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Commonalities and differences in close relationships among the Americans and Japanese: A comparison by the individualism/collectivism concept*

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We examined commonalities and differences of close relationships among the Americans and Japanese by using three major propositions extracted from the individualism/collectivism concept. Responses to three kinds of social relationship scales, i.e., affective, instrumental, and conflict, were compared. Americans ($N = 547$) and Japanese ($N = 808$) of 20 to 64 years of age rated at least four significant others out of five, i.e., mother, father, partner/spouse, a child, and same-gender friend. Findings obtained by three kinds of comparisons—(1) mean scores; (2) correlation patterns; and (3) the dominant figures—indicated both commonalities and differences across the cultures. Whereas nearly half of the working hypotheses based on the three propositions derived from the individualism/collectivism concept were supported by the data, others revealed differences in the opposite direction. It is discussed that the individualism/collectivism framework may be a useful tool for cross-cultural comparisons, but not a theory or model of the Western and Eastern cultures.

Introduction

Today, most researchers will agree that humans in every culture need other people in their lives not only for survival, but also for enhancement of wellbeing (e.g, Bowlby, 1982; Cohen & Wills, 1985; Hinde, 1981; M. Lewis, 1982; Sarason & Sarason, 1985; Weiss, 1974). Studies conducted under such rubrics as attachment, close relationships, love, and social networks have indicated commonalities across cultures, that is, humans in every culture at every stage of life need others (e.g., Bowlby, 1988; M. Lewis, 1982; Takahashi, 1990). However, it is often noted that when people choose others as significant, they also take into account various kinds of ecological constraints and cultural expectations as well as their own preferences (e.g., Elder, Modell, & Parke, 1993; Kahn & Antonucci, 1980; Weisner & Bernheimer, 1998). We therefore reasonably expect both commonalities and differences in social relationships across cultures. However, our knowledge is still limited as to how people across cultures differ and are similar in selections of appropriate significant others to fulfil their need for stable and close relationships while negotiating socio-cultural constraints.

Many scholars have long observed that there appear to be significant differences in how social relationships are construed in the United States and Japan. In early cross-cultural comparisons, Ruth Benedict (1946), an American, characterised Japanese society as collectivistic in contrast to her mother country and "laid a foundation upon which many subsequent scholars constructed models for understanding the behaviours of the Japanese" (Befu, 1980, p. 29). In another classical literature, Doi (1962/1974), a Japanese, pointed out that "in Japanese society parental dependency, *Amae*, is fostered, and this behaviour pattern is even institutionalised into its social structure, whereas perhaps the opposite of dependency prevails in Western societies" (p. 125). Both authors claimed that this collectivistic, dependent tendency of people infiltrated social relationships in Japan. This conceptualisation of cultural differences as idiocentric vs. sociocentric has appealed to social scientists who wish to explain differences between the United States and Japan, and has stimulated a vast array of discussions and writings on these differences (for review, see Aoki, 1990; Befu, 1980; Takano & Osaka, 1999).

In the last few decades, this manner of cultural contrasting of West with East around the world has been given added life by the individualism/collectivism concept (e.g., Geertz, 1974/1984; Hofstede, 1980; Miller, 1988; Schweder & Bourne, 1984; Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, & Luca, 1988). In particular, the paper by Markus and Kitayama (1991) has reactivated the traditional discussions of the United States–Japan differences, although they have preferred the term independence/interdependence to individualism/collectivism. Many researchers have utilised the concept to generate their hypotheses or interpret their findings between the Americans and the Japanese, not only in psychology (e.g., Gudykunst et al., 1992; Harter, 1999; Kashima et al., 1995; Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, & Norasakkunkit, 1997; Markus,

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Mullally, & Kitayama, 1997; Matsumoto, 1999; Rothbaum, Pott, Azuma, Miyake, & Weisz, 2000; Triandis, 1995), but also in various other disciplines such as economics and management (e.g., Ezrati, 1999; Odaka, 1984), language communications (e.g., Ide, 1999; Ikegami, 2000; Suzuki, 1976), and education (e.g., C.C. Lewis, 1995). These authors have, explicitly or implicitly, used the concept in the most convenient ways for each of them to interpret or explain their various observations in the two nations.

In this paper, we have also adopted this conventional framework to compare close relationships, that is, relationships between the self and significant others. We have attempted to understand how and to what extent the two groups of people from different cultural backgrounds of the United States and Japan, who both live in highly modernised, and capitalistic but culturally different societies, have commonalities and differences in social relationships.

Propositions extracted from the individualism/ collectivism concept

The individualism/collectivism concept proposes the idea of plotting the various cultures of the world on a single continuum line, where the two extremes, individualistic and collectivistic, are at either end. It is hypothesised that on this bipolar dimension, most Western cultures are placed relatively close to the individualistic end, and Eastern cultures toward the collectivistic end (Kagitçibasi, 1996, 1997, for review).

To date, this has been the most popular framework to compare Eastern and Western cultures. The popularity of the individualism/collectivism concept can be attributed to its global, abstract nature. That is, as Kagitçibasi (1997) has observed, researchers have arbitrarily defined the individualism/collectivism concept or extracted from it what they find individually or personally meaningful, often those "plausible" propositions which they find most useful in explaining their own findings (e.g., Cousins, 1989; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Rothbaum et al., 2000). For cross-cultural examinations using the individualism/collectivism concept, we therefore believe that the propositions we seek to examine should be clarified. In this paper, we extract the following three major propositions that have often been suggested by the concept of close relationships between the self and significant others.

Proposition 1: People in individualistic cultures will be more independent in social relationships than people in collectivistic cultures. This implies that people in individualistic cultures are largely independent and psychologically separated from others, whereas people in collectivistic cultures are supposed to relate more to or be more closely connected with others (Hofstede, 1980; Kashima et al., 1995; Marksu & Kitayam, 1991; Shweder & Bourne, 1984; Triandis, 1989; Weisz, Rothbaum, & Blackburn, 1984). Typically, it is posited that "Western cultures are organised according to meanings and practices that promote the independence and autonomy of a self that is separate from other selves,—in contrast, many Asian cultures do not highlight the explicit separation of each individual, and they are organised according to meanings and practices that promote the fundamental connectedness among individuals" (Kitayama et al., 1997, p. 1247). This is the most popular, conventional proposition derived from the individualism/ collectivism concept.

Proposition 2: People in individualistic cultures do not have a strong desire to maintain harmonious relationships with other members. This proposition holds that people in individualistic cultures are motivated to achieve closer relationships with a selected few, and are willing to clearly express negative emotions toward others (Ho & Chiu, 1994; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1995). In contrast, it implies that people in collectivistic cultures have a strong desire to maintain relations across all people with whom they interact and consistently attempt to avoid the possibility of hurting others' feelings. Triandis and his colleagues (1988; Triandis, 1989) hypothesise "in-group harmony" in collectivistic cultures. Their assessment instrument of individualism/collectivism is illustrative and includes statements that represent collectivism: "It is important for me to maintain harmony with my group"; "I hate to disagree with others in my group" (Triandis, 1995; pp. 206–207). In this vein, it is assumed that in order to keep relationships harmonious, people in collectivistic cultures will maintain, or at least report, less articulated social relationships than people in individualistic cultures do. In other words, where individuality is the norm, people will select their own appropriate persons to relate to and therefore can more clearly identify the dominantly important affective figure than people whose culture is collectivistic.

Proposition 3: People in individualistic cultures are not integrated into "ingroups", especially into a family. This emphasises that people in individualistic cultures are expected to be independent from every social group including their own family (Jansz, 1991; Triandis, 1995), with the exception of one's romantic partner or spouse (Feeney, 1999; Hazan & Shaver, 1987), because they have cultivated a belief that the married or romantically involved couple is sacrosanct (Shweder, Jensen, & Goldstein, 1995). In contrast, in collectivistic cultures, people highly value filial piety as well as loyalty to parents and elders in general (Cha, 1994; Hofstede, 1980, 1991). In such cultures, people are highly concerned with family members, especially with blood relatives. For instance, Hofstede noted that in collectivistic cultures, "people are integrated into strong, cohesive ingroups which throughout people's lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty" (1991, p. 51). At the same time, it is often suggested that "the ingroup–outgroup distinction is vital" in collectivistic cultures (Gudykunst et al., 1992; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). In this vein, we can assume that people in collectivistic cultures cultivate their close relationships mostly within their group, whereas their counterparts in individualistic cultures extend their close relationships beyond the biological ingroup to embrace such figures as friends of the same gender. Thus, it is assumed that biological family members will take the most important role in the frameworks of social relationships possessed by people in collectivistic cultures. In contrast, among their counterparts in individualistic cultures, nonfamily members as well as one's romantic partner or spouse may also be assigned a dominant role in the framework.

Methodological issues in cross-cultural comparisons

In cross-cultural comparisons, researchers take great pains to find or construct measurements and procedures that will be valid across cultures, and directly compare the quantitative and qualitative data between the cultures. However, cultural psychologists who are unsatisfied with the traditional cross-

cultural psychology often accuse the conventional procedure of cross-cultural studies, that is, the direct comparisons of mean scores between cultures, of being "methodological behaviourism" (e.g., Greenfield, 1997). As suggested by cultural psychologists, direct comparisons between cultures sometimes mislead researchers to simple conclusions about cultural differences. In fact, it is based on direct comparisons of scores or frequencies that researchers have established the popular premise, "The Americans are more independent than their Japanese counterparts" (e.g., Cousins, 1989; Kashima et al., 1995; Triandis, 1989). However, this premise has not always been supported by other studies, some of which are even based on the same or similar questionnaires (Takano & Osaka, 1999).

We agree with Greenfield's warning. However, she has not succeeded in proposing alternative ways to study cultures; instead, she has suggested some successful comparative studies between cultures and subcultures (Greenfield, 1997). As the matter stands, we believe that direct comparison of mean scores will be effective in the study of cultures if we could compensate for its deficits by making other, supplementary comparisons. In the present study, we propose and carry out two supplementary analyses: comparisons of correlation patterns among social figures, and comparisons of the relative status for each social figure in hierarchical structures of social relationships.

Furthermore, in cross-cultural comparisons, Western-developed assessments or procedures have been over-representative. For a long time, Western-developed measurements have been applied to African or Asian cultures in order to make cultural comparisons. As every tool is coloured by each cultural condition under which the tool has been constructed, if we apply assessing instruments that are constructed in the East, we may highlight different aspects of social relationships between East and West. In this study, we used a Japanese-developed assessment instrument constructed by the first author (Takahashi & Sakamoto, 2000).

Plan of this paper

A major goal of this investigation was to examine commonalities and differences in cross-national data concerning the close relationships of American and Japanese people by the three propositions of the individualism/collectivism concept mentioned earlier. In the data-set, three kinds of social relationships, i.e., affective (e.g., seeking emotional support), instrumental (e.g., seeking material support), and conflict (e.g., complaining of too many demands) of each of five significant social figures, i.e., mother, father, partner/spouse, a child, and a same-gender friend, were described by the same assessing instrument in both the United States and Japan.

In this paper, we shall first mention three clusters of hypotheses that corresponded to the propositions, then describe findings through the three kinds of cross-cultural comparisons: (1) mean scores; (2) correlation patterns; and (3) relative dominance of social figures in the individual's social framework. Finally, we discuss to what degree the findings were explained by the individualism/collectivism notion.

Working hypotheses

We examined the following three clusters of hypotheses.

Cluster 1. Based on *Proposition 1: People in individualistic cultures will be more independent in social relationships than people in collectivistic cultures*, it was expected that both (1-1) affective and (1-2) instrumental scores toward all of one's significant others would be lower among American participants than among the Japanese.

Cluster 2. Based on *Proposition 2: People in individualistic cultures do not have a strong desire to maintain harmonious relationships with other members*, it was expected that, as the Americans are not highly concerned with harmony in relationships, (2-1) their scores concerning conflicts in relationships would be higher than those of Japanese. Moreover, as the Americans would express their negative emotions clearly, we assumed that (2-2) the Americans would report higher negative correlation coefficients between conflict and positive emotions toward the same figure than the Japanese. And in contrast, since the Japanese are largely reluctant to express preferences between others, they would report more undifferentiated close relationships than their American counterparts. In other words, the Japanese would direct emotional and instrumental needs similarly toward individual others, whereas Americans would make distinctions among the various social figures. That is, we could expect that (2-3) the degree of correlations between positive relationship scores of significant figures would be lower among the Americans. It was also assumed that as the Americans prefer articulated social relationships, we would find that (2-4) more people would be willing to state which person meant the most to them affectively in the United States than in Japan.

Cluster 3. Based on *Proposition 3: People in individualistic cultures are not integrated into "ingroups", especially into a family,* we expected that (3-1a) the affective and (3-2a) the instrumental scores of biological family members among the Americans would be lower than among their Japanese counterparts. As the Americans more freely expand their social relations beyond biological family members than the Japanese, we expected that (3-1b, 3-2b) the affective and the instrumental scores toward friends as well as partner/spouse would be higher among the Americans. Moreover, because Americans have cultivated a belief in the importance of the couple (Schweder, Jensen, & Goldstein, 1995) and have developed closer relationships with nonfamily members, while the Japanese have long given prime importance to the biological family-centred relationship, we hypothesised that there would be differences in kinds and proportions of the dominant types of relationships between the cultures. That is, among American people we could expect more nonbiological family-dominant types, largely Partner/Spouse- and Friend-types (3-3b), whereas among Japanese people we expected to find greater number of biological family-dominant types, such as Mother- and Child-types (3-3a).

Method

Participants and procedure

Data were drawn from the United States–Japan cross-national survey, Social Relations and Mental Health over the Life Course. Females and males over 13 years old were selected based on a stratified probability sampling procedure from the

Greater Detroit metropolitan area and the Greater Yokohama metropolitan area. These areas were chosen as being comparable in terms of size, distribution of population, and demographic characteristics. People over the age of 60, and females who had at least one child between 8 and 12 years old, were over-sampled to get enough elderly people and child-mother pairs for another purpose of this cross-national survey. The sample consisted of 1479 Americans (aged 13–93) and 1637 Japanese (aged 13–92) (see Table 1). Data were collected in 1992–1994 in the USA, and in 1991 in Japan. The response rates for this study were 72% in the USA and 67% in Japan. All participants were interviewed individually in their homes by professional interviewers using a structured questionnaire and a variety of assessment instruments. Each face-to-face interview lasted approximately 1 hour.

Selection of the intact sample and core sample for analysis

To best evaluate our hypotheses, we selected two kinds of sample between 20 to 64 years of age from the parent data-set. First, we selected "intact" participants, that is, those who provided responses concerning all five figures, i.e., mother, father, partner or spouse, a child, and a same-gender best friend, on the affective scale. In the intact sample, responses of a total of 593 participants (205 from the United States and 388 from Japan) were analysed, as shown in Table 1. For the intact sample, we analysed 26, 12, 42, and 25% of the parent sample from 20 to 64 years of age; American female, American male, Japanese female, and Japanese male, respectively. As the proportion of the intact sample to the parent sample was not large enough, we also chose "core" participants from the parent sample, who had reported at least four figures out of five. That is, the core sample consisted of participants who rated four figures and those who reported all five figures, i.e., the intact sample. In the core sample, as shown in Table 1, responses of a total of 1355 participants (547 from the United States and 808 from Japan) were analysed. Those participants were 59, 49, 77, and 68% of the parent sample; American female, American male, Japanese female, and Japanese male, respectively. Among the Americans who rated four figures out of five, father (35% for females and 33% for males), child (23% and 36%), or friend of the same gender (27% and 22%) were not rated, whereas among the Japanese, father (55% and 40%) or child (34% and 52%) was missed. From the parent sample of ages 20 to 64, as shown in Table 2, 41, 51, 23, and 32% of the respondents (American female, American male, Japanese female, and Japanese male, respectively) were excluded because they reported about three figures or fewer.

Assessment of social relationships

Three aspects of social relationships toward multiple significant others were investigated in this study: affective, instrumental, and conflict. The participants were asked to give separate 5-point ratings (from 5 = "agree" to 1 = "disagree") for their relationships with each of five figures: the mother, the father, the closest same-gender friend, the romantic partner or spouse, and a child the participant relied on the most if she or he had any.

Specifically, affective relationships, that is, core, relatively stable, and positive emotional relationships were measured by six items from the Affective Relationships Scale (ARS) constructed by the first author in the course of prior research among the Japanese (Takahashi, 1974, 1990; Takahashi & Sakamoto, 2000). The affective relationships score (AR score) was constructed by taking the mean of the responses to the following six items: (1) "I feel my (e.g.) mother supports me, that she is there when I need her." (2) "I enjoy being with my mother." (3) "I feel that my mother believes in me." (4) "It makes me happy to know my mother is happy." (5) "When my mother is having a hard time, I want to help her," and (6) "I feel my mother encourages me in whatever I do." Only 6 out of the total 12 ARS items were included in the present study. Correlation scores between the 12-item ARS and the 6-item ARS as to mother, friend, the closest friend, and a romantic partner among college students were .94, .96, 94, and .96, respectively. Cronbach αs of the 6-item ARS were: mother, .82, .84; father, .83, .90; friend, .78, .74; romantic partner/spouse, .90, .81; child, .75, .72; for the Americans and the Japanese, respectively.

The instrumental relationships score (IR score) was the means of responses on the following two typical items: (1) "I feel my (e.g.) mother would help me out financially if I needed it", and (2) "I feel my mother would take care of me if I were sick", with the following Cronbach αs: mother, .71, .75; father, .80, .71; friend, .61, .66; romantic partner/spouse, .62,

Table 1
Composition of the samples by culture and gender

	Parent sample				*Intact sample*				*Core sample*			
	Americans		*Japanese*		*Americans*		*Japanese*		*Americans*		*Japanese*	
Age	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*
13–19	31	38	70	69								
20–29	105	70	102	107	33	8	21	11	82	40	91	87
30–39	196	121	195	88	69	24	140	43	142	79	185	78
40–49	140	97	200	108	43	14	94	32	82	48	167	75
50–64	145	127	158	142	9	5	23	24	37	37	64	61
65–74	135	104	114	117								
74+	119	51	85	82								
Total	871	608	924	713	154	51	278	110	343	204	507	301

Table 2
Number of figures given ratings by culture and gender

	Americans		*Japanese*	
Number	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*
5 figures	154	51	278	110
4 figures	189	153	229	191
3 figures	159	131	112	115
2 figures	69	59	31	23
1 figure	15	21	5	6
Total	586	415	655	445

The intact sample consisted of the participants who provided ratings of five figures. The core sample consisted of the participants who provided five and four figures.

.63; child, .61, .63; for the Americans and the Japanese, respectively.

The conflict relationships score (CR score) was the mean for the two items that represented conflict feelings with others: (1) "My (e.g.) mother makes too many demands on me", and (2) "My mother gets on my nerves". Both pairs of items are representative, typical items that have been used in previous research (e.g., Antonucci, 1985; Rook, 1984), with the following Cronbach αs: mother, .61, .77; father, .56, .80; friend, .63, .81; romantic partner/spouse, .61, .81; child, .67, .79; for the Americans and the Japanese, respectively.

Through intensive pilot interviews in both the United States and Japan, all of the scales were carefully examined. The wording was adapted to convey the same meaning across the cultures.

Results

Comparisons of mean scores: Three aspects of social relationships among American and Japanese people

The responses to the scales of the three aspects of social relationships among all five figures in the United States and Japan among the core sample are shown in Figures 1a to 1f. They were subjected to a 2 × 2 × 5 × 3 (Gender × Culture × Figure × Aspect of social relationships) ANOVA, with figure and aspect as within-subject variables, and gender and culture as between-subject variables, to affirm gender differences. However, as ANOVA with repeated measures automatically excluded the participants who had not reported all of the five figures, those ANOVAs were actually calculated among the intact sample. The main effect of gender was significant, $F(1, 594) = 5.17$, $p < .02$, with higher mean scores for females than males. This is consistent with previous social relationships research (e.g., Antonucci & Akiyama, 1987, Feiring & Lewis, 1991; Gilligan, 1982/1993). In light of this finding, further analyses were conducted separately for females and males.

For females and males separately, 2 × 5 × 3 (Culture × Figure × Aspect of social relationships) ANOVAs, with figure and aspect as within-subject variables, and culture as a between-subject variable, were conducted. Results indicated significant main effects of Culture, $F(1, 437) = 667.60$; $F(1, 157) = 188.33$, $ps < .001$; Figure, $F(4, 434) = 146.44$; $F(4, 154) = 35.06$, $ps < .001$; and Aspect, $F(2, 436) = 1054.71$; $F(2, 156) = 311.07$, $ps < .001$, for females and males respectively. All interactions were highly significant. That is, interactions of Culture × Figure: $F(4, 434) = 35.83$; $F(4, 154) = 5.79$, $ps < .001$; those of Culture × Aspect: $F(4, 436) = 318.84$; $F(2, 156) = 97.31$, $ps < .001$; those of Figure × Aspect: $F(8, 430) = 63.62$; $F(8, 150) = 12.74$, $ps < .001$; those of Culture × Figure × Aspect: $F(8, 430) = 39.44$; $F(8, 150) = 7.22$, $ps < .001$; for females and males respectively. Thus, the main effect of culture and all interactions of culture were significant. The ANOVAs suggested that further analyses should be conducted on the American and Japanese data separately.

As shown in Figures 1a to 1d, almost all average scores toward all of the five figures reported by American participants were higher than those of the Japanese. Americans of both genders revealed consistently higher affective and instrumental scores for all five figures than their Japanese counterparts. These scores, at least at face value, contradict the commonplace view of those two cultures, since these results indicate that American are more strongly attached toward their parents, spouse/partner, a child, and friends than their Japanese counterparts. Traditional cross-cultural research would have us interpret these findings as indicating that American people are more interdependent than are the Japanese. On the other hand, the average American CR score toward each of the five figures was also higher than that of their Japanese counterparts, as shown in Figures 1e and 1f. Thus, it is noteworthy that Americans rated key figures in their lives more strongly, and these strong ratings included both positive and negative aspects of their social relationships.

This puzzling set of results can perhaps best be attributed to another popular notion: the premise that Americans are willing to express both positive and negative feelings and needs more frankly than the Japanese. In other words, the findings might be distorted by response biases. In fact, a study of the response sets among five nationalities, American, British, French, German, and Japanese, indicates that the Japanese people usually prefer to respond to questions by choosing the option "in the middle" (Hayashi, 1996). It might be assumed that cultural differences in the expression and wilfulness to reveal (to third parties, such as interviewers) of affective feelings may mask the true extent of these feelings. For instance, the Americans, who had culturally developed customs to express emotions extremely, easily reached the ceiling in the 5-point rating scale. In fact, probably because of this ceiling effect, the *SD*s of the AR scores among the Americans were significantly smaller than those of their Japanese counterparts in 7 out of 10 comparisons (2: Gender × 5: Figure).

Thus, if we depend on only these direct comparisons of mean scores, we might be misled in our goal of trying to understand cultural differences. Other, supplementary comparisons to understand these differences are needed.

Comparisons of correlation patterns among five figures between American and Japanese participants

To complement the comparisons of mean scores, and consequently to overcome what might be the response biases, correlation patterns among the five figures in both countries were compared. As shown in Table 3, the interrelations among the five figures were very different between the cultures. First, as to the AR score, among the Americans, *r*s of the AR scores among the five figures were very low (on the average $r = .11$ for

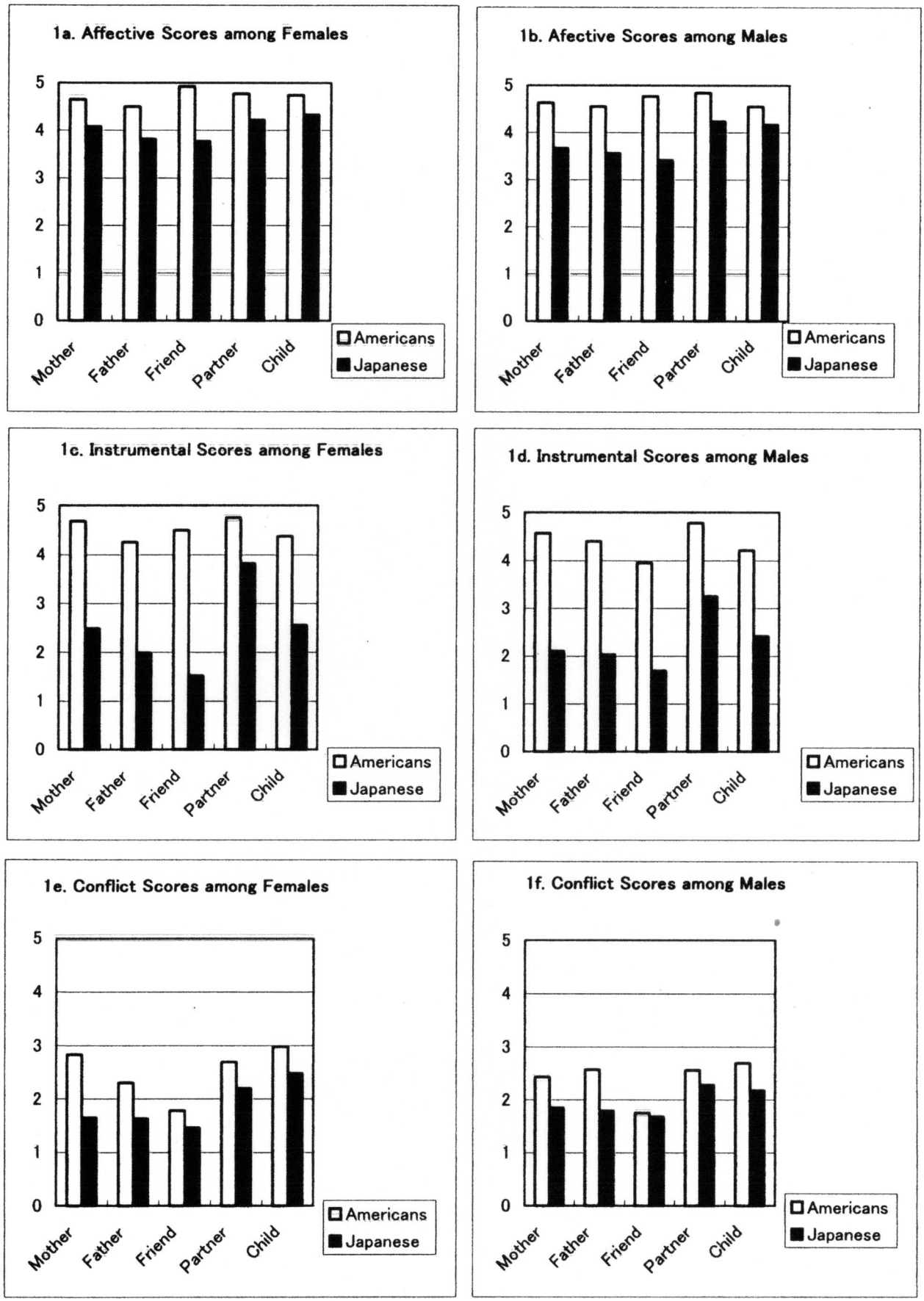

Figure 1 (a–f). Affective, instrumental, and conflict scores toward five figures among the Americans and the Japanese.

Table 3
Intercorrelations of the affective, instrumental and conflict scores toward five figures among the core sample

	Americans: Affective score					*Japanese: Affective score*				
	Mother	*Father*	*Child*	*Partner*	*Friend*	*Mother*	*Father*	*Child*	*Partner*	*Friend*
Affective score										
Mother										
Female		.29**	.11	.07	.08		.75**	.49**	.31**	.45**
Male		.35**	.21*	.07	.04		.80**	.50**	.22**	.43**
Father										
Female			.03	.11	.12			.43**	.32**	.49**
Male			.03	.11	.04			.41**	.14*	.51**
Child										
Female				−.01	.12				.28**	.39**
Male				−.01	.17				.36**	.41**
Partner										
Female					.20**					.29**
Male					−.02					.24**
Instrumental score										
Mother										
Female	.66**	.18*	.09	.01	.15*	.25**	.23**	.25**	.10*	.29**
Male	.61**	.18*	.09	−.05	.11	.29**	.32**	.24**	.05	.24**
Father										
Female	.20**	.80**	−.01	.14*	.15**	.20**	.25**	.22**	.06	.31**
Male	.33**	.74**	−.03	.14	−.01	.21**	.30**	.18*	.02	.27**
Child										
Female	.09	.05	.47**	−.05	.04	.22**	.24**	.39**	−.03	.18**
Male	−.11	−.05	.34**	−.12	.26**	.18*	.22**	.19*	−.11	.26**
Partner										
Female	.03	−.02	.02	.46**	.06	.21**	.17**	.24**	.63**	.06
Male	−.01	.04	.02	.37**	.07	.07	.11	.17*	.46**	.02
Friend										
Female	.03	.11	.01	.07	.30**	.06	.11	.06	−.04	.27**
Male	.13	.06	.22*	.03	.62**	.04	.16*	.15*	−.04	.17**
Conflict score										
Mother										
Female	−.42**	−.19*	−.01	−.01	−.02	−.18**	−.11*	.06	−.08	.08
Male	−.31*	.02	−.16	−.03	−.05	−.30**	−.14*	.01	−.04	.06
Father										
Female	−.01	−.28**	−.07	.02	−.11	−.11	−.18**	.07	.01	.09
Male	−.19*	−.23*	−.15*	−.03	−.11	−.09	−.13	−.04	−.13	.16*
Child										
Female	−.06	−.05	−.19**	−.03	.07	−.04	−.05	.10*	.03	.04
Male	−.09	−.01	−.26**	−.11	−.18	.13	.11	.04	.05	.20*
Partner										
Female	−.07	−.13*	−.02	−.40**	−.07	−.09	−.04	.07	−.08	−.06
Male	.04	−.06	−.04	−.34**	−.01	−.01	.01	.11	−.03	.04
Friend										
Female	.02	−.15*	−.02	−.03	−.24**	−.08	−.07	−.05	−.16**	−.04
Male	−.06	−.07	−.18	.02	−.22**	−.08	−.01	.01	−.09	−.02

** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

females and .09 for males), although the correlation between the parents was significant, but not very high; $r = .29$ for females and .35, for males, compared with the Japanese data. In contrast, among the Japanese of both genders, *r*s were significantly high (on the average $r = .44$ for females and .42 for males). Specifically, the AR scores between the two parents were strongly positively correlated; $r = .75$ for females and .80 for males, but those of the spouse or romantic partner with other figures were relatively low (on the average $r = .30$ for females and .24 for males). Thus, the data indicate that the Americans clearly discriminate among the five figures, and directed affective needs towards each of the figures with pinpoint accuracy. In contrast, the Japanese directed their affective needs toward every figure.

There were cultural differences in relations between the AR score and the IR score. Among the American participants, the size of *r*s suggested that the higher the AR score was for a figure, the higher the IR score was for that figure. That is, the average *r* for the same figure was .56 for females and .55 for males, but the average *r* between different figures was .07 for

females and .06 for males. However, the Japanese picture of relationships between emotional and instrumental needs was somewhat different. Like an American, a Japanese who expressed affective needs toward the romantic partner/spouse generally also depended on the partner instrumentally ($r = .63$ for females and .46 for males). However, among the Japanese, the average *r*s as to the same figure were lower (.37 for females and .28 for males) than those of their American counterparts. This suggests that whereas in either culture instrumental help was expected from those persons with whom one had affective relationships, the Japanese expected less than the Americans.

Moreover, there were differences in relationships between the AR and CR scores. That is, among the American participants, for all five figures, the AR scores were negatively related to the CR scores (average *r*s were −.31 for females and −.27 for males), whereas, among the Japanese, most of the *r*s were negative, but very low (average *r*s were −.02 for females and −.09 for males).

Comparisons of frequencies of affective types between American and Japanese participants

As another supplementary comparison, we examined the appearance of kinds of interpersonal framework of social relationships, in terms of relative importance among the five figures to each individual. In this analysis, the types of social relationships based on the AR scores were specified in order to compare the respondents from the two cultures.

Previous studies have already suggested that humans have multiple significant others and that they distinguish psychological functions among these important people. For example, Kahn and Antonucci (1980) have proposed a hierarchical structure of social relationships, the Convoy model, to describe the psychological differentiation of social relationships. Employing a three-layered concentric circle with the respondent (the word "you" is written) placed in the centre, Antonucci asked the respondents to nominate each of their significant social relations by identifying the level of importance to them (Antonucci, 1985). Empirical data on almost every continent have supported the structural assumption of the framework of social relationships on each individual (e.g., Antonucci & Jackson, 1987; Carstensen, 1992; Inoue & Takahashi, 2000; Lang, Staudinger, & Carstensen, 1998; Levitt, Guacci-Franco, & Levitt, 1993). Moreover, our previous studies based on the ARS (Affective Relationships Scale; Takahashi & Sakamoto, 2000) have also suggested structural frameworks of personal relationships, named as affective type, and indicated that, in terms of dominant figures among significant others, we could efficiently summarise individual characteristics of social relationships (Takahashi, 1986, 1989: Takahashi, Iida, & Tokoro, 1999; Takahashi & Majima, 1994: Takahashi, Tamura, & Tokoro, 1997).

Affective types are delineated in terms of the relatively dominant figure of each person, that is, the figure to whom the highest score is assigned. Operationally, first of all, the participants who reported very low affective scores vis-à-vis all five figures, that is, those with a highest average score among the five figures lower than 3 (on a 5-point scale), were specially designated as Lone Wolf-types. The remaining participants were classified into five types of affective relationships in terms of the top figure: mother, father, friend, partner/spouse, and child. Participants who rated two top figures equally were identified as Dual-type, and if three or more top figures, Multiple-type.

As shown in Table 4, among the core sample, it is remarkable that we identified only 20 Japanese as Lone Wolf participants—those who reported very low need toward any of the figures—and no Americans at all. Among the American respondents, 18% of the females and 29% of the males were identified as Single Figure-types, and there were 16% of Partner-type participants among males, there was no clear tendency toward the appearance of a single top figure. In addition, apparently contradicting the notion of "the sacred couple" (Shweder et al. 1995), the American participants, especially the females, were not likely to exclusively nominate their spouses. A majority were classified into Dual-types (26% of females and 25% of males), or Multiple-types (56% of females and 46% of males). Among the Americans, the Dual-types included a nonfamily member—a closest same-gender friend (68% for females and 31% for males). The preference

Table 4
Appearance of affective types among the core sample

	Americans		*Japanese*	
Type	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*
Mother	10	8	28	11
Father	3	3	8	7
Partner/Spouse	18	33	181	138
Friend	20	7	20	14
Child	10	8	84	41
Dual	91	51	115	57
Only family members	32	35	94	47
Including a friend	59	16	21	10
Multiple	191	94	60	24
Only family members	34	23	34	8
Including a friend	157	71	26	16
Lone Wolf	0	0	11	9
Total	343	204	507	301

for friends in combinations of top figures was consistently observed in those of Multiple-types: 82% of females and 76% of males included a friend as one of the three top figures.

In contrast, among the Japanese, 63% of females and 70% of males were classified into Single figure affective types in terms of the top figure. Moreover, most of the Japanese Single figure-types were Partner-type (36% and 46%, for females and males, respectively), but 17% of females and 14% of males were Child-type. Combinations of figures of Dual-types were very different from those of the Americans. Among the Japanese, a majority of the Dual-types were composed of the romantic partner/spouse and a child (46% for females and 51% for males). Eighty-two per cent of the Dual-types and 60% of the Multiple-types consisted of only family members, including natural parents and children, and the spouse.

Furthermore, as we could identify only a small number of single-focus types among the Americans, we compared combinations of the first three figures between the cultures. As shown in Table 5, among the core sample, the Americans included friends in their close relationships, whereas the Japanese constructed their social relationships of only family members, $\chi^2(1) = 75.9$, $p < .001$ for females; $\chi^2(1) = 14.0$, $p < .001$, for males. These tendencies were replicated in the intact sample, $\chi^2(1) = 3709.5$, $p < .001$ for females; $\chi^2(1) = 17.2$, $p < .001$, for males (see Table 5).

Those results suggest that the Japanese share the custom to be concerned with biological, given relationships. Among the Japanese, the partner/spouse, while not biologically related and initially an outsider, essentially becomes an organic part of the biological family. In contrast, the preferences of friends among the Americans suggests that they are more flexible in selections of social figures than the Japanese, because it is assumed that friends are the most changeable social figures in that they can be added and subtracted at will.

A summary of the present findings

Table 6 summarises the three propositions derived from the individualism/collectivism concept as to close relationships, working hypotheses based on the propositions, and the findings of this study. As the table shows, some of the hypotheses were supported by the data, but others were not.

First, inconsistent with the cluster of hypotheses 1, since all of the mean scores of positive relationships among the Americans were higher than those of their Japanese counterparts, it could not be said that the Americans were more separated from others than the Japanese. Thus, the results indicate that the most popular, conventional proposition arising out of the individualism/collectivism concept is not empirically supported by direct comparisons of mean scores.

Second, the cluster of hypotheses 2, which related indifference toward harmonious relationships among the Americans, was partially supported. As we expected, the American people were more likely to report conflict relationships with others (2-1), and correlation coefficients between the affective and the conflict scores of the same figures were higher than for the Japanese (2-2). Moreover, the lower correlation coefficients among affective scores of the Americans supported the prediction of more differentiation between figures among the Americans (2-3). However, contrary to our prediction, we found greater numbers of Single figure-types among the Japanese (2-4). Thus, the data indicate that the preference for maintaining harmonious relationships does not necessarily mean that those people are emotionally interdependent with everyone with whom they wish to maintain harmonious relations. The present finding suggests that the Japanese participants constructed hierarchical structures of affective relationships with a clear specification of who was the most significant figure for them more often than their American counterparts.

Third, the cluster of hypotheses 3, which posited a preference for nonbiological family members among the Americans (3-1a; 3-2a) was not supported, but preferences for such nonblood ties as same-gender friends as well as one's partner/spouse among the Americans (3-1b; 3-2b) were supported by the direct comparisons of mean scores of both affective and instrumental relationships. Moreover, the tendency of emotional commitment to the mother and children among the Japanese was found through comparisons of relative dominance of affective scores (3-3a). At the same time, as expected, we found higher status of friends of the same gender among the Americans (3-3b) but, contrary to our expectation, there were more partner/spouse Single types among the Japanese than among the Americans.

Discussion

This study examined the close relationships experienced by people from the United States and Japan and compared the affective, instrumental, and conflict aspects of the relationships within the framework of individualism/collectivism. To do this, we used a random-sampling procedure and carefully chosen, reliable, and valid instruments. We collected a large data set that included participants from the two countries. Our analyses included both the "intact" respondents, who provided

Table 5
Combinations of top three figures among the core sample and the intact sample

	Core sample				*Intact sample*			
	Americans		*Japanese*		*Americans*		*Japanese*	
	Female	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*
Only family members	66	56	246	132	13	8	156	55
Including a friend	214	101	165	107	116	26	64	26
Not identifiable	63	47	96	62	25	17	58	29
Total	343	204	507	301	154	51	278	110

Table 6
Summary of propositions based on the individualism/collectivism concept, hypotheses, and findings

Proposition		*Hypothesis*	*Findings*[a]
1. The Americans are more independent from others than the Japanese.	(1-1)	Affective score: USA < Japan	*USA > Japan*
	(1-2)	Instrumental score: USA < Japan	*USA > Japan*
2. The Americans are less concerned with harmonious relationships than the Japanese.	(2-1)	Conflict score: USA > Japan	USA > Japan
	(2-2)	Correlation coefficients between Affective and conflict scores: USA > Japan	USA > Japan
	(2-3)	Correlation coefficients among affective figures: USA < Japan	USA < Japan
	(2-4)	Articulations among affective figures, i.e., Single figure type: USA > Japan	*USA < Japan*
3. The Americans have close relationships with biological family members less often, and with nonfamily members more often, than the Japanese.	(3-1)	a. Affective score toward biological family members: USA < Japan	*USA > Japan*
		b. Affective score toward nonbiological figures: USA > Japan	USA > Japan
	(3-2)	a. Instrumental score toward biological family members: USA < Japan	*USA > Japan*
		b. Instrumental score toward nonbiological figures: USA > Japan	USA > Japan
	(3-3)	a. Relative dominance of biological family members: USA < Japan	USA < Japan
		b. Relative dominance of nonbiological figures,	
		as to friends: USA > Japan	USA > Japan
		as to partner/spouse: USA > Japan	*USA < Japan*

[a] Letters in italic mean findings against the hypothesis

responses concerning all of five major figures, and the "core" respondents, who provided ratings for four out of the five figures. Within the framework of individualism/collectivism, we focused on the differences in human relationships between the cultures. Our findings indicated that nearly half of the tests of hypothesis were true and the others were not only untrue but were significantly different in the opposite direction.

The individualism/collectivism framework as a heuristic device to compare cultural differences

Should we conclude that the framework of individualism/collectivism is not useful for the United States–Japan comparisons? Our simple answer is that we should not. The present study clearly indicates that, for cultural comparison of close relationships between the Americans and the Japanese, the individualism/collectivism concept offered an appropriate heuristic framework. Such an apparently simple framework is useful when researchers are trying to analyse complex phenomena between cultures (e.g., Greenfield & Cocking, 1994; Kagitçibasi, 1996; Shweder et al., 1995), although we agree with social scientists who claim that any monolithic model is inadequate to describe the complexity of a culture (Befu, 1980; Geertz, 1973; Gjerde & Onishi, 2000a, b; Lemons, Vasquez, Au, & Takahashi, 1995; Miller, 1997; Takano & Osaka, 1999). In fact, in the present analyses, the use of the individualism/collectivism concept led to propositions and working hypotheses regarding arenas in which we recognised meaningful commonalities as well as differences between the two cultures.

Thus, we could appreciate the individualism/collectivism concept as a useful, working tool for studying cultures without regarding it as a valid model of theory of each culture. In fact, considering the present findings under the umbrella of the individualism/collectivism concept enriches our understanding of both commonalities and differences between the Americans and the Japanese. In particular, the results that could not be coherently interpreted by the concept can stimulate and direct our further examination of these cultures. Specifically, we emphasise the following four critical premises that researchers should seriously consider regarding United States–Japan comparisons.

Premises of the United States–Japan comparisons

Commonalities of social relationships across the cultures. First, although the individualism/collectivism concept mainly highlighted differences between the cultures, we must not ignore the fact that the Americans and Japanese also showed commonalities. That is, consistent with previous literature (e.g., Bowlby, 1982; Kahn & Antonucci, 1980; M. Lewis, 1982; Takahashi, 1990), the present findings indicate many similarities across the cultures: In particular, Americans and Japanese clearly need others, and both groups direct affective and instrumental needs towards family members and people outside the family. In addition, Japanese and Americans both have conflict emotions towards close figures, construct hierarchical frameworks of close relationships, and are classified into individual types of social relationships in terms of the dominant figure. The present findings indicate that highlighting only the differences between the cultures provides an unbalanced perspective, and thus is misleading. By paying attention to both the universalities and the differences among human beings, we can better understand how each culture influences human behaviour. It is assumed that because of the large degree of universality across the two cultures, researchers

need to develop sophisticated devices to uncover hidden and subtle evidence of cultural differences, such as the individualism/collectivism concept.

Cultural differences in expressive style between the cultures. Second, the present study indicates differences in expressive style between the Americans and the Japanese. That is, in terms of the response bias of each of the cultural groups, we could explain the unexpected and incompatible finding that Americans had higher rating scores for both the positive and conflict emotions toward all social figures than did the Japanese. Because of their self-effacing expressive style (Harter, 1999; Hayashi, 1996), Japanese participants might consistently report lower scores than their American counterparts. In contrast, for Americans, who have cultivated customs to express their emotions clearly, the 5-point rating scales that were used in the present study might not efficiently articulate their levels of emotion. These "not good enough" scales pushed the Americans' responses toward the ceiling of the scales we used, and this effect might partially explain the smaller number of Single-figure type relationships among the Americans, and the lower correlation coefficients between social figures among the Americans than among their Japanese counterparts. Thus, because of differences in response styles, we should be careful in making direct comparisons of the mean scores between the two groups, although comparing the mean scores is the most conventional procedure in cross-cultural research.

Necessity of multi-dimensional comparisons. Third, this study indicates the necessity of multi-dimensional assessments, including both positive and negative ones. That is, multi-dimensional comparisons considering the three aspects of social relationships enabled us to distinguish differences in expressive style from actual differences in close relationships.

Moreover, the present findings showed that these aspects of social relationships were correlated differently in the two cultures. For example, the Japanese showed a reluctance to ask for instrumental help from others with whom they had affective relationships, probably because of a fear of incurring some psychological burden on both sides (Antonucci, Fuhrer, & Jackson, 1990; Iida, 2000). Also, the conflict score was not highly negatively correlated with the affective score among the Japanese. In contrast, among the Americans the correlation patterns were understandable in a straightforward way. That is, an American who had an effective relationship with a given person was willing to seek help from that person, and expressed a low negative feeling toward that affective figure. In this sense, the American manner of social interactions was harmonious and interdependent, although the individualism/collectivism concept has simply hypothesised so far that people in individualistic cultures prefer to be separated from others (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

These findings support the interpretation that the Japanese have developed more intricate and subtle customs in exchanging emotional and material substance with others than their American counterparts (Akiyama, Antonucci, & Campbell, 1990). In other words, the two cultures have different social rules that direct how they treat others to maintain close relationships with them.

Different conceptualisations of social figures. Finally, the present study suggests that the Americans and the Japanese conceptualise social figures differently (e.g., in this study, a friend). Once the Americans rated a social figure as a friend of the same gender, they assigned higher scores to that figure than did their Japanese counterparts. However, it is also noteworthy that a large number of the American participants failed to rate any social figure as a friend. For example, 27% of females and 33% of males did not rate anyone as a friend, whereas only 4% of the Japanese did not rate anyone as a friend.

These findings can be explained by different conceptualisations of a friend between the two countries. The previous research on the concept of "friend" (Krappmann, Oswald, & Uhlendroff, 1994; Takahashi & Hirai, 2000; Takahashi & Miyamoto, 1997) suggests that the Western category of friend is narrower than that of the Japanese, who tend to include playmates or classmates in the category. Along these lines, it is assumed that when the Japanese participants were asked to rate a social figure as a friend, they would report a casual friend when they did not have a close friend in the Western sense. In contrast, the Americans only rated a figure as a friend if they had a close friend, but they failed to rate anyone as a friend if they had no such friends in their sense. This interpretation supported the finding that, if a friend was rated, the friend often occupied one of the top three figures for the Americans (50% for females and 31% for males), but not for the Japanese (9% for females and 4% for males).

These findings suggest that the real characteristics of the cultures are rather complicated. Even if researchers have carefully prepared instruments and procedures for assessing these characteristics across cultures, it will not be enough in cross-cultural comparisons. Interestingly, in this study, the participants revealed aspects of their cultures through both their replies and the parts of the questionnaires to which they failed to reply.

Future directions

Our findings suggest several directions for future research. First, in this paper we examined two supplementary, indirect comparisons, i.e., comparisons of correlation patterns and of affective relationship types, in addition to the conventional direct comparisons of mean scores. We suggest that these three types of comparisons together can highlight both differences and commonalities between the cultures. In the future, we should examine how these three comparisons can be combined into one system of cross-cultural comparisons.

Second, although the present study examined the individualism/collectivism concept from the aspect of close, social relationships—that is, the tendency to relate to others—it is necessary to focus on the other side of the framework—that is, the tendency to be independent from others. As has been often discussed, humans have dual, seemingly incompatible, tendencies toward attachment and detachment, dependence and independence, homonony and autonomy (e.g., Bakan, 1966; Baumrind, 1998; Erikson, 1950; Hirai & Takahashi, 2000; Shimizu, 2000). If we could examine the dual tendencies within one study, it would probably advance our understanding of how culture affects the development of social relationships.

Finally, although the individualism/collectivism concept proposes to classify non-Western nations dichotomously into collectivistic cultures in contrast to Euro-Western nations (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1991), we can easily assume that there are a variety of differences even within Asian cultures (e.g., Chen, Rubin, & Li, 1994; Freeman, 1997; Fijneman,