

The Effect of Recalling Relationships with Parents  
on Self-Acceptance and Life Satisfaction

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### **Abstract**

The effect of daily recall of the relationships with one's parents on self-acceptance and life satisfaction was investigated. One hundred thirty-one undergraduate students in Japan were randomly assigned to one of three conditions (five listings of their relationships with their parents, five records of daily events, and no treatment) for a week. Results indicated that the group recalling parental relationships significantly increased their life satisfaction after the intervention, and their life satisfaction was significantly higher than that of the no treatment group after the intervention. Regarding self-acceptance, no significant intervention effects were found. Conscious daily recall of the relationships with one's parents may increase one's life satisfaction.

### **Keywords**

Japan, positive psychology, parent, self-acceptance, relationship

According to Bowlby's attachment theory (1969, 1973, 1980), virtually everyone forms an attachment to their caregivers. A secure attachment with caregivers (Ainsworth, 1993) is predicted to have positive consequences in one's social development (Waters & Cummings, 2000). Existing studies found supporting evidence for this prediction and suggest that a secure attachment with caregivers leads to a successful social life (Kail & Cavanaugh, 2007).

However, only a few studies have investigated the effect of recalling relationship qualities between children and parents on their subjective well-being (Datta, Marcoen, & Poortinga, 2005; Yeh, Tsao, & Chen, 2009). For example, recalling positive maternal bonding experiences increased life satisfaction and concern about the mother's welfare in India and in Belgium (Datta, Marcoen, & Poortinga, 2005). On the other hand, Chinese adolescents who recalled more child-parent conflicts indicated less filial belief and more maladjustment than their counterparts (Yeh, Tsao, & Chen, 2009). These studies asked their participants to recall either positive bonding experiences or negative conflicts with their own parents. However, the whole relationship should include both positive and negative interactions with their parents. These studies did not capture the whole relationships between participants and their parents. Therefore, the present study, in which participants can recall their relationships with parents in either way, was designed.

Datta, Marcoen, and Poortinga (2005) reported that recalling positive experiences with their mothers increased life satisfaction. Additionally, Garcia and others (Garcia & Moradi, 2013; Garcia & Siddiqui, 2009) repeatedly found that self-acceptance is a significant predictor of life satisfaction for adolescents in Sweden and Iran. Indeed, positive correlations between self-acceptance and life satisfaction had already been found repeatedly in American adult samples by Ryff and her colleagues (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Ryff, Lee, Essex,

& Schmutte, 1994). Thus, self-acceptance and life satisfaction were chosen as dependent variables in this study.

Yet some famous cultural psychologists claim that the self-concept of Japanese is qualitatively different from that of the Western world (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). According to Kitayama and Markus (1999), the Japanese self emerges from the dynamic equilibrium of two opposing characteristics that are incompatible and inconsistent with each other. In order to be a coherent and integral Japanese person, he or she must have two contradictory characteristics (e.g., toughness and warm-heartedness) and different situations bring out different characteristics. This view of personality is different from a traditional view of personality that assumes fixed dispositions exist inside of a person. A recent cross-cultural study of self-descriptions reported that two opposing self-description sentences (e.g., “I am talkative”, in one self-description, and “I am not good at chatting with others”, in the other self-description) appeared more frequently in Japanese than Americans (Kobayashi, 2011). If self-concept of Japanese is different from that of the traditional trait view, it might be not easy to measure self-acceptance of Japanese.

The present study examined the effects of maintaining a daily recall and record of one’s relationships with one’s own parents (or someone who raised him or her) on one’s self-acceptance and life satisfaction. In the present study, participants were randomly assigned to Group A, who wrote about five things they recalled from their relationships with their parents every day for a week, or to Group B, who wrote about five things that happened (or they did) in their life on that day for a week, or to Group C, who did nothing for a week. Group B was used in order to clarify the effect of daily recall of one’s relationships with one’s own parents (or someone who raised him or her). Participants of both Groups A and B share the common characteristic of daily writing about five things. In other words, Group B existed in order to show the non-significant effect of daily writing about five things.

This study used an intervention strategy similar to a common strategy that is often utilized in gratitude research. Since Emmons and McCullough (2003) developed the gratitude listing intervention strategy, many other researchers of gratitude have conducted similar interventions (for a review, see Wood, Froh, & Geraghty, 2010). Although it is an effective intervention strategy in gratitude research, it has at least one shortcoming. It enforces all the participants to recall some incidents for which they feel grateful. However, such enforcement might make some participants feel uncomfortable because they must feel grateful. The intervention strategy that was used in this study, recalling some incidents with one's parents including either positive or negative ones, did not enforce gratitude on any participants. Therefore, the current intervention strategy has an advantage of no enforcement of gratitude.

There were three hypotheses in this study based on the results of previous studies. First, Group A participants' self-acceptance and life satisfaction would significantly increase after a week of such intervention but such an increase would not appear in the other two groups. Second, Group A participants' self-acceptance and life satisfaction would be significantly larger than those of Group C after intervention although there were no differences in these three groups before intervention. Third, Group B participants' self-acceptance and life satisfaction would not be significantly larger than those of Group C after intervention.

## **Methods**

### **Participants**

Initially 133 participants filled out the surveys before the intervention, but two of them (one in Group A and the other in Group B) failed to answer the surveys after the intervention and these two were therefore omitted from the data analyses. Thus, there were 131 participants and their mean age was 19.41 ( $SD$  age = 2.88, age range: 18-45). All

participants attended a liberal arts college in Miyazaki, Japan. Among them, there were 32 male students (24.4%) and 99 female students (75.6%). Eighty (12 male and 68 female) of these students lived with their parent(s). They were all native Japanese speakers.

## **Materials**

**Self-Acceptance.** Hiraishi (1990, 1993) created the Sense of Self-Positiveness Scale from factor analyzing the data from 247 junior high school students, 292 high school students, and 341 undergraduate students. The scale contains 41 items to assess six dimensions of self-consciousness: self-acceptance (4 items), self-accomplishment (7 items), self-fulfillment (8 items), self-openness (8 items), self-expression (7 items), and self-consciousness from others' evaluation (7 items). Each item was rated from 1 (*not applicable to me*) to 5 (*applicable to me*) in a Likert-type scale. This scale demonstrated sound construct validity in a Japanese adolescent sample (Shimizu, Fuzihara, & Lee, 2008). For the sake of the present study, four items in the self-acceptance dimension were chosen from the scale and they demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency ( $\alpha = .69$ ) in Hiraishi (1993).

**Life Satisfaction.** A Japanese version of the Satisfaction With Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) was produced by Sumino (1994). There were five items in the Japanese Satisfaction With Life Scale (JSWLS). They were intended to measure cognitive aspects of subjective well-being, and each item was rated from 1 (*not applicable to me at all*) to 7 (*applicable to me completely*) in a Likert-type scale. By conducting five different studies, Sumino tested the psychometric properties of JSWLS and found appropriate factor loadings, satisfactory levels of construct validity, internal consistency ( $\alpha = .84$ ), and a test-retest correlation coefficient of .80 with a 4-week interval. Recently, Kobayashi (2013) reported

that JSWLS evidenced satisfactory internal consistency ( $\alpha = .83$ ) and sound construct validity in a Japanese undergraduate sample.

## **Procedure**

After receiving an approval of the Institutional Review Board and the Dean of the School of International Liberal Arts, e-mails were sent to all undergraduate students of a liberal arts college where I work in order to invite them to participate in the study. Interested students read an informed consent form that explained the study itself and their rights and the benefits from participating in this study. Those who agreed to participate signed the informed consent form and were randomly assigned to Group A (44 students) who wrote about five things they recalled from their relationships with their parents every day for a week, or to Group B (45 students) who wrote about five things that happened (or they did) in their life on that day for a week, or to Group C (44 students) who did nothing for a week. First, all the participants anonymously completed surveys that asked their gender, age, cohabitation with their parents (i.e., living with parents or not) and the scales of self-acceptance and life satisfaction. Then, notebooks were given to all of the participants in Groups A and B and they started writing their daily journal for seven days for several minutes every night before going to bed. The participants in Group C did nothing special during that time.

Participants of Group A were asked to write down any events that happened involving them and their fathers from when they were 2 or 3 years old to when they graduated from elementary school on Day 1. On Day 2, they were asked to respond to the same question but this time considering their junior and senior high school days. The question for Day 3 covered their college days. For example, a Group A entry on Day 1 might be, "I went fishing with my dad when I was in elementary school." They were then asked to write down any events that involved them and their mothers from the age of 2 or 3 to

elementary school graduation on Day 4, to consider their junior and senior high school days on Day 5, and their college days on Day 6. For example, a Group A entry on Day 5 might be, “When I felt depressed, my mother also looked depressed.” On Day 7, they were asked to write down what they thought about their own parents at each moment after reviewing the six previous entries.

The participants of Group B were asked to write down what they did or what happened in their life on each day during the data collection stage. This was like writing five entries on events in their diaries.

In order to protect the privacy of the participants, they wrote a randomly assigned identification number instead of writing their names or any other identifiable information on their notebooks. A week later, they came back and their notebooks were collected and all of the participants in each group anonymously completed the same survey again. Then 1,000 Japanese yen (approximately US\$9.50 on the currency exchange rate of September 3rd, 2014) were paid as an appreciation for their research participation. After collecting all of the participants’ data, a debriefing e-mail of the study was sent to all participants.

## Results

A 2 (time: before and after intervention) X 3 (group: Group A, B, and C) repeated measures multivariate analysis of variance was conducted to find intervention effects on these two variables. There was a marginally significant multivariate effect across the interaction between group and time point,  $V = .067$ ,  $F(4, 254) = 2.184$ ,  $p = .071$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .033$ . Univariate tests revealed a significant interaction between time and group for life satisfaction,  $F(2, 127) = 4.176$ ,  $p = .018$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .062$ , but not for self-acceptance,  $F(2, 127) = .178$ ,  $p = .837$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .003$ .

Therefore, post hoc tests with the Bonferroni correction were conducted on the life satisfaction variable only.

The simple effects post hoc tests of the interaction effect for the groups at each time point revealed that the life satisfaction of Group A was significantly larger than that of Group C ( $p < .05$ ) after intervention. Such a phenomenon did not appear in Group B. See Figure 1.

The simple effects post hoc tests of the interaction effect for the time at each group revealed that the life satisfaction of Group A was significantly increased after intervention ( $p < .05$ ) but such an increase did not appear in Groups B and C. See Figure 2.

## Discussion

All the hypotheses regarding the life satisfaction variable were supported, but none of the hypotheses regarding self-acceptance were supported. It was intriguing because life satisfaction and self-acceptance were positively correlated before ( $r = .306, p < .01$ ) and after ( $r = .304, p < .01$ ) intervention. In addition, the self-acceptance scale demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency before ( $\alpha = .79$ ) and after ( $\alpha = .88$ ) intervention. Regarding the self-acceptance scores, there were three outliers before intervention and four outliers after intervention that had z-scores more than 2.58. These seven outliers did not indicate special features regarding sex (three men and four women) or group (two from Group A, three from Group B, and two from Group C). It was difficult to detect why seven outliers appeared in this study. In the future study, it may be worthy to use different scales for measuring self-acceptance of Japanese participants.

It may be worthy of note that just a week of daily recall of the relationships with one's parents significantly increases life satisfaction, and this recall includes both positive and negative events. For most of us, our relationships with our parents are one of the most fundamental in our lives. Therefore, a recalling intervention would be effective not only for

young people but also middle-age adults and senior citizens. Accordingly, similar studies might be worthwhile for different age groups (e.g., middle-age adults and senior citizens) in the future.

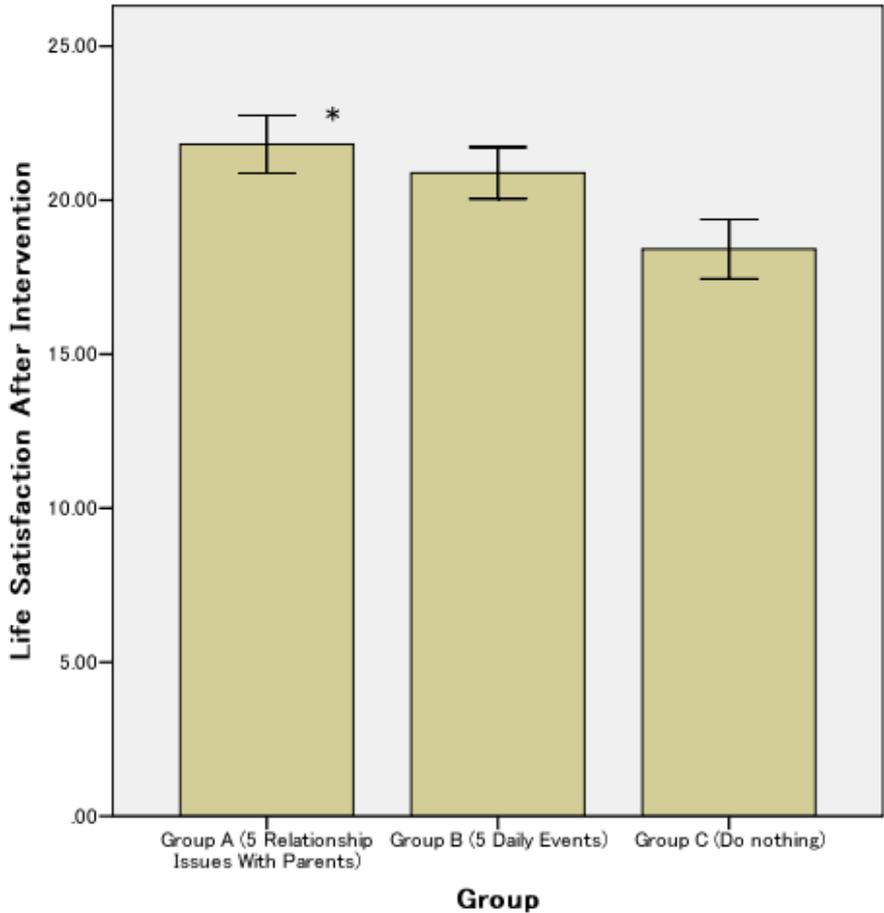
As a concluding remark, this study could empirically demonstrate that daily recall of the relationships with one's own parents (or someone who raised him or her) significantly increased life satisfaction. As an extension of gratitude intervention strategy that has been frequently used, it demonstrated a significant effect on the good life of human beings.

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*Figure 1.* The bar graphs show mean scores of life satisfaction after intervention as a function of group. Error bars indicate standard errors of the means. The asterisk indicates a significant difference from Group C ( $p < .05$ ).

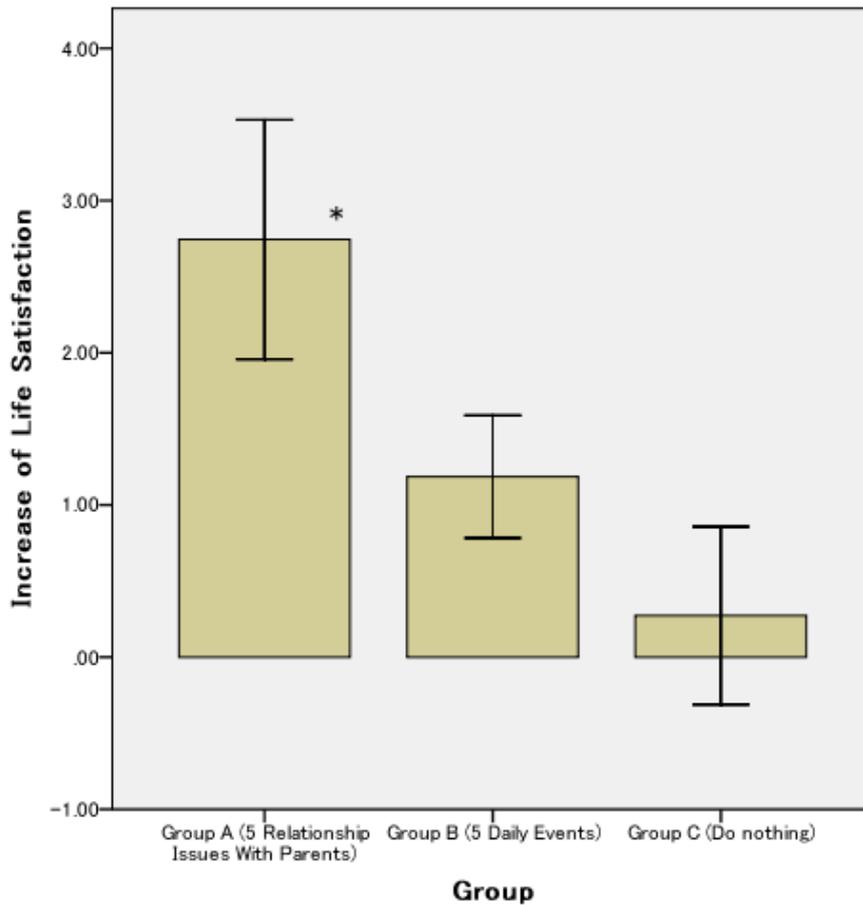


Figure 2. The bar graphs show mean increase of life satisfaction after intervention as a function of group. Error bars indicate standard errors of the means. The asterisk indicates a significant increase after intervention ( $p < .05$ ).