

## **“The Only Future Certainty is that I’ll Still be Speaking to her”: Social Capital/Network for the Transition of Disadvantaged Young People**

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*This paper examines the significance of social network and social capital in youth transition from school to work, with a focus on both instrumental and expressive aspects. In recent years the transition of Japanese young people has changed drastically, similar to young people in other industrialised countries. The individualisation of transition has proceeded and collective guidelines or public systems have become less helpful. Thus, their transition has begun to depend more on their social networks and social capital. For young people who cannot help undergoing an insecure and uncertain transition, the instrumental aspects of social networks and social capital are important in their search for job. Few studies, however, have discussed their expressive aspects in great detail. This paper attempts to illustrate the importance of expressive aspects seen in more young people who are afflicted with serious mental problems as a result of their insecure and uncertain transitions.*

*This paper analyzes the cases of six females from the most insecure group in our sample. These freeter girls<sup>1</sup> have local networks composed of members in insecure employment situations with similar characteristics. The instrumental resources these networks provide are minimal, but the expressive aspects of the networks make them valuable sources of relationships for its members. They share sentiments, ventilate frustrations, reach understanding on issues and problems, and affirm each own as well as the other’s worth and dignity. The research findings also indicated that young people in middle to late adolescence rely more on these networks than they do their families. We must pay attention to young people who have little support from their parents in either the expressive and instrumental aspects to sustain the expressive aspects of their networks.*

### **1 Introduction**

Similar to that of young people in other industrialised countries, the transition of Japanese young people from school to work has changed profoundly in this decade. For example, many

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young people are experiencing insecurity and uncertainty for longer periods of time (Jones & Wallace, 1992; Inui, 2003). As Beck argues, there are two specific aspects characterizing young people's uncertain conditions in late modern societies. The first is the restructuring of the labour market, which has increased the number of insecure jobs and the extent of unemployment (Beck, 2000). Young people have suffered the most from the restructuring. The second aspect is the individualisation of people's lives (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). Though young people were once able to rely on their communities to provide collective guidelines for transition, they now must find their way on their own.

As the individualisation of transition has proceeded and collective guidelines or public systems have become less helpful, young people's transition has begun to depend more on their social networks and social capital. Many researchers of youth transition have recently focused on social networks and social capital in Japan (Uchida, 2005; Okita, 2004; Hori, 2004; Kukimoto, 2007) and in Europe (Raffo et al., 2000; Walther et al., 2005; Holland et al., 2007). However, most of these discussions are focused mainly on the instrumental aspects of social capital (Uchida; Raffo et al.), or mention only the general function of social networks without distinguishing between specific aspects (Okita; Hori; Kukimoto). The instrumental aspects of social networks and social capital, such as their utility in finding jobs, are important to young people undergoing an insecure and uncertain transition. However, the expressive aspect that sustains their 'ontological security'<sup>2</sup> is also important, because more young people are being afflicted with serious mental problems as a result of their insecure and uncertain transition (Furlong & Cartmel, 2006; Furlong, 2007; Genda & Maganuma, 2004).

Our paper intends to explicate the significance of social networks and social capital in youth transition, with a focus on both instrumental and expressive aspects. The data are derived from our longitudinal research of high school graduates' transitions from school to work in Tokyo (Inui et al., 2003, 2005, 2006, 2007)<sup>3</sup>. The aim of the research is to explore 'ordinary' young people's experiences in their transition from school to work. Our sample covers young people from middle and lower academic levels, which means that high achievers who would enter prestigious universities are excluded, along with the most disadvantaged students. This paper mainly examines the most insecure group of our samples, which consists of young people who were without stable employment for a significant period of time and who were mainly working as freeters with several interruptions. They suffer most seriously from mental as well as material difficulty during their insecure and uncertain transition.

## **2 Individualisation of Transition and Social Network/Social Capital**

### **Individualised Transition**

Beck defines individualisation as 'the disintegration of previously existing social forms' such as class and social status, gender roles, family, neighbourhood, and others (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p. 2). He argues that, in Western European countries, the welfare state and institutions that treat people individually have replaced traditional social forms, which once provided collective regulations and guidelines for building satisfying and successful lives. Japan has undergone a slightly different transformation compared to Western European countries. Industrialised society began later in Japan, but rapid economic growth in the 1960s profoundly changed Japanese social structure. Traditional regulations and guidelines were modernised. A kind of state

system, with the streaming structure of high school, provided almost all young people with a collective transition until the beginning of the 1990s. High schools were stratified by achievement, and students spent their academic lives among peers with similar achievement levels and family backgrounds. Though students of highly-ranked schools went on to university, most of those from middle- and lower-ranked schools transitioned directly from high school to work through the school’s placement system<sup>4</sup>. This system provided young people with a kind of collective transition.

Since the early 1990s, the number of young people who transition directly to work has declined, and their transition has been individualised. As Furlong and colleagues argue, the transitional mode has not changed evenly for all young people (2004). The transitional mode has been divided into three types: normal biography, choice biography, and risk biography (Walther et al., 2005). At this point in the twenty-first century, roughly half of Japanese young people still transition from school to regular employment directly, a small group takes entrepreneurial route, and others remain in an uncertain and insecure situation of freeters or as unemployed. As opposed to the first group, who still transition more or less linearly, the second and the third groups are non-linear and individualised. A school’s support for transition applies only to those students transitioning to regular employment, and there are few signposts and public resources for others (Inui et al., 2007b). Inevitably, those students must rely on personal or family resources or their personal networks. Students in the last group are the most insecure and uncertain because they are academically and economically disadvantaged, and their personal resources are smaller (Inui et al., 2007b).

Young people facing an insecure and uncertain transition need two distinct types of resources. First, they need instrumental resources. While schools provide students with job information, the information concerns only ‘regular’ jobs<sup>5</sup>, and there are far more students than there are available openings. Students seeking non-regular employment, or who are excluded, for a variety of reasons, from regular employment, are left to search for jobs on their own. Advertisements and leads from friends and acquaintances are of vital importance, since the public job placement office is seldom helpful for young people. Social networks and social capital are invariably the most reliable resources for young job-seekers.

Young people undergoing an insecure and uncertain transition also need expressive resources, since they suffer not only from economic insecurity but also from ‘ontological’ insecurity (Giddens, 1991; Walther et al., 2005). Few signposts exist to help in their transition and identity formation. To create settled lives, young people must form their identities and achieve a stable economic status; without the proper resources, they tend to get lost, sidetracked, and confused in their identity moratorium (Cote & Allahar, 1994). Cote and Allahar argue that young people without support in need to explore themselves often stagnate and drift; indeed, ‘they may develop mechanisms that shut the world out and occlude possibilities for their growth’ (p. 75). In the past, Japanese companies once enclosed workers within both their occupational life and various spheres of personal life. This provided a sense of belonging and bonding and supplied an identity model for young workers. However, the unstable conditions of the freeter lifestyle make it difficult for young people to form reliable relationships with their company or fellow workers. Instead, they must tap resources within their personal network for their expressive support, and shape their identities on their own.

### **Social Network and Social Capital for Transition**

The theory of social capital is of interest to many researchers who study youth transition because it is useful in conceptualising individualised transition (Raffo et al., 2000). Although the concept of social capital has several different theoretical origins, rooted in the work of Bourdieu, Coleman, and Putnam, Bourdieu's theory (1986) is most influential (Raffo et al., 2000; Walther et al., 2005; Holland et al., 2007):

Social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition—or in other words, to membership in a group—which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a 'credential' which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word.(1986, pp. 248-249)

The volume of the social capital possessed by a given agent thus depends on the size of the network of connections he can effectively mobilize and on the volume of the capital (economic, cultural or symbolic) possessed in his own right by each of those to whom he is connected (p. 249).

Bourdieu's theory is useful in identifying the instrumental aspect of social capital. According to his definition, social capital does not consist of personal resources but of the network's resources; therefore, it complements one's personal resources. However, the volume of social capital depends on one's social position, including class, status, and ethnicity, since both the advantages and disadvantages of connections depend on it. This means that if there is no affirmative intervention, disadvantaged young people can mobilise only a small amount of resources in the form of economic, cultural, or symbolic capital.

Bourdieu's theory also includes expressive or emotional aspects of social networks. 'Durable obligations subjectively felt (feeling of gratitude, respect, friendship, etc.)' mediate the transformation of contingent relationships into that of social capital (pp. 249-250). However, these emotional factors are designed to function as reinforcement of relationships. The resources those relationships provide are instrumental.

Lin presents two dimensions, instrumental and expressive, of social capital (Lin, 1986, 2001):

The instrumental dimension involves the use of the relationship as a means to achieve a goal, such as seeking a job, getting a loan, or finding someone to baby-sit. The expressive dimension involves the use of the relationship as an end as well as a means. It is the activity of sharing sentiments, ventilating frustrations, reaching understanding on issues and problems, and affirming one's own as well as the other's worth and dignity.(1986, p. 20)

Thus, the expressive dimension maintains physical health, mental health, and life satisfaction. Promoting and maintaining mental health requires sharing and confiding among intimates who can understand and appreciate the problems involved. Strong and homophilious (homogeneous) ties that form among people with similar characteristics, attitudes, and lifestyles are most likely to function expressively (Lin, 2001, pp. 244-245). Lin further argues that, contrary to instrumental action, which is undertaken to obtain resources not possessed by the actors, expressive action is

performed primarily to maintain resources the actor already possesses.

Lin’s concept of social capital might push the meaning of ‘capital’; in the social sciences, the term generally refers to a resource that returns a profit or enables its owner to reach an advantageous position in an economic, political, or social domain. ‘Capital’ traditionally refers to the value that turns profits on their movement; therefore, capitalists take a dominant position in modern society (Marx). In his extended definition, Bourdieu claims that various forms of capital, i. e., economic, cultural, and social, share the idea of accumulated labour (1986). Bourdieu argues that various forms of capital may convert into one another, although this incurs the costs and efforts of transformation. It is unclear whether the expressive dimension of Lin’s concept functions to return profits that are convertible to an economic or cultural form.

Therefore, we deliberately extend the concept of ‘social capital’ to include Lin’s definition of the expressive dimension. Indeed, in regards to social networks, the expressive dimension (or aspect) is as essential as the instrumental dimension. In this paper, we use ‘social capital and social network’ to refer to Lin’s concept of social capital, which includes expressive aspects, and ‘social capital’ as Bourdieu’s concept.

### 3 Case Study: Freeter Girls’ Stagnated Transition and their Local Network

#### The Uncertainty and Insecurity of Being Freeter or Unemployed

We now describe the cases of six females (*Ayano*, *Miho*, *Rie*, *Nao*, *Maki*, and *Nahoko*), all of whom graduated from B High School and who comprised the most insecure group in our samples. All of these girls have been freeter or unemployed since they had finished high school or junior college, or had left their regular employment. None of them had actively chosen to be freeter from the beginning, and most of them (except *Maki*) have moved frequently between being freeter and unemployed, even though they wanted to keep the same job. Four of them (*Miho*, *Nahoko*, *Maki*, and *Nao*) have had several part-time jobs at one time, since no single job paid sufficient wages.

*Ayano* was employed as a regular worker in a takeaway shop after graduating from high school. She planned to save money for vocational school, where she could learn dubbing. After ten months, however, she gave up her job because the work was difficult and the conditions were bad. She often had to work overtime, was moved to different branches three times in ten months, and regularly suffered from stress and conflicts with new managers and co-workers. After leaving the shop, she had several interviews for part-time jobs, though none resulted in stable employment; she was hired for only a few short-term jobs. Now she lives with her parents and is economically dependant on them.

Since her school days *Miho* hoped to become a cosmetician, and she began working as an apprentice at a beauty salon. But after fourteen months, she left the salon; she had to work more than twelve hours a day, faced conflicts with senior staff members, and suffered from chapped hands. She went on to have several part-time jobs, as well as intervals of unemployment. Her experiences in her first job made her very cautious about working conditions and atmosphere. She now works part-time job as a telephone salesperson, but she is considering quitting.

*Rie* had hoped to become a translator, but she gave it up during junior college because she had a hard time learning English. When she graduated, she intended to search for a regular job while working as a freeter. She worked two part-time jobs, at a rice cracker shop and a bar, for a

year. Now she doesn't work and cares for her sickly mother and grandmother.

Like *Ayano*, *Nao* has dreamed of becoming a dubber. During high school, she tried to find regular employment so she could save money for dubbing school, but she gave up and chose to be a freeter. She knew she couldn't count on her high school to help with job placement; the school got few job offers for students, and she was regarded as a truant. She worked as a freeter at a home improvement shop, but left because she felt she undertook too much responsibility as a freeter. After six months of freeter work at a drugstore, she looked after her newborn brother for eight months. Later, she found a part-time job at a lunch box shop but left within a month, along with her co-workers, because of conflicts with an inexperienced manager. When we spoke with *Nao* for the third time, she was working two jobs (as a part-time instructor of a community after-school programme and a part-time employee at a convenience store) and had started living on her own.

*Maki* hoped to attend vocational school for cooking. However, the tuition was too high for her to afford, and she began working at a takeaway shop as a freeter. She sometimes worked other part time jobs besides it; she needed more money in order to sustain her life with her mother, a single parent, who used to worked at a pub but had been injured in a traffic accident. *Maki* worked in the adult entertainment industry as a side job for six months with her former classmate *Nahoko*, but she left the job when the shop closed. The pay was good, but she did not want to become accustomed to that type of work. She worked at the takeaway shop for three years, but she left because she suffered mentally and physically due to serious conflicts with a new manager.

*Nahoko* secured a regular job as a secretary in a small company thanks to her father putting in a good word for her. As soon as she started, however, her working life became stressful. She had to arrive at the office early in the morning to clean before opening, and she had to manage tasks such as serving tea to her boss and visitors, shopping for employees' lunches, washing uniforms, and cleaning the factory floor, which was downstairs from the office. Often, she started her office work only after closing time. Moreover, her boss blamed her for falling sales because the parent company, for which her father worked, decreased orders. She was the only woman in the company; she suffered from depression and insomnia, and she injured herself. Her mother referred her to a mental health clinic. Three months later, she left the job and withdrew from the world for a while. After recovering, she tried a few freeter jobs, stepping into adult entertainment industry at a friend's invitation. Though she was paid very well, she wound up spending more money to alleviate job-related stress, and she borrowed a considerable amount from consumer financing firms. When we interviewed her, she was double-working (in the adult entertainment industry and in a karaoke shop) to repay her debts.

Although the timing and path to becoming freeters varied, none of these girls had had a preference for being a freeter at the beginning. While the girls would have preferred stable employment, even as freeters, their poor employment conditions (such as wage rate and working hours) precipitated their frequent movement from one job to another.

### **Family Conflict**

When we asked whether his relationship with his parents changed after he started working, *Yoichiro* (male), who had a regular job as a licensed cook, answered:

Just calling my mother, it's O.K. to tell her 'I'll get home late tonight'. No matter how late I get home...She leaves me alone since I started to work. She used to poke her nose into my stuff more before. Because now I hand money to her as a family budget, I think. (Feb-

ruary 2006)

From this statement, it is clear that the economic status of young people affects their relationships with their parents. Parents regard their children as young adults when they get ‘proper job’, and the relationship becomes more cooperative. However, in general, freeter work is not recognised ‘proper’. Family conflicts are frequent for young people living in insecure economic conditions, since parents do not allow their children to have as much independence as they would like. *Ayano’s* mother, for example, often interfered in *Ayano’s* affairs during her high school days (Interview 1, December 2002). When she had regular employment, she often talked with her father about social affairs, her boss, and her company, and she felt more cooperative with her parents (October 2003, Interview 2). However, her mother began to interfere again since *Ayano* left the job and once more became economically dependent on her parents:

Whatever I say to my parents, they must object to me...Even if I say that I want to do something like this, I am just told, ‘There is no choice. You should do what we advice’... [What did they say when you quit your job?] ...was told this kind of stuff; ‘Get married and have a baby’... (November 2005)

Disadvantaged families tend to have more conflicts that are directly or indirectly affected by economic difficulties. *Miho’s* mother divorced her violent husband, and had to care for four children by herself. She worked as a cosmetic demonstrator until she became ill and had to quit. This was why *Miho* hoped to be a cosmetician. *Miho’s* family had received livelihood protection benefits until her youngest brother graduated from high school and began working. During her own high school days, *Miho* had worked a part-time job to help her household. She handed all her income over to her mother when she worked as an apprentice hair dresser. Her mother and older sister blamed her for giving them less money when she left the job and earned an unstable income as a freeter. *Miho* explains:

Mother said, ‘Your sister and younger brother are working hard, but you are the only [lazy] child. It’s a bad habit of yours to quit jobs as soon as you feel you don’t want to do them anymore. You lose your job and take too much time to find a new one. I suffer from losing your income support’ ...because I’m a lazy child and I’m NEET... (March 2006)

Disadvantaged parents tend to have poor mental and physical health, and this worsens their stressful relationships with their children. *Rie’s* parents are divorced and she lives with her mother, younger brother and sister. Her family’s household is supported by livelihood protection benefits. In addition to the economical difficulty, *Rie’s* life has been constrained by her mother, who is fastidious about *Rie’s* clothes, shoes, bags, and accessories. She always asks where *Rie* is going and who she will meet. Her mother is mentally unstable and depends on *Rie*, the oldest daughter. Indeed, her control over *Rie* can be interpreted as a form of dependence. Because she wants her daughter to be with her constantly, she makes *Rie* do household chores and care for her grandmother, who has been facing greater difficulties in daily life since *Rie* graduated from college and became jobless. *Rie* is frustrated by her living situation:

If I told my mother I’m going out with my friends, she would always say ‘No!’ That’s why

I usually go out without telling her. The reasons she doesn't let me go are such silly things. For example, 'I can't carry all my shopping by myself' or 'Our dog misses you'...[Can't your mother do housework?] Yes, she can! Whenever I am out, she does it by herself. She depends on me like a needy child...I can't escape her. She is a kind of ball and chain...I shouldn't have quit the part-time job; otherwise I would have more free time...

(March 2006)

Clearly, *Rie* faces strong conflict with her mother, and it seems difficult for her to escape from this stressful relationship. Since she believes that her mother cannot live without her, she feels her own existence within that relationship. In other words, she, too, is dependent on the relationship.

These three cases suggest that the insecure status that arises from taking on freeter work, or becoming unemployed after graduating from school, or quitting a regular job, can alter family relationships. This is particularly evident with young women, who tend to have more conflicts with their mothers.

### **Freeter Girls' Local Network**

Networks more or less provide young people with useful information and knowledge, or economical support for their transition from school to work, which is the instrumental aspect of the network.

We found that in the three years following graduation from B High School, almost all of the female subjects, including the six we cited, kept in frequent touch with friends with whom they shared their school life. They composed subgroups, which are based on particular subcultures. For example, *Nahoko*, *Miho*, and *Maki* expressed deep interest in live indie rock concerts. *Ayano*, *Nao*, and *Rie* enjoy comics and movie cartoons. Although the subgroup members are close, they are not cut off from other relationships; rather, they are open to members of other groups. They contact each other almost daily by mobile phone, e-mail, or visits. They live in a small local area where they travel on foot or by bicycle. We call their relationships 'the local network'.

The local network provides substantial information for vocational transitions. At our third interview, *Miho* was thinking of changing jobs from a telephone salesperson to a part-time salesperson for a confectioner. The new job was recommended by *Nahoko*'s mother. *Nahoko* worked at a pachinko (pinball) hall where *Miho* had once worked, and *Miho* was also waiting for a job vacancy in a karaoke shop where *Nahoko* worked. However, even though job information was exchanged, most jobs that the network provided were part-time and unstable. Moreover, the network sometimes provided risky prospects. *Nahoko* got the adult entertainment job at an establishment where a friend of hers had worked. *Nahoko* gave the job information to *Maki* when she heard that *Maki* needed money after her mother's traffic accident. *Nahoko* and *Maki* worked together for about six months, earning good wages but suffering both physically and mentally; they got through by cheering each other up. *Maki* ultimately left the job, but *Nahoko* could not follow because she had considerable debt to repay. The girls share their reactions:

Last year is a year I really want to remove and forget all about...

(*Maki*, April 2006)

I really want to do an ordinary job, and I should not continue (working in the adult enter-

tainment industry) because I’m 21 years old. It’s not good, I think. You know, I cannot talk about this job to my parents. I think they might already have suspected it...maybe I wanted them to notice that because it’s too hard... (*Nahoko*, March 2006)

Thus the instrumental resources of the local network appear marginal. However, the network also has an expressive aspect, which enables network members to share their sentiments and to affirm their dignity. This is very influential in their transition. The network provides them with not only psychological support for their hard work, but also emotional resources that can help them recover from mental damage. For example, *Maki* called *Nahoko* to complain about her job when she started to work, and *Nahoko* often escaped from her office to call *Maki* for reassurance and sympathy when she was working her first job. Thanks to *Maki*’s support, *Nahoko* managed to overcome the deep depression she sank into after she quit her first job:

After I quit the job I began to wake up at four in the morning, and my heart was beating fast with fear...I was lying in my bed all day for a few weeks. I still remember that I had a morbid fear of meeting people. Then *Maki* frequently came and saw me...She took me to a live concert. I realised, ‘This is where I belong! I feel healed!...(February 2004)

For those who have serious conflicts with their parents, the local network provides sympathy, understanding, affirmation, and even refuge. *Miho* had conflicts with her family because they resented her unstable wages, and she began to condemn herself as well. She said, ‘I am lazy’. She believes that she is still suffering from the pain that came from quitting her job at the beauty salon. Frequently, *Miho* visits *Nahoko*’s house to escape the stress of family conflict and her part-time job:

[What do you do on holidays?] I’m at *Nahoko*’s house. I go there when I’m loafing on the job, too. [How often are you there?] Nearly everyday...When I run away from home, I always go over there. I am very much obliged to them. It’s like a second home for me...[Do you have someone you can talk with when you have trouble?] Yes, maybe *Nahoko*, and maybe her mother, too. You know, my mother talks on and on and my elder sister also does like my mother. They don’t listen to me. That’s why I don’t feel like saying anything ‘to them’... (March 2006)

*Rie* and *Ayano* also feel oppressed by parental conflict, particularly with their mothers. *Rie* can rarely join social activities because she must care for her mother and grandmother, but she sometimes meets *Ayano* for a talk. Their meetings allow them to express their frustrations and offer each other understanding. Though *Rie* also has friends from college, *Ayano* seems to best understand her conflict and frustration. *Rie* discusses this relationship:

I slipped away from my mother to go to meet *Ayano* last month...I felt refreshed when I talked with her...There happens to be a similar family near us. It’s hers...Both mothers depend on their daughters. They depend on us to compensate for something else. (March 2006)

*Ayano* feels not only constraint but also anxiety about her future. Her parents intend to re-

turn to their hometown after her father's retirement next year. If they go, she will have to go with them, which is something she cannot imagine. She fears that she will have a lonely life after they die, since her parents have been on bad terms with their siblings and she will have no one to rely on.

*Ayano* has another friend, *Reina*, who is also emotionally reliable. *Ayano* and *Reina* have shared an interest in animated cartoons since high school, and they once worked for the same company. They sometimes attend their favourite dubbers' shows together. She often visits *Reina*'s family and has stayed overnight on holiday. She feels more comfortable with *Reina*'s family than she does with her own:

[What do you usually talk about with your parents?]

*Reina*: Silly things, we have lots of topics. We are always laughing, aren't we?

*Ayano*: Yes, you are. I feel comfortable with your family.

[*Ayano*, why do you know that?]

*Reina*: She stays overnight with us on holiday.

*Ayano*: I'm sorry to trouble you...

*Reina*: Never mind. You're a kind of a member of my family.

(December 2005)

Thus, when they face trouble with their families or in the workplace, the network can function as an expressive resource by providing them with ontological security. Supported by their friends, they *survive* daily life, with all of its unresolvable difficulties.

#### 4 Discussion and Conclusion

Our findings about freeter girls' local networks are the following:

(1) The network is composed of members who share similar characteristics. They have attended high school together and live in the same local area, within walking or biking distance of one another. They have unstable working conditions, either working as freeters or unemployed. Though some of them have held regular jobs, the work was hard and the pay was low, with no-pay overtime. Most of them come from disadvantaged backgrounds, and many live in single-parent homes.

(2) The network has an instrumental aspect (social capital), but the instrumental resources are minimal. The job information the network provides usually relates to freeter work or risky employment in adult entertainment industry.

(3) The expressive aspect of the network effectively supports young people's well-being. Friends exchange e-mails and chat with one another by mobile phone almost every day. They share their leisure time. They rely on one another to help them recover their mental health when they suffer from depression over hard work or job loss. They offer support and refuge for members who struggle with family conflicts.

Overall, the network is a 'strong tie'(Granovetter, 1974) composed of members with similar characteristics, and the instrumental resources it provides are minimal, which may keep its members in an insecure employment situation. It is not a network for getting ahead, but for getting by (Pierson, 2002). Several Japanese researchers who have focused on social networks de-

scribe disadvantaged young people’s homogenous networks negatively (Okita, 2004), or recognise minimal efficacy since they provide little help in getting ahead (Uchida, 2005).

However, the network’s expressive aspect makes it a valuable source of relationships for its members. They share sentiments, ventilate frustrations, reach understanding on issues and problems and affirm each other as well as the other’s worth and dignity. Many young people in Japan experience depression and often withdraw from social relationships because of insecure employment or oppressive work conditions (Genda & Maganuma, 2004; Furlong, 2007). It is likely that a few of the subjects discussed here would have withdrawn from society if they did not have access to the network.

One additional important point is that young people tend to rely more on the network than on their families. Lin defines three phases of social support: community, which provides a sense of belongingness; social networks, which provide a sense of bonding; and confiding partners, which provide a sense of binding (1986). The most supportive of these is the binding relationships forged with partners and family who share understanding and responsibility for one another’s well-being. Lin’s definition applies mainly to mature adults, however, and young people’s situation is different. In childhood and early adolescence, parents are the most reliable sources of both instrumental and expressive support; this changes in middle to late adolescence. The relationship becomes less a structure of unilateral authority and more a cooperative partnership (Youniss & Smollar, 1985). Youniss and Smollar argue that adolescent friendships provide young people with a strong foothold while their relationships with their parents change, a frequently unstable and conflict-ridden period.

The transition from school to regular employment helps to transform the parent/child relationship into a cooperative one because parents regard young people as adults when they get a regular job (*Yoichiro’s* case is one example). This is problematic for those young people who get only freeter jobs, since the transformation tends to stagnate when parents do not regard them as true adults. Therefore, young people’s economic status affects their relationships with their parents, and their insecure economic condition stagnates or reverses the transformation (as is the case with *Ayano*). Disadvantaged families tend to have more conflicts that are directly or indirectly affected by economic difficulties (such as in *Miho’s* case). Disadvantaged parents often have poor mental and physical health, which can increase stress in their relationships with their children (*Rie’s* case is an example).

Disadvantaged young people’s relationships with their parents do not provide enough support in either expressive or instrumental aspects. In contrast, the local network includes not only bonding relationships, but also binding relationships based on friendship. The network is more supportive for disadvantaged and unstable young people than their relationships with parents.

We agree with other researchers that disadvantaged young people’s homogenous networks, such as the local network, need affirmative intervention to supply heterogeneous relationships, which enrich instrumental resources. However, expressive support is just as vital as instrumental support for young people who are isolated in an individualised and insecure transition, and the network provides it most reliably. Any successful intervention programme for disadvantaged young people needs to supply not only instrumental resources but also expressive resources, and must be careful to sustain the expressive aspect of young people’s network (Araya, 2006).

#### Notes

1 We define freeter as casual (so-called *arbeit*) or part-time worker, together with unemployed persons who wish to

- work as *arbeit* or part-time workers, excluding housewives and students. The number of freeters between the ages of 15-34 has climbed rapidly to 2,510,000 (MHLW, 2004). Especially over the last decade, the increase in the number is outstanding and the estimated total number of freeters has approximately doubled. This rapid growth can be seen both for males and females, though female freeters have outnumbered males by roughly 3 to 2 recently (Inui, et al., 2006b: p33).
- 2 The notion of ontological security ties in closely to the tacit character of practical consciousness, or to the 'bracketings' presumed by the 'natural attitude' in everyday life. The natural attitude brackets out questions about ourselves, others and the 'objectworld' which have to be taken for granted in order to keep on with everyday activity (Giddens, 1991: pp. 36-37)
  - 3 The research was based on a post-graduate seminar course at Tokyo Metropolitan University. It started in the autumn of 2002, when the samples were in the last academic year of high school. They were composed of students of two general-course public high schools in Tokyo: 'A' High School is ranked near the middle level and 'B' High School near at the bottom. We interviewed them three times: first, four to five months before their graduation; second, seven to twelve months after their graduation; and third, approximately three years after their graduation. Each interview lasted thirty minutes to one hour. The interviews were recorded, and manuscripts were analysed and evaluated in the case seminar. The first sweep covered 89 young people, the second 51, and the third 40.
  - 4 Job information and placement for high school students are mainly provided by teachers in Japan. The system has been combined with the new graduate recruitment practice, which means that companies recruit their core workers solely from new graduates, and almost all high school graduates transitioned from school to regular employment directly from the 1960s to 1980s (Inui, 1993; Inui, 2003).
  - 5 'Regular' job refers to a full time job without a terminated contract.

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