ... [through SCCC] I learned about the adverse effects of synthetic detergents to our body, and to the environment; the danger of food additives” (member recollection. Ozei Watashi, No. 3: 65).</p>	Learning

Reflecting on self and collective	<p>“ ... we realized that we are the ones who have the power of collective buying, and we are the ones who were responsible for developing consumptions materials.” (member recollection in The 20th Anniversary Publication of Seikatsu Club Kanagawa, 1991: 111).</p> <p>“Seikatsu Club movement has transformed me. Seikatsu Club is me. ... People should consider Seikatsu Club as a platform to allow housewives to have a voice for social change. We all know that there is little power in one single housewife. But what we should really realize is how powerful we can be when a large number of individuals each with limited power work together.” (Member reflection, 1976. 06. In Ozei Watashi, No. 2: 12).</p>	Sensemaking
Recognizing the power of self and collective	<p>“The key person in the Seikatsu Club is not someone else, but me (i.e. every single one of us). With our own will, our own hand, we had accomplished buying rice and eggs directly from producers... This showed that when we had a strong wish to improve our own life, and organize ourselves, we could create changes in society” (member reflection, in Ozei Watashi, No. 2: 12).</p> <p>“On the table where my husband read his front-page news, wasn't I the one who fought for the economic issues through meat and vegetables? ...” (Member's interview transcript, Sato, 1988: 387).</p> <p>“ ... within 2 months we got to 300 members (able to buy eggs) and within 6 months we got to 500 members (able to buy milk, etc.). This very success taught those of us who involved in the “expansion” process that by gathering the small power of many people, we could become a significant energy to achieve a goal. From now on, I will continue to connect my “limited power” with others in the Seikatsu Club.” (member reflection, 1982. 07, in Ozei Watashi, No. 3: 66).</p>	
Rationalizing for role expansion	<p>“So we need to be involved, to speak up about our needs, and to decide the direction for our actions. These are “our issues”, our families' issues ... It is a matter of course that women need to protect the interest of our family. But limiting ourselves within the family boundary is not the best way to achieve happiness and harmony for the family – our family's well-being is linked to the progress of the society ...” (Seikatsu Club Newsletter, No. 12, 1966. 05).</p> <p>“Housewives should exercise their right from the standpoint of housewives. We also need to take responsibility for our society.” (SCCC Newsletter, No. 17, 1968. 07. 21).</p> <p>“In order [for housewives] to have a real say [in effecting social change], to be taken seriously, we needed economic power [economic independence].” (member's reflection, Sato, 1988: 405-406).</p>	Role boundary expansion
Action in new domains	<p>“As I realized the harmful effects of synthetic detergent to the human body and the environment, and my knowledge about food additives deepened, I also came to the conclusion that even if I understand those harmful effects, I cannot guarantee safety [for my family, and others]. I wanted to spread the message in our community, hence I started calling on people [to join the Seikatsu Club movement].” (member recollection, 1981. 05, in Ozei Watashi, No. 3: 65).</p> <p>“We cannot contribute to the society by just eating safe products ourselves. As we have participated in the Seikatsu Club movement, we want people in the community to consume safe food as well. Therefore, we make lunch.”</p> <p>“The plant to make soap from recycled oil was a tool to support the soap movement. If we were to advocate the use of soap in our community, we wanted to expand the usage with the soaps we made.” (20th Anniversary Publication of Seikatsu Club Kanagawa, 1991: 163).</p>	

Table 2: Illustrative Examples of the Spiralling Process of Action, Learning, Sensemaking and Identity-expansion

Example 1

Evidence	Process
Joined the Seikatsu Club Consumers' Collective (SCCC)	Action
“(Through SCCC) I learned about the adverse effects of synthetic detergents on our bodies, and on the environment; the danger of food additives,	Learning
and realized even if I understood those risks, it did not make it safe – the message had to be spread widely in the community.	Sense-making
So I started to get involved in talking and convincing people about those dangers. I did not really use the slogan “changing way of life” – it is not that simple to change the way we live, and you can't really push people to change their way of life.	Role-boundary expanded action
But in the process of connecting with others, spreading the message of “safe products”, I have changed the habit of relying on the supermarket as my life line. By the time the distribution of milk and eggs became a routine (through the Han system), the rhythm of our life has been changed – “Change the way of life” is not as difficult to do as I thought. People who joined Seikatsu Club and engaged in collective buying are changing their way of life.	Learning & Sensemaking
I would consider this phenomenon as ‘self reform’ or “life reform”. (Reflection by a member entitled “What is Seikatsu Club to me”, 1981, Ozei Watashi, No. 3, pg. 64-65).	Changed self-perception

Example 2

Evidence	Process
Joined Seikatsu Club while living in Tokyo	Action
“Once I moved to the new neighborhood, I realized there was no proper store for proper food items. Items sold in the nearest supermarket were expensive, not fresh, and not tasty. Even my husband started noticing how bad the taste of the	Learning

meat was. No wonder, we were used to having fresh meat from the farm before [through Seikatsu Club].

When I bought from Seikatsu Club in Tokyo, I had never considered how important Seikatsu Club had become in our life. But my husband's complaint [about bad tasting pork] made me realize that.

Sensemaking

After a while, I got a leaflet of Seikatsu Club, and joined with others to form a local branch.

Action

Yet I realized we could not get milk, meat, or eggs, because we did not have enough members to do the collective buying. We needed 300 members to be able to order eggs directly from the farmer, and 500 members for ordering milk. I did not know about this before. I had never attended any general meetings [of Seikatsu Club] when I was in Tokyo. However, I wanted to get fresh eggs, milk, meat and fish. "What should I do?" I was told that I should then go and expand the membership.

Learning

So I did. I put my oldest child in the kindergarten, brought my 2-yr old with me and started visiting homes to convince people to join the SCCC. My motivation in expanding the Seikatsu Club was purely for selfish reasons [to be able to buy quality food items at reasonable price].

Role-boundary
expanded
action

However, the results have linked me to much greater meaning. ... By June membership had increased to the level sufficient to order eggs (reached 300 people from 165 in April), and by October we reached 500 people, the number needed for ordering milk.

Learning &
Sensemaking

To us, the people who did the leg work to expand the network, such results made us realize that by each of us contributing a small step and taking action, we become a force to be reckoned with." (Han journal entry by a member, 82. 07, In Oosei Watashi, No. 3, pg. 66).

Changed self
perception

Appendix I: Manifesto and Principles of the Setagaya Seikatsu Club, 1965

Setagaya Seikatsu Club was started as an autonomous and democratic organization for women living in the community of Setagaya ward near the Odakyu train line in June 1965.

The main purpose of this organization, as expressed in separate sheet of principles, and in our newsletters and pamphlets, is to utilize women's strength to reform our way of life, to become actively involve in activities for the progress of our society.

From the establishment of this organization, we have been issuing a monthly newsletter "Seikatsu" (currently with 3,000 circulations). However, the monthly newsletter has become an inadequate material to cover all our activities. Therefore, we will start issuing a monthly newspaper called "Seikatsu Shinpo" (2 pages of newspaper size with 10,000 copies).

This is a newspaper that is organized and edited by ourselves (club members), to provide a democratic platform for residents of Setagaya-ward to express their stand point.

If you appreciate our intention, you are more than welcome to not only be a member of "Setagaya Seikatsu Club", but also be a subscriber of the "Seikatsu Shinpo". For those who want to subscribe "Seikatsu Shinpo", we will ask you to write an article once or twice a year, and contribute an annual fee of 1000JPY.

October 1966

Appendix II: Major Milestones of the Seikatsu Club Group Movement up to 1990

1965	The Seikatsu Club formed, collective purchase of milk begins
1968	The Seikatsu Club Co-operative Established. Pre-ordering collective purchase in “ <i>han</i> ” (small groups) begins
1972	Development of the first consumer material, miso (soybean paste) according to SC independent standards
1978	Political “Group Seikatsusha” (now Seikatsusha Network) formed in Tokyo
1982	First workers’ collective “Ninjin” established
1986	SC Mutual Assistance System “Ecolo Mutual Assistance” founded
1989	Honorary recipient of the Right Livelihood Award, the alternative Nobel Prize
1990	Establishment of the Seikatsu Club Consumers’ Co-operative Union

Appendix III: Major Campaigns Pursued by Seikatsu Club Group Movement up to 1990

- Soap Movement (1974)*
- Recycle Movement (1976)
- Anti-nuclear, Peace Movement (1977)
- Network Movement for political representation in the local assemblies (1982)
- Workers’ Collectives Movement (1982)
- Food Safety Movement (1989)

*the year in brackets indicates the starting year only, as most of these campaigns were on-going.