



## Self-informant agreement for subjective well-being among Japanese



Masao Saeki<sup>a,\*</sup>, Shigehiro Oishi<sup>b</sup>, Takashi Maeno<sup>a</sup>, Elizabeth Gilbert<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Keio University, Graduate School of System Design and Management, Collaboration Complex, 4-1-1 Hiyoshi, Kohoku-ku, Yokohama, Kanagawa 223-8526, Japan

<sup>b</sup> University of Virginia, Department of Psychology, Charlottesville, VA 22904-4400, United States

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### ABSTRACT

The present study examined the convergence between self- and informant-ratings for well-being among Japanese students. A total of 202 same-sex friend pairs completed self-reports and informant reports of life satisfaction, domain satisfaction, positive and negative affect, extraversion, and neuroticism. Life satisfaction and other variables showed significant self-informant agreement correlations, thereby establishing their convergent validity. However, the size of agreement on life satisfaction was lower than the previous findings conducted in the United States, whereas other variables did not differ from previous results. Furthermore, there was a significant difference in the size of agreement between life satisfaction and extraversion; that is, life satisfaction produced lower agreement than extraversion.

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### 1. Introduction

Informant judgments traditionally have been used as evidence of the construct validity of self-reports (e.g., Diener, Smith, & Fujita, 1995; Pavot, Diener, Colvin, & Sandvik, 1991). Recently, Schneider and Schimmack (2009) conducted a meta-analysis of published studies that reported self-informant agreement for well-being. Based on 44 independent samples, the results showed that the average self-informant correlation for well-being measures was .42. Because of the relatively high convergences, Schneider & Schimmack concluded that well-being judgments have some validity. However, most previous research on self-informant agreement has been conducted in the United States, and surprisingly few studies have examined self-informant agreements outside North America. Thus, it is still unclear whether self-ratings on well-being have convergent validity in Asia or not. In the present study, we examined the convergence on several components of well-being (i.e., life satisfaction, positive and negative affect) between self- and informant-ratings among Japanese.

The importance of examining potential cross-cultural differences in self-informant agreement is highlighted by recent research suggesting that cultural differences in basic psychological findings may be more widespread than psychologists traditionally have acknowledged. The knowledge base for psychological and other social/behavioral sciences comes largely from Western, Educated, Industrial, and Democratic (WEIRD) societies (Henrich,

Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010). The self-informant agreement literature is no exception. The lack of non-WEIRD data could obscure the possibility of societal/cultural variation, and could lead researchers and readers to reach a potentially erroneous conclusion that subjective well-being can be assessed by informants reliably across any cultural groups. The current study is an attempt to broaden the basis of knowledge on subjective well-being to non-WEIRD samples, in particular, on the issue of self-informant agreement.

Previous work has examined cultural differences in self-informant agreements on personality ratings. For instance, Heine and Renshaw (2002) found that the average self-informant agreement correlations on personality traits were significantly lower for Japanese than for Americans. Suh (2002) also reported a similar pattern of results between Americans and Koreans, and speculated that cultural differences in self-other agreements on personality traits may arise from cultural differences in consistency of behavior across situations. Because judgments about a target person's personality may influence judgments about the target's well-being, it is likely that cultural differences in the convergence of self- and informant-ratings on personality would also extend to cultural differences in self-informant agreement on life satisfaction and positive and negative affect.

In one of very few studies to have previously computed self-informant agreements of well-being among the people from an Asian cultural background, Kim, Schimmack, and Oishi (2012) collected self- and informant-ratings of well-being from Asian Canadians and European Canadians. Their results showed that the correlations between the latent factors for self-ratings and informant-ratings were significant. However, Kim et al. computed

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +81 45 564 2518.

E-mail address: [saekimasao@gmail.com](mailto:saekimasao@gmail.com) (M. Saeki).

self-informant agreements among the combined sample of European Canadians and Asian Canadians, and did not report self-informant agreement among only Asians Canadians. Okazaki (2002) examined self-informant agreement on depression and affective scales among Asian Americans and White Americans. She demonstrated that agreements of these scales did not differ across cultures. However, given evidence that Asian Americans often score in between European Americans and Asians living in Asia on myriad tasks<sup>1</sup> (e.g., Hamamura, Heine, & Paulhus, 2008; Norenzayan, Smith, Kim, & Nisbett, 2002), it is possible that the comparison between European Americans and Asian Americans might underestimate the cultural differences between countries.

### 1.1. The present study

Our study extends the existing literatures in several ways. First, we collected data from Japanese participants living in Japan. To our knowledge, the current study is the first to examine self-informant agreements for well-being ratings among Asians residing in Asia. Because self-informant agreement on personality is lower among Asians than North Americans (Heine & Renshaw, 2002; Suh, 2002), we predicted that the size of self-informant agreement of life satisfaction would also be lower than those from previous findings conducted in the United States (Schneider & Schimmack, 2009). Furthermore, previous research has demonstrated that Japanese self-enhance less than North Americans (Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999). Thus, we also predicted that mean self-reports of life satisfaction would be lower than informant-reports of life satisfaction among Japanese. Second, our respondents completed several components of well-being and personality scales for self-report and informant-report. Thus, we can directly compare the sizes of agreement for the same respondents across multiple measures. Previous studies have demonstrated that easily observable personality traits show stronger self-other agreement than internal, subjective traits (e.g., Funder & Colvin, 1988; Watson & Clark, 1991). This reasoning predicts that the size of self-informant agreement on life satisfaction might be lower than the agreement on more easily observable traits (i.e., extraversion). Third, we also measured domain satisfaction for self-reports and informant-reports because domain satisfaction is a primary component of subjective well-being (Schimmack, Diener, & Oishi, 2002), but it may have different self-informant agreement and has not yet been tested across cultures. For instance, Schneider and Schimmack (2010) collected self-ratings and informant ratings of life satisfaction and domain satisfaction in five domains (family, health, academics, friends and weather) among Canadians. They found that domain satisfaction produced higher self-informant agreement than life satisfaction. Another study found that significant self-informant agreement for spouses' informant ratings of marital satisfaction and job satisfaction in the U.S. (Heller, Watson, & Ilies, 2006).

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants

Participants were recruited from the downtown streets of Shibuya, Ikebukuro, and Takadanobaba wards in Tokyo. Because most previous self-informant agreement studies collected data from university students, to make the comparison to previous research meaningful, we recruited only same-sex friends who were

in college. Research assistants asked persons who were walking with a same-sex companion about their relationship to each other and whether they were college students. In total, 202 same-sex Japanese friendships pairs (43% female) were recruited for the survey. The mean age of the sample was 20.4 ( $SD = 1.5$ ), and the average friendships length was 33.3 months ( $SD = 31.6$ ).

### 2.2. Procedure

To ensure honest and independent responding, participants were physically separated, and then completed a battery of instruments that included basic demographic information, general life satisfaction, domain satisfaction, positive and negative affect, extraversion, and neuroticism. To obtain friends' ratings, we prepared a parallel questionnaire that used the same items for well-being and personality scales. After participants finished the questionnaire, they received \$1 worth of candy for their participation.

### 2.3. Measures

**Satisfaction measures.** General life satisfaction was assessed using the first three items of the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985; Oishi, 2009,  $\alpha = .87$  for self-report,  $.85$  for informant-report) because the last two items are especially problematic in comparisons of North Americans and Asians (Oishi, 2006). Domain satisfaction was assessed with six single-item questions (i.e., I am satisfied with the weather, I am satisfied with the my friendships, I am satisfied with my academic life, I am satisfied with my health, I am satisfied with my relationships with my parents, I am satisfied with my romantic life). The response format for all ratings was a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. The alpha coefficient for the six domains was  $.61$  for both the self and the informant reports.

**Affective measures.** The positive affect measure was constructed by averaging three positive affect adjectives (pleasant, cheerful, and happy), and the negative affect measure was constructed by averaging three negative affect adjectives (unpleasant, downhearted, and depressed). Participants were asked to rate how often they felt these affect adjectives during the past few weeks. The response format was a 5-point scales, ranging from 1 = not at all to 5 = very often. The alpha coefficient of positive affect was  $.82$  for self-report and  $.86$  for informant report. The alpha of negative affect was  $.77$  for self-report and  $.78$  for informant report.

**Personality measures.** Extraversion and neuroticism were assessed using the Big Five Inventory (Kim, Schimmack, & Oishi, 2012). Extraversion was assessed using 4 items (i.e., I tend to be talkative, I tend to be reserved (reverse scored), I tend to be outgoing and sociable, I tend to be full of energy). The alpha coefficient was  $.62$  for self-report and  $.58$  for informant-report. Neuroticism was assessed using 4 items (i.e., I tend to relaxed and handle stress well (reverse scored), I tend to worry a lot, I tend to get nervous easily, I tend to be easily upset). The alpha was  $.60$  for self-report and  $.52$  for informant-report.

## 3. Results

Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations for the primary variables for self- and informant-reports. As predicted, paired *t* tests revealed that self-rated life satisfaction was significantly lower than informant-rated life satisfaction. Similarly, two of the six individual domain satisfaction items and the average of the six domain satisfaction items were significantly lower for the self-reports than for the informant-reports. Positive and negative affect, extraversion and neuroticism also showed similar patterns

<sup>1</sup> For example, Hamamura et al. (2008) reported that mean Rosenberg self-esteem scale scores were 39.6, 35.7, and 31.1 for European Americans, Asian Americans, and Japanese sample, respectively.

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