

## The role of Japanese wives in moderating the association between striving for self-verification and marital relationships

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**ABSTRACT.** People seek self-verification from others. Previous studies suggest that striving for self-verification (e.g., the disclosure of accurate self-information and the preservation of a sense of coherence about oneself in social relationships) functionalizes couple relationships in Western cultures. However, there has been little research on couples in Asian cultures. The aim of this study is to address this gap by examining 46 heterosexual Japanese couples. Attitudes and behaviors regarding striving for self-verification, stress communication, and trust in marital relationships were assessed using a questionnaire. In contrast to previous Western studies, Japanese couples striving for self-verification had a stronger association between the attitudes of wives regarding striving for self-verification and their own trust and stress communication than that of their husbands. The role of Asian wives is also discussed.

**KEYWORDS:** *Striving for self-verification, Asian gender, Marital relationship, Stress communication, Trust*

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### **Introduction**

People like to maintain consistency of concepts within an individual (Lecky, 1945) because they dislike cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1962). In line with this self-consistency theory, Swann (1987) proposes that people seek verification from others, because the verification fosters to maintain consistency of self-concepts within an individual. Verification is referred to as self-verification and numerous studies have focused on this subject (Swann, 1997). For example, people who receive self-verification from their partners claim to have more

satisfying relations than those who do not receive self-verification (even if they receive negative self-evaluations) (Weinstock & Whisman, 2004). Previous research also suggests that people reported higher levels of satisfaction when they received self-verification from partners in marriage than during courtship (Swann, De La Ronde, & Gregory, 1994). These studies indicate that self-verification from partners is a key factor in ensuring satisfying couple relationships. Previous studies, however, are largely based on Western couples, so the effects of self-verification in Asian couples are unclear. The present study aims to examine the effects of self-verification in Japanese couples.

To receive self-verification, some people disclose honest self-information to others and try to preserve a sense of coherence about

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themselves in their social relationships. Such behaviors and attitudes are referred to as striving for self-verification (Cable & Kay, 2012). Striving for self-verification is beneficial in intimate relationships. For example, honest self-disclosure and emotional expression to partners functionalizes dating relationships (Brunell et al., 2010). Furthermore, university students who frequently lied to their dating partners were found to be dissatisfied with their dating relationships (Peterson, 1996). These studies suggest that striving for self-verification is also functional in couple relationships.

Striving for self-verification can change according to an individual's situation (Chen, Chen, & Shaw, 2004). For example, when people meet those who belong to the experimentally-constructed same group, they seek self-verification from them. However, when they meet those that belong to another experimentally-constructed group, they do not seek self-verification. These findings suggest that one's striving for self-verification in one situation might be different from that in another situation. In other words, people who live in different cultural environments might have different patterns of striving for self-verification.

Previous studies on this topic mainly focus on Western cultures. One Japanese study suggested that people in dating relationship were likely to receive both positive and self-accurate evaluation from their partner (Taniguchi & Daibo, 2008), but the study did not include marital relationships, so the pattern of striving for self-verification in Asian marital

relationship is still unclear. Many studies suggest that Asian traditional gender roles require women to be compliant rather than vocal in their opinions (Harter, Waters, & Whitesell, 1997; Rehman & Holtzworth-Munroe, 2006). These findings suggest that Japanese women as Asian women would strive for self-verification less than Japanese men (Hypothesis 1).

In Western countries, a man's self-verification striving in a couple relationship is deemed more beneficial than a woman's because such an act by a man is regarded as an extraordinary intimate expression (Brunell et al., 2010). In Asian countries, however, women striving for self-verification might be regarded as representing extraordinary trust to their husbands because such acts are restricted in most Asian cultures (Rehman & Holtzworth-Munroe, 2006). In Asian cultures, when a wife seeks self-verification, she is asking her husband to accept such behavior, even though such behavior is not generally accepted (Sen, 2003). Hence, wives need to trust their husbands when seeking self-verification. In contrast, it is more acceptable and expected that men strive for self-verification in Asian cultures (Fikree, 2004). Therefore, husbands' striving for self-verification is regarded as normal behavior. This gender difference implies different patterns of self-verification in Asian marital relationships. When Japanese couples strive for self-verification, wives trust their husbands more than husbands trust their wives

(Hypothesis 2).

Similarly, striving for self-verification also involves open discussions between a couple, including the expression of one's feelings of stress to the other partner (Bodenmann, 2005). Wives striving for self-verification could be regarded as a display of extraordinary trust. It has been found that wives in Asia express themselves less than their husbands (Rehman & Holtzworth-Munroe, 2006). When they do express themselves, they need to express everything, including stress, within a short period of time because their opportunities for expression are limited. In contrast, husbands have sufficient time to express themselves so their self-expression does not need to include everything at once. Hence, when Japanese couples strive for self-verification, wives express their stress more than their husbands express (Hypothesis 3).

To explore Asian marital relationships, we sampled Japanese couples as one example of an Asian culture (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). To evaluate striving for self-verification in general, we used general striving for self-verification scores (excluding employment-related scores) (Cable & Kay, 2012). To evaluate the trust relationship and expressions of stress, we used trust in marriage (Rempel, Holmes, & Zanna, 1985) and stress communication (Bodenmann, 2005), respectively.

## **Methods**

### *Participants*

Two-hundred and thirty questionnaires were distributed to Japanese couples. Of these, 112

(48%) were completed. While there may be differences between those participants who answered questionnaires and those who did not, we cannot compare these two groups because we did not obtain any information from the latter. Among the 112 respondents, 47 couples were identified. One set of paired data reported the same responses for all questions, so this pair was excluded from the analysis. Thus, the final sample comprised 46 couples (46 wives and 46 husbands).

Table 1 shows participants' ages. The mean ages of wives and husbands were 45.4 years (SD = 14.1) and 46.4 years (SD = 15.4), respectively. The mean marital duration was 18.5 years. All couples had been married for at least 1 year (minimum: 1; maximum: 55; SD = 15.0).

### *Procedure*

Two leaders from the local communities in Tohoku (Northeast Japan) and Kansai (West Japan) recruited couples in their communities. Three university professors also recruited couples in Chubu (Central Japan), Kyushu (South Japan), and Tohoku. The leaders and professors asked their friends to participate in our study. Couples who showed interest in participating received questionnaires in October 2014. The questionnaire included separate material for the wives and husbands, along with a self-addressed envelope and instructions to return the questionnaires to the laboratory by December 2014.

Participants received no payment for completing the questionnaire. In addition to their basic information, we collected data on

striving for self-verification, stress communication, and trust.

#### *Measures*

**Striving for self-verification.** The present study used a revised version of the Self-verification Striving questionnaire (Cable & Kay, 2012). The original version of this questionnaire included eight items and assessed attitudes (Do you agree with the following comments?) using an anchored five-point scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The eight items included four general items (e.g., It's worth being truthful with others about my habits and personality so that they know what to expect from me) and four employment-related items (e.g., When looking for a job, I work hard to find a place where people will accept me for who I am). We did not use the four employment-related items because some participants might not be in regular employment. The questionnaire was revised in two ways. First, the four employment-related items were amended to concern marriage (e.g., When looking for a partner, I work hard to find a partner who will accept me for who I am). Second, the revised version also assessed actual behaviors (Do you actually behave in accordance with these values?) using the same five-point Likert scale. Hence, the revised version has two subscales: (1) attitude regarding striving for self-verification in marriage and (2) behaviors regarding striving for self-verification in marriage. The revised version was translated into Japanese by two Japanese psychologists, both of whom had published academic papers

in English and Japanese. Then, the Japanese version of the questionnaire was back-translated by two English–Japanese bilinguals. The final version of the questionnaire was approved by the two psychologists.

**Stress communication.** We used the subscale stress communication found in the Japanese version (Kawashima, Yoshitake, Matsumoto, & Sugawara, 2014) of the Dyadic Coping Inventory (Bodenmann, 2005). The items were scored using a five-point Likert-type scale (1 = very rare to 5 = very often). The Japanese stress communication was back-translated and has been shown to have good validity and reliability (Kawashima et al., 2014). Higher stress communication reflects better stress communication.

**Trust.** We used a 17-item trust scale (Rempel et al., 1985) with a seven-point scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). Higher scores in the trust scale reflect higher trust in the marital relationship. As with the method used for striving for self-verification, the trust scale was back-translated from Japanese and approved.

#### *Analyses*

We compared basic scores using t-tests and correlations using Z-tests. We also compared regression coefficients using chi-square tests. We used the Actor Partner Interdependence Model (APIM: Figure 1) to simultaneously estimate the actor (e.g., a wife's behaviors when striving for self-verification in her marriage affect her stress communication) and partner (e.g., a wife's behaviors when striving

Table 1

Means, standard deviations, and t-tests of all study variables between wives and husbands (N = 46 couples)

	Wife		Husband		Paired-t	df	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			
Age	45.46	14.10	46.46	15.46	-1.06	45	-0.07
Striving for self-verification attitudes in general	4.10	0.71	4.00	0.74	0.65	44	0.14
Striving for self-verification behaviors in general	3.54	0.64	3.73	0.75	-1.66	44	-0.27
Striving for self-verification attitudes in marriage	4.29	0.66	4.12	0.78	1.35	43	0.24
Striving for self-verification behaviors in marriage	3.68	0.74	3.78	0.62	-0.80	43	-0.16
Trust	4.93	0.90	5.04	0.84	-0.85	43	-0.13
Stress communication	3.60	1.02	3.30	0.83	2.18*	44	0.32

Note. \*:  $p < .05$ , †:  $p < .10$

for self-verification in her marriage affect her husband's stress communication) effects of striving for self-verification on stress communication and trust (Kenny, Kashy, & Bolger, 1998). SPSS 21.0 and HAD version 12.240 (Shimizu, 2016) were used for the analyses.

**Results**

*Cultural differences in trust and stress communication*

The present data did not include European and American couples so we compared our data with European and American counterparts from previous studies. We compared averages, standard deviations, and numbers of

participants from previous studies with our data using t-tests. Although their stress communication was not significantly different from that of European couples (Ledermann et al., 2010), the Japanese participants showed less trust in their marital relationships (wife  $t = 3.2$ ,  $df = 130.1$ ,  $p < .01$ ; husband  $t = 2.8$ ,  $df = 133.3$ ,  $p < .01$ ) than their American counterparts (Rempel et al., 1985).

*Do Japanese wives strive for self-verification less than Japanese husbands?*

We compared the score of striving for self-verification between the wives and husbands (Table 1). Table 1 does not show any significant gender differences for striving for

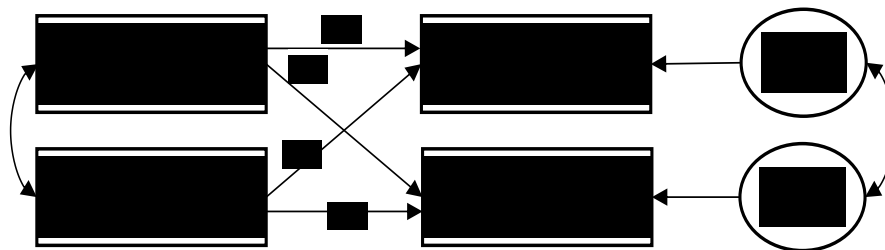


Figure 1

Actor-partner interdependence model

Note: A represents actor effect; P represents partner effect.

Table 2

*Correlations among self-verification attitudes/behaviors, trust, and stress communication in Japanese couples (df = 44)*

	Wives' $\alpha$	Husbands' $\alpha$	1	2	3	4
1.Striving for self-verification attitudes in marriage	.84	.93	.50 *	.76 **	.62 **	.56 **
2.Striving for self-verification behaviors in marriage	.89	.83	.49 **	.31	.71 **	.63 **
3.Trust	.88	.87	.56 **	.45 **	.65 ***	.65 **
4.Stress communication	.88	.84	.25	.31 *	.53 **	.68 ***

*Note.* Correlations for wives are on the upper diagonal, correlation for husbands are on the lower diagonal, and paired correlations between (wives and husbands) are on the diagonal. The paired correlations are intra-class correlations, whereas the other correlations are Pearson's correlations. \*\*\*:  $p < .001$ , \*\*:  $p < .01$ , \*:  $p < .05$ .

self-verification. However, overall, the wives' attitudes regarding striving for self-verification showed significantly less support for the concept than their actual overall behavior regarding striving for self-verification (paired  $t = 6.5$ ,  $df = 45$ ,  $p < .0001$ ).

When couples strive for self-verification, do wives trust their husbands more than husbands trust their wives?

A comparison of simple correlations did not show any significant differences (Table 2). However, the APIM produced significant differences (Table 3). There was a stronger significant association between the wives' attitudes regarding striving for self-verification and their own trust than between the husbands' attitudes and trust ( $\chi^2 = 4.69$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Furthermore, there was a significant association between the wives' behavior regarding striving for self-verification and their own trust, but there were no significant difference between husbands' and wives' unstandardized estimates (Table 3).

*When couples strive for self-verification, do wives communicate about their stress with their*

*husbands more than husbands communicate with their wives?*

A comparison of simple correlations did not show any significant differences (Table 2). However, the APIM produced significant differences (Table 3). There was a greater significant association between the wives' attitudes regarding striving for self-verification than between the husbands' attitudes and stress communication ( $\chi^2 = 19.36$ ,  $p < .0001$ ). Similarly, there was a greater significant association between the wives' behaviors regarding striving for self-verification and their own stress communication than between the husbands' behaviors and stress communication ( $\chi^2 = 14.73$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Moreover, wives' actual behaviors for self-verification positively predicted their husbands' stress communication, but husbands' behavior actual behavior for self-verification did not predict their wives' stress communication (Table 3).

### **Discussion**

Our study tested the moderator effects of Asian women's roles in the association between striving for self-verification and marital

Table 3

*Actor and partner effects for trust and stress communication in relation to self-verification attitudes and behaviors (N = 44 couples)*

Parameters	Striving for self-verification attitudes in marriage		Striving for self-verification behaviors in marriage	
	Estimate	Z	Estimate	Z
<b>Actor effects</b>				
$W_{\text{Self-verification}} \rightarrow W_{\text{Trust}}$	0.80**	4.76 <sup>b</sup>	0.88**	6.91 <sup>b</sup>
$W_{\text{Self-verification}} \rightarrow W_{\text{sc}}$	0.81**	10.92 <sup>a</sup>	0.84**	12.43 <sup>a</sup>
$H_{\text{Self-verification}} \rightarrow H_{\text{Trust}}$	0.50**	3.53 <sup>b</sup>	0.55**	2.96 <sup>b</sup>
$H_{\text{Self-verification}} \rightarrow H_{\text{sc}}$	0.12	0.79 <sup>a</sup>	0.34**	2.62 <sup>a</sup>
<b>Partner effects</b>				
$W_{\text{Self-verification}} \rightarrow H_{\text{Trust}}$	0.37*	2.22 <sup>b</sup>	0.23	1.50 <sup>b</sup>
$W_{\text{Self-verification}} \rightarrow H_{\text{sc}}$	0.48**	3.87 <sup>a</sup>	0.44**	3.78 <sup>a</sup>
$H_{\text{Self-verification}} \rightarrow W_{\text{Trust}}$	0.20	1.39 <sup>b</sup>	0.14	0.95 <sup>b</sup>
$H_{\text{Self-verification}} \rightarrow W_{\text{sc}}$	0.06	0.62 <sup>a</sup>	0.22†	1.88 <sup>a</sup>

*Note.* All estimate scores were unstandardized coefficients. H = husband; W = wife; SC = Stress communication

\*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ , † $p < .10$ , <sup>a</sup>:  $N = 43$  pairs, <sup>b</sup>:  $N = 42$  pairs.

relationships. Seemingly, women's striving for self-verification was not significantly different from men's. However, there was a significant gap between women's attitudes and behaviors regarding striving for self-verification in general. This gap suggests that for women, there is a discrepancy between what they want to be and what they actually are. This gap has been frequently reported in public health fields (Fikree, 2004; Sen, 2003) and could be regarded as indicating a gender difference in striving for self-verification in Asia (Rehman & Holtzworth-Munroe, 2006).

As hypothesized (Hypotheses 2 and 3), there was a stronger association between wives' attitudes regarding striving for self-verification and their trust than between their husbands' attitudes and trust. Similarly, there was a stronger association between wives' actual behaviors for self-verification and their stress communication than for their husbands. Furthermore, wives' actual behaviors for self-verification only had a significant partner effect on their husbands' stress expression. Our findings for Japanese couples differ from

previous findings for American couples (Brunell et al., 2010). These results indicate that cultural context and gender roles need to be considered in future self-verification studies (Neff & Suizzo, 2006), as individuals change their self-verification striving depending on their situation (Chen et al., 2004).

In the context of couple therapy in Japan, therapist might need to pay special attention to wife's actual behavior for self-verification in couple because her behavior positively predicted her trust. Furthermore, husband's expression of stress in couple also needs an attention, because his expression of stress might be linked with his wife's actual behavior for self-verification. Enhancement of wife's actual behavior for self-verification and husband's stress expression might be linked with positive marital relationships.

Our study did not find any significant differences in striving for self-verification between husbands and wives. Japanese husbands are more likely to be in regular employment than their wives (Tsuya, Bumpass, Choe, & Rindfuss, 2005), so occupational

differences between husbands and wives might affect our findings. Japanese husbands also work in competitive job environments, so emotional expression might hinder their job performance. In contrast, Japanese wives who did not work might feel free to express their emotion in general. Thus, the occupational status of couples needs to be considered in future research (Cable & Kay, 2012). Still, occupational discrepancy between husbands and wives has diminished in Japan (Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, 2013), so patterns of self-verification in Japanese couples might be subject to change over time.

Our study used a limited sample, which made the present findings suggestive rather than conclusive. Our sample couples were at a wide variety of marital stages, which might affect our findings. Furthermore, our study was based on self-reported answers in a questionnaire, which may weaken our findings. Future research needs to include observational data and use a sample of more paired couples at a specific marital stage.

Despite these limitations, we examined the effects of self-verification processes in Asian couples and found that cultural and gender differences might moderate the effects of self-verification (Neff & Suizzo, 2006). Cultural and gender differences in self-verification could foster mutual understanding about how people's ideals differ according to their living environments.

#### ***Ethical Standards***

The authors assert that all procedures contributing to this work comply with the ethical standards of the relevant institutional committees on human experimentation and with the Helsinki Declaration of 1975, as revised in 2008.

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