

《論文》

Marginalization and Activism: A Narrative Study of Women Activists in Japan

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Abstract

This paper briefly summarizes some of the research literature on Japanese women and discusses a study of Japanese women activist leaders. It provides insight into their experiences as marginalized women who have shown leadership. As marginalized Japanese, the women have experienced some of the same types of oppression historically experienced by women in patriarchal Japanese society. However, they have worked to negotiate and overcome some of those oppressions, including some that existed within their families so that they could continue to engage in their activism. Their curiosity led them to gather information about issues related to their children's illnesses, and they talked to people to gather information and explore activities to solve the problems. Moreover, they networked and created communities with others and found creative ways to improve their situations and the situations of others experiencing similar hardships. Through their activism, they showed leadership and activism that fit into the elements of Harro's Cycle of Liberation (2000). The women participants all felt their activism was a driving force in their lives, with little separation between their activism and other parts of their lives. In a world less accepting of diversity and people willing to actively work for social change, research such as this is becoming more important.

Women's issues have been prominent in headlines all over the world recently. The worldwide #MeToo movement focusing on difficulties women have faced, and the need to increase women leaders and managers have motivated many people to discuss women-related topics. Internationally, we can find research about these movements in many countries. However, when looking at research in Japan, it is more difficult to find studies on current women issues. This paper briefly summarizes some of the research conducted about Japanese women and a study of Japanese women activist leaders.

Literature Review

A review of the literature on women in Japan shows many works describing the history of feminism and activism in Japan. Much of the literature shows how social and legal constraints have worked to force women to be subservient. Dales (2009), Mackie (2002, 2003), Fujimura-Fanselow and Kameda (1995) and others dedicate extensive space to show the history of oppression and of feminism in Japan. Dales points out that while some Japanese women avoid the term feminism, they often see gender as a critical factor in social and political issues and engage in activism as feminist engagement.

Historically, women have been viewed as less capable with roles to support a patriarchal

society in ways that were prescribed to them. Mackie (2003) describes how Japanese women in the late 1800s were not allowed to attend public meetings. When some women finally did attend them and speak up, there was opposition to their presence, and eventually a law was passed making it illegal for women to take part in public debates. However, even before the law was passed, it was uncommon for women to openly speak up, and those who did were ridiculed for not knowing their proper place in society. Women's place in Japanese society was considered supporting male-dominated institutions, including patriarchal families, legal and political institutions, and workplaces dominated by men. According to Mackie (2002, 2003), Condon (1995) and Kaneko (2011) women were expected to have sons to carry on the family name. As they aged and their sons became adults, women were expected to follow the guidance of their sons. Hane (1982) points out "Under the strong patriarchal system that prevailed in prewar Japan, women were generally deemed to be inferior beings, and according to law, wives were treated as minors. Daughters had virtually no say in whom they were to marry and no legal claim to the family property; their interests were entirely subordinated to those of the men" (p. 79). Because women did not have the right to vote, it was difficult for them to change laws or push for equal right laws.

According to Mackie (2003), during the Meiji period (1868-1912), higher schools for women were linked to providing partners for men in suitable class positions as the education system became increasingly stratified. Women were perceived to be key players in the family structure as nurturers of children and supporters of husbands. When the Meiji state extended Confucian ideology to the state, women became supporters of the military and state since husbands and children were necessary as soldiers and nurses. Women were expected to give birth to soldiers to support the state. Even though women went to work in factories to support the Japanese economy during war, in the post-war period, women were expected to give up their jobs to men and go home to support fathers, husbands and sons from home. Even today as part-time and domestic laborers, women are not accorded the same status and respect as men who have full-time permanent employment. This is shown through the taxation system which makes it advantageous for married women to work fewer hours, which in turn conditions their "choice" to engage in part-time work (Mackie, 2003, p. 9).

Women Activism

Feminist activists have attempted to gain legitimacy as political activists from a position that places gender difference in the context of other kinds of diversity. They have worked towards creation of a new identity as creators of political change (Mackie, 2003, p. 10). The first record of a public speech made by a Japanese woman was in late 1881 by Kishida Toshiko. Even though she became a regular attendee of public meetings in the 1880s, and inspired other women activists to openly express their views, the press often focused on her appearance and dress

rather than her words, and her behavior at the meetings was sensationalized. This shows how public spaces were already being gendered as masculine spaces and that women were already being made “others”. (Mackie, 2003, p. 20). Later, regulations were passed to explicitly exclude women from political activities and public meetings. In fact, Kishida was arrested in 1883 for a public speech that included criticism of the family system, which she saw as limiting women’s education and depriving them of opportunities to develop into politically responsible adults (Mackie, 2003, p. 20). As a result of Kishida’s activities from 1905 to 1908, socialist women worked to petition government officials to rescind laws prohibiting women from participation in politics and political parties (Mackie, 2003, p. 35). Limits for attending public political meets for women was modified in 1922. However, women still did not gain suffrage. All adult males over 25 were granted suffrage in 1925, including male residents from Taiwan and Korea living in Japan. Women gained the right to vote only after the end of World War II at the end of 1945 (Kameda, 2011).

In addition to indigenous Japanese activism, women were influenced greatly by feminist movements in the US and Great Britain. From the early 1900s, a group of women began to publish translations and commentary of Western (American and British) plays and articles. They were interested in individual self-expression while continuing to raise their children. Until this time, Japanese individuals were seen to subordinate their own needs for the common good; men to the state, and women to the patriarchal family and ultimately to the state. Their reframing of motherhood and the family led them to examine the politics of maternity and reproduction of future workers, soldiers, politicians and citizens as well as issues of sexuality, pregnancy and childbirth (Mackie, 2003, pp. 48–53).

As a result of Japan needing women to provide labor in factories while men became soldiers during the war periods, women gained the added burden of working outside the home in addition to their duties to the family. Yamakawa Kikue was a woman activist who worked for equality of women in society and better working conditions. In the early 1920s, Yamakawa made extensive demands.

These demands included: the abolition of the household head system; abolition of all laws which treated women as incompetents; equality as grounds for divorce for both sexes; the granting to women and colonized people the same rights to education and employment as mainland males; a standard living wage regardless of age or sex; equal wages and equal treatment for all regardless of sex or race; nursing time (30 minutes per 3 hours worked) and nursing rooms for working women; prohibition of the sacking of women on the grounds of marriage or pregnancy; and abolition of the prostitution system (Mackie, 2003, pp. 81–82).

Yamakawa argued that women were constantly under the vigilance of factory dormitory supervisors or parents if they lived at home. She criticized the feudalistic family system that

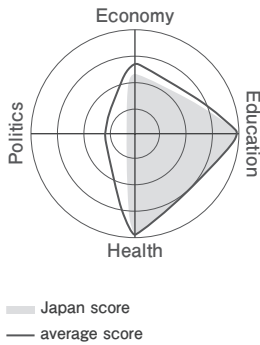
shackled men and women and that hampered women's class consciousness. In fact, Yamakawa pointed out that women were hindered by the twin shackles of sex and class, saying that they were doubly exploited as women and workers (Mackie, 2003). Women were able to join unions and did so; however, due to remaining limitations placed on women joining political parties, women were still excluded from the main organizations of political influence (Mackie, 2003, p. 84).

While Yamakawa and other early activists focused on women in relation to men, as Japan colonized other countries, they recognized imported labor and immigration had created another group of people who faced prejudice due to unequal wages and treatment. As more Japanese women came in contact with them, some began to include more minority and immigrant women in their activism. However, for the most part, research on women belonging to marginalized groups such as Ainu, Zainichi-Korean, and Buraku People groups are often overlooked. On the other hand, with the increase in use of intersectionality theory and multiple oppressions theories to examine marginalized communities, the complexities of women in Japanese society and women who belong to marginalized groups in Japan are being increasingly documented (Chapman, Dales & Mackie, 2008). In particular, women researchers such as Houston (1992), Tai (2006) and Fujimura-Fanselow (2011), and women from marginalized communities, such as those documented by The International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism-Japan Committee (2009, 2016) and Hansabetsu Kokusai Undō Nihon Iinkai (2007), point out that women do not experience things simply as women and members of a certain ethnic, cultural, or socioeconomic group. They experience them in an altogether different way from men from the same group. They indicate that it is impossible to separate being a woman from other parts of identity.

Though the history of activism has focused particularly on such issues as oppression within a patriarchal society, societal pressure to take care of the family, low wages and political power, Mackie (2003), Fujimura-Fanselow (2011) and others point out that the same issues still exist. They contend that, while more women do work outside the home and more have been elected and make higher salaries than in the past, the situation has still not advanced as greatly as in many other countries. This can be seen in Figure 1 with Japan's continual poor ranking in the Global Gender Gap Index in 2017. While it may be in part due to advances by other countries, Japan's rank fell to number 114 out of 144 countries in gender gap statistics due to reversal of progress on economic participation and opportunity and political empowerment categories (World Economic Forum, 2017, p. 17).

The UN Human Rights Commission and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) Committee have repeatedly called for the Japanese government to make more progress at a faster rate to improve the human rights of women. In order to work towards this goal, Wakakuwa and Fujimura-Fanselow (2011) say that it will be

SCORE AT GLANCE



	2006		2017	
	rank	score	rank	score
Global Gender Gap score	80	0.645	114	0.657
Economic participation and opportunity	83	0.545	114	0.580
Educational attainment	60	0.986	74	0.991
Health and survival	1	0.980	1	0.980
Political empowerment	83	0.067	123	0.078
rank out of	115		144	

Figure 1. 2017 Global Gender Gap score for Japan (World Economic Forum, 2017).

necessary for women activists to press for political reforms of “customs and system established by the sex that has long held privileges and power” (p. 353). They further explain that these elements of the system include political determination, equality in the workplace, equality in the home, elimination of compulsory heterosexuality and freedom of creative spaces.

Leadership and Activist Development

This study also looks at leadership development, abilities, and skills of women activists. Therefore, it is necessary to clarify the meaning of leadership. Helmrich (2016) defines leader as a person who attempts to achieve goals by inspiring people to support and help achieve those goals. Schedlitzki and Edwards (2014) point out that it focuses on social construct influenced by leader, followers and society in recognizing diverse styles of leadership exhibited by leaders. There is recognition that women leadership differs from traditional male models of leadership. Chin and Tremble (2014) point out that diversity leadership focuses on not only who leaders are, but also “what they bring” from their identities and lived experiences that have helped create those identities. They continue and point out that these often include experiences of marginalization, oppression and inequity (p. 17). These experiences give them the skills to be leaders and are the reasons it is necessary to listen to the stories of leaders in their own words.

The current idea is that a leader influences and manages depending on the situation, culture, relations, and other factors. One model that can be used to show how people develop into leaders and activists is Harro’s Cycle of Liberation (2000) that takes a sociological approach to development as is shown in Figure 2. The Cycle of Liberation shows how socially conscious members of society come to understand oppression and seek ways to create social change. While doing this, they move towards empowerment and liberation (Harro, 2000, p. 463), This model illustrates an individual experiencing an epiphany that wakes them up to awareness of a problem. Upon experiencing awareness, the individual begins to educate themselves about the problem and empower themselves at the same time. While self-educating, the individual reaches

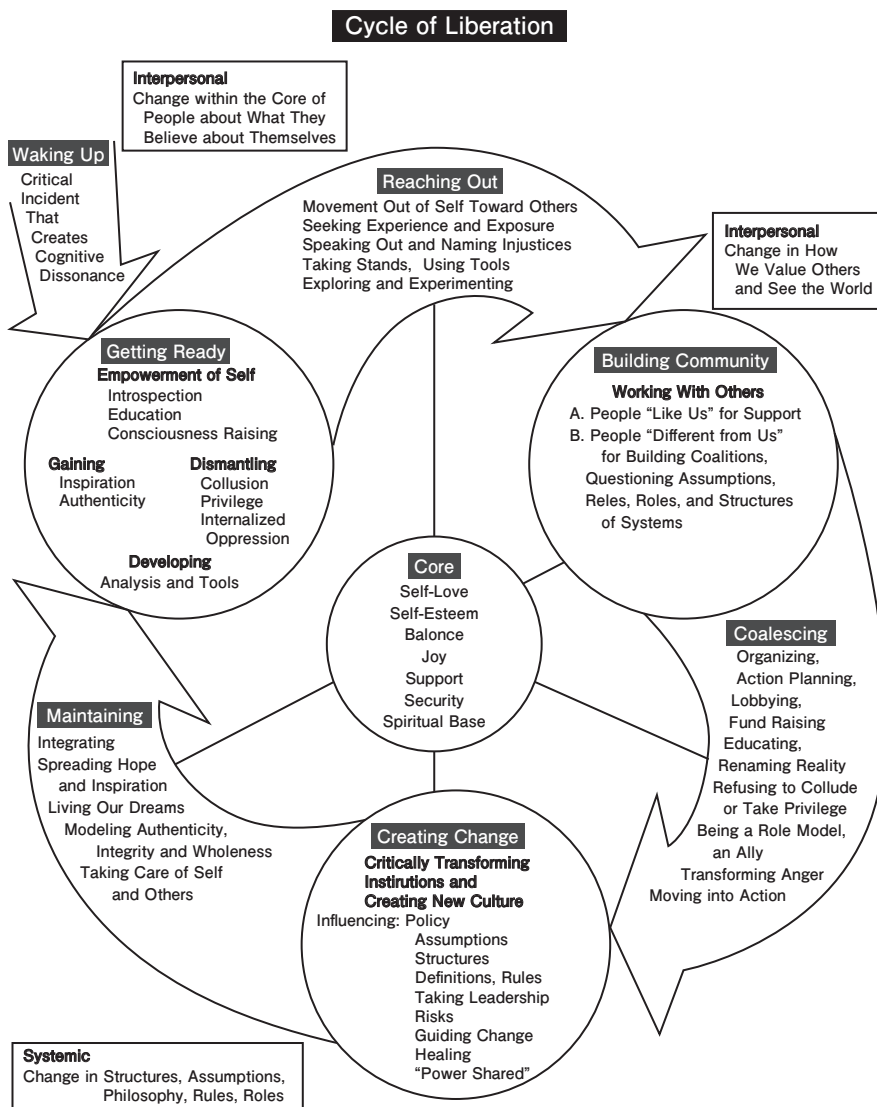


Figure 2. Cycle of Liberation (Harro, 2000, p. 464).

out to others seeking more knowledge and meeting people who have similar experiences and knowledge. This process of connecting with others creates networks and communities of people with similar ideas and experiences as well as with those who are different, but who want to join forces or to become allies. They begin organizing and taking action to influence and create change. Their activism leads to changes in the system such as social change, political or legal change and other aspects. Finally, their actions result in others seeing their efforts and provide inspiration and motivation to others. This inspiration may in turn be the experience that wakes up another individual to an issue and restart the process. The ideal result is freeing players in society from oppression and creating an equal society.

Method

This study was a qualitative study using narrative inquiry to gain an understanding of women activist leaders' experiences and views. Creswell (2014) explains that qualitative research is especially beneficial in exploring and understanding meanings individuals and groups assign to social and human problems. Narrative research is valuable in using interviews to get a holistic idea of the inner world of study participants' social realities (Josselson, 2013). This makes a narrative inquiry style of qualitative research method especially effective for gaining insight and understanding the experiences, activities, and views of marginalized women activist leaders in Japan.

I utilized narrative inquiry to understand why some Japanese women became activists as well as why and how some became activist leaders. My preliminary research question was: How have women in Japan become social activist leaders?

In addition, I investigated the following questions:

- 1) What were their experiences of marginalization, oppression, agency, and activism?
- 2) What influenced them to become activist leaders?
- 3) How did they think of themselves in their activist/leadership role?
- 4) What problems were they attempting to address and what was their methodology?
- 5) Did they believe their life and activist experiences had helped them develop leadership skills? If they did believe they helped, in what ways?

Narrative inquiry is a method of gathering data that takes into account not only stories, but lived experiences, including events, actions, and happenings that are woven into the stories (Trahar, 2009). Through interactions between the researcher as listener and participant as storyteller, the true voice, how the stories were experienced, and how they were produced can be conveyed (Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou, 2013). Kim (2016) uses the metaphor of a quilt to describe narrative inquiry. She explains how each quilt is made out of pieces of personal and social stories collected from any section of a participant's life to reflect a part of the world in which they live (p. xv).

I conducted interviews with five women social activist leaders to capture complexity and insight into their experiences. They were all living in the Kansai area and participated in environmental activism and other social issues. Interviews allowed me to see how they viewed peripheral events directly and indirectly and the emotions involved. As Creswell (2014) suggests, I used purposive sampling, in which study participants were chosen based on their ability to aid in understanding stories related to the research question; how women in Japan become social activist leaders. The five women activists were chosen because of their activism predominantly through referral from other women activists and interview participants. An activist acquaintance introduced me to a well-known environmental activist in Kyoto. When I

contacted her, she invited me to join a petition several activists, including women activists she considered leaders, were presenting to the Shiga Prefectural government. The women's activities were focused on environmental safety and food safety. After the formal petition requesting the prefectural government create a contingency evacuation plan in the case of a nuclear power plant accident, I joined their discussion at a coffee shop. While there, I explained about my research and asked them if they would be willing to participate in my study. Two members said they would be interested, and later one took the role of organizer and helped set up times and places for the five interviews.

Before beginning the interviews, I explained in Japanese the goals of the research and the reasons for asking the interview questions. After the explanation, I gave them a copy of the Japanese research letter and requested their signature on a Japanese informed consent form. In addition, I informed participants that there were no anticipated risks associated with participating in any parts of the study, but that they could withdraw at any time without penalty. When conducting the interview, I informed them that they did not need to answer any question they did not want to answer. I asked them what language they wanted to do the interview in, and all the participants wanted to conduct them in Japanese. I told them that I may have follow-up questions and would contact them by email or telephone in that case. In addition, I told them participation in this study would remain confidential. I also told them pseudo-names would be used if any of their comments were mentioned in research reports. Finally, I offered to provide them with an electronic or paper copy of the study results based on the research after the study was completed.

As Bailey (1994) suggests, I asked macro-level questions related to background and general lifestyles to help establish a rapport with interviewees. However, I collected information about their date of birth, hometown, education and families via paper questionnaires to preserve each study participant's privacy. I then asked them to tell me their stories especially focusing on their activism. I periodically asked followed up questions based on their responses to encourage participants to clarify some points or so I could gain more insight into the contexts and meaning of their experiences. The interviews lasted 90 minutes to two hours and were recorded using digital recorders.

Results

Even though the five women activists were all very different, the study participants all explained in detail about their relationships with one another and their most recent projects. At first they talked mainly about their anti-nuclear power plants activism and efforts to help victims of the Fukushima power plant disaster after the Tohoku earthquake and tidal wave damaged it. They described their difficulties in starting projects and continuing them. They used rich emotional descriptions to paint a picture of their efforts and the satisfaction they

received from their actions. The women also explained the support they gained from each other as they collaborated in their endeavors. They all agreed that it was important to work together with others so that they could motivate each other and empower one another.

When they explained how they became involved in social activism, they all had similar stories of becoming aware of one of their children experiencing health problems due to unsafe food, such as foods treated with chemicals that caused allergies. After discovering the cause of their children's illnesses, they all sought more information. Most of them not only read reports and studies about unsafe foods and their relations to the environment, but also attended lectures and seminars where they met other similarly minded people. Moreover, they met women like them who wanted to do something to improve their children's lives and that of others. They also sought groups that would help them organize to take their complaints to government officials, such as the petition for government responsibility in case of a nuclear accident in Shiga Prefecture.

Another story they included about their lives was their relationship with their families and friends. Most of them described their husbands not understanding their wanting to become involved. They talked about arguing with their spouses because of their long hours of activism interfering with their ability to take care of their families, especially their husbands. One of the main duties in conflict was often cooking meals and cleaning house, two traditional jobs done by women in Japan. Two of the women went so far as to say these conflicts almost led to divorce. On the other hand, one participant said that her husband supported her activities entirely. Even the two women whose husbands were against their activities in the beginning eventually accepted their efforts and supported them.

Discussion

All of the participants experienced some oppression as women. They described their duties to their families and being forced to take care of their children and husbands. This is similar to Mackie's (2003) account of women in Japan being subservient to a continuing patriarchal system. At least one woman activist also talked about experiencing oppression of class as well. Similar to Yamakawa's story, (Mackie, 2003), she talked about life as a woman and as a worker being used in an oppressive system. However, the women activists worked to overcome patriarchal families and work within oppressive social and political systems. They found other women to work together and showed leadership and activism to influence change. They did this while finding something to be passionate about and enrich their lives.

This pattern fits Harro's Cycle of Liberation (2000), shown in Figure 2, in which all the components influence each other in a circular way while showing leadership and activist tendencies, abilities, and skills. The stories told by the women activist participants and the ways they reflect the research questions show how they have reacted to oppression and shown

characteristics similar to the Cycle of Liberation.

For the question regarding their dilemmas, struggles, and agency on their journeys, the answer can be described as societal expectations and the continual patriarchal family concept described by earlier researchers such as Mackie (2003) and in Fujimura-Fanselow's (2011) works. The following dialogue by one participant shows this:

"In my case, once... Actually, not once but many times, I was about to get divorced. He said I don't need him. He said I should leave. But, I thought, if I don't do this, who would do this? My husband is a teacher, and I asked him 'Don't you care about children? You are an educator of children. Then why don't you care about children?'
'I do care about them' he said.
'Then is what I am doing wrong?'
He said 'You are doing the right thing. I understand this. But, why don't you care about our family and house?'"

For the question regarding what influenced them to become activists/leaders, answers showed strong concern about their family, especially children. Anger against the government, in particular failing to support children, motivated some of them to take action. All of the participants had at least one child who had food-related allergies. This was what Harro (2000) calls the Wake Up. To help their children, the women read about causes of unsafe food and food-related allergies and attended public events to find out more information. They continued to study and gather information about the problems and how to solve them, which led them to other related issues. This is similar to the self-educate and building community elements described in the Cycle of Liberation model. This led to discovering how to attempt to influence change related to things such as nuclear power facility policies and government policies related to food safety. This in turn gave them confidence in some cases to become involved in other social and political movements as well.

For the question "How do they think of themselves in their activist/leadership role?" participants had various responses. Many of them said they do not see themselves as leaders or that they sometimes do not perceive themselves as leaders. One participant did not make a distinction between a voluntary leader and a situational leader. She said, "...it might not be normal but when I feel like I must do this, I don't even have time to care about other people and wonder why only I have to do this so much for others. In other words, here are things that must be done, and here are things I can do." Another participant expressed the difficulty of leadership when she stated, "We don't appoint any leader, but we make the most of each person's skill." Finally, one other women activist expressed the reluctance to label her role. She said, "I'm not comfortable being called an activist...For me, this is not a job. I do this for myself. I do not intend to do this as my job. I don't want what I do to be categorized." From the women activist study

participants view, while they were reluctant to label their roles, they are aware of their actions and wish to affect change as Helmrich's (2016) definition of leadership. This also clearly matches the element of acting to create change in Harro's Cycle of Liberation (2000).

The problems they were attempting to address and their methods can be summed up as working together and working towards a better society for themselves and for all. This is demonstrated by the following words of one woman who said, "I can't be happy until everyone becomes happy." Another showed a global outlook when she said, "I would like to change Japan and to connect to the world." These ideas of trying to create a better society can also be interpreted as an attempt to inspire others to follow their activist efforts.

The methods the women activists used were communities and networks, similar to the Cycle of Liberation element. One activist's words showed her desire to work with others. She said, "...I was studying about Chernobyl. I thought studying alone is not enough, so I thought I should let everyone know about it. I visited Osaka and Kyoto to hear stories from teachers, and I got to know many people who have the same interests." Finally, one participant summed it up when she said, "Nobody is working alone, we support to cover each other. That's why we can keep going."

However, the women activists' stories are less clear regarding their beliefs about whether their life and activist experiences have helped develop leadership skills and in what ways. Indirectly, they talked about their activities and touched upon characteristics of leadership. One participant said, "If I take actions, people start to change. When I join activities, I am also influenced by many people. We gain many supporters as well." Another woman showed some tendencies to both lead and follow, motivating and empowering each other. She stated, "I think a leader's job is difficult as it is too much hassle for one person to lead the whole group, and each person has their own problems. Especially women, they have household problems....They do whatever they can do depending on each situation. So nobody is working alone, we support to cover each other. That's why we can keep going." Only one woman activist described her leadership role when she said "...leader here doesn't mean controlling or managing people but empowering them. I always select people depending on how much they can sympathize and actively be involved in the activities." Even though their ideas of their leadership roles are unclear, it is evident that they utilized communities and networks the same as illustrated in Harro's model (2000).

Conclusion

This study is limited by the small number of women activist participants. Nevertheless, it provides insight into their experiences as marginalized women who have shown leadership. As marginalized Japanese, the women have experienced some of the same types of oppression historically experienced by women in patriarchal society. However, after engaging in activism

as a result of seeing their children suffering, they have worked to negotiate and overcome some of those oppressions, including some that existed within their families. Their curiosity led them to gather information about social issues related to their children's illnesses, and they talked to people to gather information and explore activities to solve the problems. Moreover, they made connections with others and found creative ways to improve their situations and the situations of others experiencing similar hardships. Through their activism, they showed leadership and activism that fit into the elements of Harro's Cycle of Liberation (2000). In fact, they all felt their activism was a driving force in their lives, with little separation between their activism and other parts of their lives. Through their activities, they felt that they were learning and developing as they tried to influence change. In a world less accepting of diversity and people willing to actively work for social change, research such as this is becoming more important. I hope that this study will lead to other researchers to study women's stories to examine ways to highlight agents of change.

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