Cultural Similarities and Differences in Social Identification in Japan and Australia

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Abstract

A comparison of social identification processes in Australia and Japan found some similarities and differences. In both countries, identification with smaller face-to-face groups was found to be stronger than identification with larger social categories; however, Australians scored higher on the affective dimension of social identification, whereas Japanese scored higher on the cognitive dimension. Moreover, positive situations from Australia and negative situations from Japan were estimated by respondents from both cultures to be more influential in determining how much they identify with their ingroups, showing a cultural situation-bias effect. Situational affordances of social identification across cultures are discussed.

Key words: Social identification, culture, impacts of social situation, Australia-Japan difference, friendship group
Social identification is the key concept for understanding the relationship between a person and a group. In numerous studies conducted to date, primarily in European and North American cultural contexts, social identification has been highlighted as an important moderator of collective identity threats on individuals. For instance, individuals who find their ingroup being consistently devalued or discriminated against by the society would strive to better their group’s social standing only if they strongly identify with the ingroup (e.g., Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999; Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1997; Jetten, Schmitt, Branscombe, & McKimmie, 2005; McCoy & Major, 2003). Those with weaker ingroup identification are more likely to psychologically shift away from the group and even abandon their group membership if they see the self as being disadvantaged because of their group affiliation (e.g., Branscombe & Ellemers, 1998; Hutchison, Jetten, Christian, & Haycraft, 2006; Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Researchers have also recognized some potential cultural variations in the effects of social identification on individuals (e.g., Abrams, Ando & Hinkle, 1998; Bond & Hewstone, 1988; Jetten, Postmes, & McAuliffe, 2002; Triandis, McCusker, & Hui, 1990; Uleman, Rhee, Bardoliwalla, Semin, & Toyama, 2000). In particular, Yuki and his colleagues (Brewer & Yuki, 2007; Yuki, 2003; Yuki, Maddux, Brewer, & Takemura, 2005) have argued that social identification that highlights the sense of depersonalized self is less characteristic of a typical East Asian group context where the group is construed as a network of separate individuals rather than a monolithic entity. According to these authors, in situations that make salient one’s membership in a large ingroup category, East Asians are less likely to identify with the ingroup than are North Americans. From a somewhat different angle, Hong and her colleagues
(Hong et al., 2003) argued that social identities are uniquely constructed, depending on one’s implicit theory about social groups. Hong’s view implies that social identification operates as a function of one of two cultural perspectives, one in which people tend to think that social groups have fixed attributes (i.e., the entity theorists), and the other in which people tend to think characteristics of social groups are flexibly malleable (i.e., the incremental theorists).

In spite of the emerging research on culture and social identification, systematic investigation of basic similarities and differences in social identification processes across cultures is rare. At the most basic level the question of whether the concept of social identification is equivalent across cultures needs to be examined. Although researchers have largely taken the concept of social identification to be universal, the concept should be best regarded as *pseudoetic* until it is demonstrated to be truly etic (Triandis & Marin, 1983).

According to the Compact Oxford English Dictionary, *identify with* means regarding oneself as sharing the same characteristics (as someone or something); or thinking as (someone else), and associating (someone or something) closely with. Interestingly, however, there is a reason to suspect that this notion of *identify with* is not native to all world languages. In Japanese, for instance, *to identify with* is not part of the everyday language. Among Japanese speakers, the term ‘aidentiti’ which mimics the sound of ‘identity’ may be used at times when referring to ego-identity but the concept of social identification (or collective identification) is not as commonly used. In Liu’s (2003) chapter on social identification, Yamaguchi translated group identification as ‘Hitoga jikoto shuudanwo douitsuhisurukoto (sunawachi, shuudanwo jibunjishinno ichibutosite minasukoto)’ (p. 86), that is, ‘the person regards the self and the group to be the same (to see the group to be part of the self)’. Many
group and organizational researchers, however, operationalize group identification in terms of the sense of belonging or ‘being part of the group’ (e.g., Hornsey & Jetten, 2004; Nishida & Gudykunst, 1999; Prentice, Miller & Lightdale, 1994). Moreover, in their recent paper, Ashmore, Deaux, and McLaughlin-Volpe (2004) reviewed diverse definitions of collective identity that have appeared in the recent social psychological literature. They identified several elements of collective identity, including self-categorization, evaluation, attachment, and importance, among others. Thus, whether or not social psychologists and lay people across cultures ascribe similar meanings to social identification is a relevant question.

In the present research, we systematically compared the psychological experiences of social identification in Japan and Australia. Three strategies were adopted. First, we examined directly whether Japanese and Australians evaluate the personal experiences of social identification in similar terms by using a standard rating scale. Second, we examined whether or not people from these two cultures identify with ingroups of different types to the same degrees; specifically, more strongly with smaller face-to-face groups than larger social categories. Third, we examined if members of these different cultural groups find a particular social situation similarly more identification-enhancing or more identification-diminishing. We will report three studies that together shed some new light on the basic questions regarding culture and social identification.

**Study 1**

Study 1 tested the first two questions about social identification; whether there are cultural differences in (a) the personal evaluation of social identification with different targets, and (b) the degrees of identification with smaller vs. larger ingroups. We also elicited from Study 1 participants situations that they had previously
experienced in their own life and found relevant to their identification with specific ingroups.

As reviewed by Ashmore et al. (2004), previous researchers have often measured social identification by using self-rating scales that included multiple elements of social identification. We used a scale that included three of the key elements: (1) cognition, or self-perception of being a member of a particular group, (2) affect, or evaluation of the experience of being part of the group, and (3) psychological tie, or attachment/involvement with the group. Although it is difficult to directly translate the notion of social identification per se into Japanese, these three elements of social identification are readily translatable. We provided respondents four ingroups: Family and friendship groups represented smaller face-to-face groups, and university and society represented large social categories.

According to Optimal Distinctiveness Theory (e.g., Brewer, 1991), humans try to achieve an optimal balance between two opposing social needs for inclusion and differentiation. This may have implications for how strongly individuals identify with ingroups of various sizes. While adopting a personal identity (not identifying with an ingroup) satisfies differentiation needs at the expense of inclusion needs, identifying with a larger social category satisfies inclusion needs at the expense of differentiation needs. In contrast, small face-to-face groups have potential for optimizing the balance between the two needs; hence, smaller ingroups might generally facilitate stronger identification than larger ingroups across cultures (see Brewer & Caporael, 2006, for a related discussion). Nevertheless, the point of optimal balance in terms of preferred ingroup size could differ across cultures. Following the reasoning of Yuki (2003), the optimal point is biased towards the larger group size in North America, compared to East Asia. As previous research has found high degrees of cultural similarity between
Australia and the U.S.A. (e.g., Y.Kashima et al., 1995, 2005), it may be expected that Australians, as well as North Americans, would identify more strongly with larger social categories relative to the Japanese.

**Method**

**Participants**

The participants were 55 undergraduate students (15 men and 40 women) from a university in Melbourne, Australia, and 48 undergraduate students (25 men and 23 women) from a university in Sapporo, Japan. The mean age of the participants was roughly equal: 20.3 years in Australia and 19.3 years in Japan, \( t (101) = 1.79, p > .10 \). All participants were born citizens of the respective country. Five Australian participants had European backgrounds other than Anglo-Irish (the major cultural background of Australians) such as Eastern European or Southern European.

**Materials**

Respondents were first asked to indicate their gender, age, and cultural background in the questionnaire. They were then presented with four ingroups (society, university, friendship group, and family) in one of two counterbalanced sequences. With respect to each ingroup, respondents rated the degree to which each of three identification statements described the self, using a seven-point scale spanning from 1 'not at all' to 7 'very much': "I see myself as part of (the group)"; and "I am pleased to be in (the group)"; "I feel strong ties with (the group)". A corresponding group label was used in place of ‘the group’. Translation of these statements was conducted by the first author, and another bilingual individual translated them back into English. The back translation was identical to the original. In addition, participants were asked to recall a previous life situation where they
strongly felt being part of the group, and a situation where they strongly felt not being part of the group.

**Procedure**

Participants were recruited from lectures in the introductory psychology courses at the respective universities. Volunteers received the questionnaire in the lecture, completed it at their convenience, and returned it to the investigators through a box provided on their university campus. The cross-cultural nature of the research was not disclosed.

**Results and Discussion**

**Cognition, affect, and psychological tie**

We first examined the Japanese and Australian respondents’ subjective experience of social identification. Within each cultural sample, we compared the ratings for cognition, affect, and psychological tie with the four ingroups. This examination showed an interesting pattern. Averaging across four ingroups, and regardless of gender, Japanese participants scored higher on cognition than affect (5.42 vs. 4.98), whereas Australians scored higher on affect than cognition (5.59 vs. 5.26). The respective difference was found to be significant, using pair-wise comparisons with Bonferroni adjustment in a 3 (Scale) × 4 (Target Group) × 2 (Gender) ANOVA: $t'(46) = 3.34, p < .01$, for Japanese; $t'(53) = 3.38, p < .01$; for Australians (see Fig. 1 for the scale mean for each ingroup target). Therefore, it seemed that perceiving the self as part of the group was more central to social identification in Japan but experiencing positive affect was more central to social identification in Australia.

In addition to this cultural difference, we also found that across ingroups, both Japanese and Australians scored lower on psychological tie than on cognition and
affect: $t'(46) = 11.03$ and $6.55, ps < .001$ for Japanese; $t'(53) = 5.93, 8.75, p < .001$, for Australians. This tendency appeared stronger for University and Society, somewhat weaker for Friendship Group, and the weakest for Family in both samples. The sense of psychological tie thus seemed less central to social identification in both cultures, with the exception of identification with the family.

How do these elements of social identification relate to one another? Our analysis found them to be coherently related. A principal component analysis of the three ratings clearly showed that the ratings formed a single factor; however, the total amount of variance accounted for by the general factor was greater in Australia (74% to 89%) than in Japan (58% to 85%). The internal consistency of the three ratings was also slightly lower in Japan relative to Australia, especially for the larger social categories (see Table 1) due to the weaker link between psychological tie and cognition/affect in Japan (between .35 and .43; in Australia, .53 and .76).

**Social identification with smaller vs. larger ingroups**

We next examined the expectation that social identification with smaller ingroups would be stronger than identification with larger ingroups, both in Australia and Japan. To this end, the mean group identification scores across the four ingroups were analyzed in a 2 (Culture) × 4 (Target Group) × 2 (Gender) ANOVA. A planned contrast was used to test the effect of group size, which showed a highly significant effect, $F(1, 99) = 109.8, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .54$. The result indicated that identification with the smaller groups ($M = 5.77$) was stronger than identification with the larger groups ($M = 4.33$). Further, this effect was not qualified by culture, gender, or by their interaction, $Fs < 1$; thus, the tendency to identify more strongly with smaller groups was consistent in both cultures and in both gender groups.
The analysis also found no evidence to suggest that one cultural group had stronger social identification than the other, overall, $F(1, 99) = 2.88, p > .10$. Likewise, a gender difference was also absent, $F = 2.23, p > .10; F < 1$ for the gender by culture interaction. Further, a planned contrast revealed that both Australians and Japanese identified more strongly with family than friendship group, $F(1, 99) = 4.57, p < .05$. The degree of identification with family was equivalent between the cultural samples, $t' < 1$ (pair-wise comparison with Bonferroni adjustment) but identification with the friendship group was stronger in Australia than in Japan, $t'(99) = 2.33, p < .05$. The cultural groups also differed in their relative degrees of identification with university and society, $F(1, 99) = 27.81, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .23$. Whereas Australians identified slightly more strongly with their society than university, though not significantly, $t'(99) = 2.06, p > .10$, Japanese identified significantly more strongly with their university than society, $t'(99) = -5.51, p < .001$. Interestingly, the average degree of identification with university did not differ between the cultural groups, $t'(99) = -1.72, p > .10$, but societal identification was much stronger in Australia than in Japan, $t'(99) = 3.73, p < .001$.

In sum, Study 1 found that the subjective experience of social identification involved both cultural similarities and differences. Psychological tie was weaker than cognitive and affective facets of social identification in both Japan and Australia, but cognition was stronger than affect in Japan and affect stronger than cognition in Australia. We also found both similarities and differences regarding the types of ingroups with which people identify. Both cultural groups reported stronger identification with smaller, face-to-face, ingroups than larger categories. They also agreed in their stronger identification with the family than friendship group, suggesting the special status of family as ingroup across cultures. Nevertheless,
Australians reported identifying more with society than university, whereas Japanese showed the opposite tendency. Further, both societal identification and friendship-group identification were stronger in Australia than in Japan. We further investigated this interesting cultural difference in degree of societal identification in Study 2, and friendship-group identification in Study 3. In addition, we pursued our third question, which concerned the impacts of social situations derived from the two societies on individuals’ social identification.

**Study 2**

Does a social situation found to be identification-enhancing or identification-diminishing in one culture have similar psychological impacts in another culture? To answer this question, the situations elicited by Study 1 respondents as having been identification-enhancing or identification-diminishing in their own life were presented to new samples of participants from Japan and Australia. The new respondents rated the situations derived from both societies in terms of how identification-enhancing or -diminishing they were, with no information about the societal origin of each situation provided. If each situation has similar psychological meanings for Japanese and Australians, we would find no effect of respondent culture. Nonetheless, the potential impacts of identification-relevant situations that originate from one culture may be subtly different from those that originate from another. For example, positive situations in one culture might be more identification-enhancing than positive situations in another culture. Likewise, negative situations from one culture might be more identification-diminishing than negative situations from another culture. Such an effect, referred to as a *cultural situation-bias effect* here, may partly explain why people from one society identify more strongly with a particular ingroup than do people from another society.
The notion that the sense of self is constructed socially and collectively through individuals’ participation in social situations has been experimentally demonstrated by Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, and Norasakkunkit (1997). In their research, respondents from the U.S.A. and Japan rated the social situations sampled from these two cultures in terms of how likely it was that each situation would influence their own self-esteem, in which direction (increase vs. decrease), and to what extent. The results showed that both American and Japanese participants rated situations from the U.S.A. to be more self-esteem enhancing than those from Japan. As Americans tended to have higher levels of self-esteem than Japanese, this meant that situations from the culture with higher self-esteem tended to be more self-esteem enhancing. Nevertheless, participants in their research also thought that the situations originating from their own culture would be more influential than those from the other culture, though unaware of the cultural origin of these situations. We call own culture effect this tendency to regard situations from one’s own (vs. other) culture as more influential (in the lack of knowledge of cultural origin of the situations). Cultural familiarity of situations may facilitate an own culture effect by enhancing one’s sensitivity to these situations. Kitayama et al. found bicultural Japanese in the U.S.A. rated both positive American situations and negative Japanese situations as more influential than mono-cultural Japanese and mono-cultural Americans, respectively, thus showing the own culture effect in two ways.

By extrapolating from Kitayama et al. (1997) research, we predicted that our participants would show both a cultural situation-bias effect and an own culture effect. Reflecting a cultural situation-bias effect, it was expected that regardless of respondent culture individuals would find situations from Australia to be more identification-enhancing and situations from Japan to be less identification-enhancing,
or even more identification-diminishing. Reflecting own culture effect, individuals would generally find situations from own culture more influential than those from the other culture.

In addition to these effects of situation-culture, there may also be some effects involving individual differences in societal identification. For instance, those who have established a high level of identification with their society may estimate their societal identification to strengthen in a positive social situation, and to a greater extent than their counterparts who have lower levels of societal identification.

Method

Participants

Participants were 57 Australian students (15 men and 42 women) and 61 Japanese students (46 men and 15 women) from the same universities as in Study 1. The mean age of Australians ($M = 19.5, SD = 1.5$) was slightly higher than that of Japanese ($18.9, 1.2$), $t (116) = 2.71, p < .01$, but this had no implication for the results reported below. All participants were born citizens of their respective country. In the Australian sample, six participants had European backgrounds other than Anglo-Irish.

Materials

Situations concerning societal identification elicited in Study 1 were collated. After discarding overly general (e.g., 'everyday situations', 'never') and irrelevant items (e.g., ‘cannot recall’), situations from Australia were translated from English to Japanese, and those from Japan were translated from Japanese to English. Two bilinguals engaged in translation and back-translation. Culturally unique situations, such as Australia Day (Australia’s national foundation day) and Anzac Day (the day that marks the anniversary of the first major military action fought by Australian and New Zealand forces during the First World War), were replaced with events in the
other society with the cultural significance most similar, such as ‘Kenkoku Kinenbi’ (Japan’s national foundation day) and ‘Shuusen Kinenbi’ (the day that commemorates the defeat of Japan in WW2). Twenty-five identification-enhancing situations and identification-reducing situations were randomly sampled from the pool of Japanese situations. Twenty-five identification-enhancing situations were also randomly sampled from the pool of Australian situations, but only 18 identification-reducing situations were used because the pool had fewer items due to redundancy among items. The 93 situations were randomly sequenced and presented in that order in one version of the questionnaire. The sequence was reversed in another version of the questionnaire. See Appendix for examples of situations.

Respondents were asked to think of their society (Australian society for Australians, Japanese society for Japanese) while reading the situations presented. Three ratings were required for each situation: (1) whether or not the sense of being part of society would be affected in the situation described, with a 'yes' vs. 'no' option; (2) If the 'yes' option was chosen, participants then selected between the options of ‘the sense of being part of society would increase’ and ‘the sense of being part of society would decrease’; and (3) the extent of such a shift in identification with society on a four-point scale ranging from 1 'slightly' to 4 'very much'. We coded ‘yes’ responses as 1 and ‘no’ responses as 0. When the situation was identification-enhancing, ‘increase’ responses were coded +1 and ‘decrease’ responses -1. When the situation was identification-reducing, ‘decrease’ responses were coded +1 and ‘increase’ responses -1. Then, this value was multiplied by the degree of shift on the four-point scale. Thus, the score range was from -4 to +4 through 0 that suggested no change. A higher score suggested a larger change in societal identification in the
direction expected. Finally, respondents completed the 3-item social identification (society) scale that was used in Study 1 (Study 2 $\alpha = .79$).

**Procedure**

In both countries, participants completed the questionnaire as part of their class exercises. They worked independently, and submitted their completed questionnaire to their tutors. The cross-cultural nature of the study was not disclosed to the participants until the task was complete.

**Results and Discussion**

A 2 (Culture) × 2 (Gender) ANOVA found that similar to Study 1, identification with society was stronger among the Australians ($M = 4.53, SD = 1.14$) than the Japanese ($3.48, 1.05$), $F(1, 114) = 16.41, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .13$. Gender had no main effect or interaction effect, $Fs < 1$.

*Impacts of situations on social identification change*

The estimated identification change scores were averaged across situations within each of the four conditions derived from situation culture and situation valence (identification enhancing vs. diminishing). They were submitted to a 2 (Situation Culture) × 2 (Respondent Culture) × 2 (Situation Valence) × 2 (Gender) mixed-factors ANCOVA, with the score of societal identification as a covariate. No reliable main effect for Respondent Culture was detected, $F < 1$, suggesting that the estimated change in social identification overall was similar between the cultural groups. There was a significant Respondent Culture by Situation Culture two-way interaction effect, $F(1, 113) = 4.77, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .04$; however, this effect was qualified by a highly significant three-way interaction due to Respondent Culture x Situation Culture x Situation Valence, $F(1, 113) = 10.91, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .09$. 
The three-way interaction effect combined the cultural situation-bias effect with the own culture effect in the following manner. Supporting the cultural situation-bias prediction that Australian situations would be more identification-enhancing and Japanese situations more identification-attenuating, respondents indeed indicated that their societal identification would decrease more in the negative Japanese situations than the negative Australian situations (see the right panel of Fig. 2) but it would increase more in the positive Australia situations than in the positive Japanese situations (the left panel of Fig. 2). Nevertheless, showing the own cultural effect at the same time, the estimated impact of positive situations from Australia (vs. Japan) was stronger among Australian respondents than among Japanese respondents, $F(1, 113) = 16.42, p < .001$. The estimated impact of negative Japanese (vs. Australian) situations was however no stronger in Japan than Australia, $F < 1$. Therefore, the own culture effect was only partly supported.

Are the stronger effects of positive situations from own (vs. other) culture likely to be due to the respondents finding the foreign situations inconceivable or meaningless, rather than finding native situations familiar and compelling? To test this possibility, we presented the 93 situations to a new sample of 44 university students from Japan (30 women and 14 men) who rated each item in terms of its meaningfulness, on a scale that ranged from 1 ‘extremely difficult to imagine’ to 6 ‘extremely easy to imagine’. A 2 (Situation Culture) × 2 (Situation Valence) × 2 (Gender) ANOVA revealed that Japanese students indeed found Japanese situations easier to imagine than the Australian situations, $F(1, 42) = 60.45, p < .001$. Nonetheless, the Australian mean (3.88), as well as the Japanese mean (4.36), was on the higher side of the scale, suggesting that Japanese judges did not find Australian situations to be highly inconceivable. Further, contrary to an assumption that people
would find less meaningful situations to be less influential, the correlation between the perceived impact and situational meaningfulness was negative \((r = -.22, p < .05)\) across 93 situations; \(-.25 > r > -.15\), n.s., for positive/negative situations from Australia/Japan). Thus, the weaker effect associated with the foreign situations does not seem entirely due to their relative meaninglessness. Nonetheless, the meaningfulness ratings were not obtained from Australia, therefore cautions are required in interpreting the current result.

The ANCOVA also yielded a significant covariate effect of Identification, \(F(1,113) = 17.56, p < .001\), as well as an Identification \(\times\) Situation Valence two-way interaction, \(F = 4.61, p < .05\), and an Identification \(\times\) Situation Valence \(\times\) Situation Culture, three-way interaction effect, \(F = 8.33, p < .01\). Together, these effects suggested that the more strongly the respondents identified with society the more they thought their social identification would be influenced in all except the negative Australian situations (\(F < 1\) for negative Australian situations; \(F = 16.63, p < .001\) for positive Australian situations, \(F = 15.42, p < .001\) for positive Japanese situations; \(F = 5.32, p < .05\) for negative Japanese situations). Thus, as anticipated, the positive social situations had greater identification-enhancing impacts on individuals who had established higher (vs. lower) levels of societal identification. Somewhat unexpectedly, however, the negative situations from Japan had more identification-attenuating impacts on those with higher (vs. lower) societal identification in Japan and Australia. It may be that those who identify more strongly with society, relative to their lower identification counterparts, are more sensitive to negative as well as positive situational influences. Nonetheless, the impact of negative Australian situations was consistently low, regardless of identification level, which might be attributed to the limitation of our pool of negative Australian situations.
Analysis so far has indicated that participants found positive situations more identification-enhancing and negative situations more identification-diminishing regardless of the cultural origin of those situations. Nonetheless, evidence also indicated that situations originating from each society had subtly different effects. Australian positive situations were rated more powerful in increasing societal identification, and more so in Australian than in Japan. Japanese negative situations were rated more powerful in reducing societal identification, in both Japan and Australia, and especially by respondents with higher societal identification in both countries.

Taken together, this pattern of results suggested that Australian (vs. Japanese) society makes available identification enhancing situations more whereas Japanese (vs. Australian) society makes available identification reducing situations more. Nevertheless, because of the smaller sample of negative Australian situations used, Study 2 results were limited. We therefore conducted a conceptual replication of Study 2 with another ingroup target included in Study 1; friendship group. Study 1 data suggested that Australians tend to identify more strongly with their friendship groups than Japanese. Although using an ingroup with which Japanese identify more strongly than Australians might also be beneficial, Study 1 failed to identify such an ingroup. Given stronger identification with the friendship group in Australia than in Japan, situational effects similar to Study 2 were expected in the new sample.

**Study 3**

*Method*

Participants were 52 Australia students (11 men and 41 women) and 61 Japanese students (37 men and 24 women) from the same universities as in Study 1.
All were born citizens of the respective country. Five Australian participants had a non-Anglo-Celtic, European background.

Materials and Procedure

Twenty-five each of the identification-enhancing and identification-reducing situations relating to the friendship group were randomly selected from the situations elicited in Japan and Australia in Study 1. These were then presented in one of two random sequences in a questionnaire. The same materials and procedures as used in Study 2 were adopted. See Appendix for examples of situations. The degree of identification with one’s friendship group was assessed by the same three items used in Study 1 and Study 2 (Study 3 $\alpha = .87$).

Results and Discussion

An examination of the group identification score in a 2 (Culture) × 2 (Gender) ANOVA found that, as in Study 1, identification with the friendship group was significantly stronger in Australia ($M = 5.63, SD = 1.22$) than in Japan ($M = 4.82, SD = 1.26$), $F(1, 109) = 8.21, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .07$, but unrelated to gender, $Fs < 1.6$.

Identification change scores were submitted to a 2 (Situation Culture) × 2 (Respondent Culture) × 2 (Situation Valence) × 2 (Gender) mixed-factors ANCOVA with friendship-group identification serving as a covariate. Two two-way interaction effects, one involving Situation Valence × Situation Culture, $F(1, 108) = 5.72, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .05$, and another involving Situation Culture × Respondent Culture, $F(1, 108) = 18.51, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .15$, were found; however, they were qualified by a significant three-way interaction of Situation Valence × Situation Culture × Respondent Culture, $F(1, 108) = 5.35, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .05$. They suggested the following two effects. First, indicating the own culture effect, both Australian and Japanese respondents found positive situations from their own culture more influential than
those from the other culture; pair-wise comparisons with Bonferroni adjustment, 
$t'(108) = 3.58, p < .01$, for Australians; $t'(108) = 4.02, p < .001$, for Japanese. Second, 
repeating Study 2 results and supporting the cultural situation-bias effect, both 
cultural groups found negative situations from Japan to be more influential than those 
from Australia: $t'(108) = -2.18, p < .05$, for Australians; $t'(108) = -5.80, p < .001$, for 
Japanese.²

*General Discussion*

The present research sought to clarify some similarities and differences in 
social identification in Australia and Japan. Several similarities were found. 
University students in these two societies similarly identified more strongly with 
smaller groups (family and friendship groups) than larger social categories (university 
and society), and they identified with family most strongly among the four ingroups 
examined. Also, both Japanese and Australian social identification emphasized the 
cognitive and affective elements of social identification more than psychological tie 
with the ingroup. Further, respondents indicated that, regardless of the cultural origin 
of situations, their social identification would be enhanced under situations listed as 
identification-enhancing and it would diminish under situations listed as 
identification-attenuating. These basic aspects of social identification were common 
to members of both cultural groups.

We also found several cultural differences. Australians scored higher on the 
affective dimension of social identification, whereas Japanese scored higher on the 
cognitive dimension of social identification. This interesting cultural difference 
should be further investigated in future research. We also found Japanese university 
students identified more strongly with their university than society whereas their 
Australian counterparts identified more strongly with society than university. This
difference seemed due to Japanese (vs. Australian) respondents’ lower identification with their society, as replicated in Study 2, rather than their slightly higher university identification. The finding that Australian students identified more strongly with their friendship group than did Japanese students was also replicated in Study 3.

These cultural main effects in the level of societal and friendship identification were nevertheless not the most important aspect of the present research as they may be partly influenced by cultural differences in response style (e.g., Hui & Triandis, 1989). A more important finding was that positive situations from Australia (Study 2) and negative situations from Japan (Studies 2 and 3) were estimated by respondents from both cultures to be more influential in determining how much they identify with their ingroup. Regardless of culture, respondents found positive Australian (vs. Japanese) situations to be more incremental to their societal identification, and negative Japanese (vs. Australian) situations to be more detrimental to their societal and friendship-group identification. These are examples of cultural situation-bias effect which we expected on the basis of previous research on culture and self (Kitayama et al., 1997). It may be that Australian society makes available more opportunities for young members of the society to strengthen their identification with their society, whereas Japanese situations relatively lack such opportunities. Such a possibility might be fruitfully investigated in future research.

Nevertheless, differences in the distribution of social situations can at best be only a partial explanation for the differential degrees of social identification that might be observed across cultures. The present data also found an own culture effect. In Study 2, Australian participants rated positive situations from their own (vs. other) culture to be relatively more powerful, and in Study 3, both cultural groups rated positive situations from their own culture to be relatively more powerful than
situations originating from another culture. Thus, foreign situations may have less psychological impact, at least immediately. The own culture effect in social situations, found also in previous research, is intriguing as it seemingly pertains to some situational qualities beyond simple comprehensibility. Our supplemental data, though only from Japan, found comprehensibility to be weakly associated, and negatively, with situational power. Because we are yet to confirm that low comprehensibility of Japanese situations in Australia was unrelated to the present result, the present finding should be regarded as preliminary. Future research should investigate this effect further.

There are additional limitations in the present cross-cultural investigation of social identification. In addition to being a two-culture comparison study, the present investigation involved fairly small samples of university students. Also, we assessed social identification in situations devoid of strong motivation to identify with the ingroup, such as identity threat. Social identification is a process. When a situation unfolds to present a collective threat, such as perceived lack of ingroup distinctiveness or negative evaluation toward the ingroup, individuals may strengthen their identification if they already identify with the group. To be sure, there was nothing to prevent our Study 1 respondents from sampling such situations when we elicited their prior experiences, and some situations we sampled indeed involved a collective threat, such as “when our university was criticized by the media”. However, a majority of situations recalled by the respondents did not involve collective threat, and were written from the perspective of individuals who had found their own personal place within the group, or conversely, who failed to see the self as being a part of the group. To identify potential cultural effects related to more motivated group identification, it may be instructive to elicit situations in a context that involves groups and have those
situations rated by new respondents in a group context. Further, it may be instructive to use ‘We’ rather than ‘I’ when respondents are asked to recall their past experiences. Using a priming method might also be promising (e.g., Brewer & Gardner, 1996).

Also important, the current research examined the imagined effects of social situation on own identification, thus it revealed a folk theory concerning antecedents of social identification, rather than the actual effects of situations on individuals. Implications from the present research, such that positive situations drawn from a culture with stronger identification with a particular ingroup would be more influential, and that negative situations from a culture with weaker identification with the ingroup would be more influential, should be tested in an experiment that manipulates situations directly.

In conclusion, the present research has supported the notions that social identification entails culturally similar processes, involving positive responses to an identification-enhancing situation, and negative responses to an identification-reducing situation, but those situations with implications for the individual-level social identification are distributed uniquely within each society. A particular distribution of positive and negative situations within a given society might be partly responsible for the general level of social identification with a particular ingroup. Future research should uncover such situational affordance of social identification processes across cultures with respect to different social groups.
End Notes

1There was also another unanticipated effect involving gender: women tended to be influenced more by Australian situations than the Japanese situations (.71 vs. .60) whereas men were influenced similarly by these situations (.61 vs. .64), resulting in a significant Gender x Situation Culture two-way interaction effect, F (1, 113) = 4.04, p < .05. This effect was not qualified further.

2 Four further effects were found from the ANCOVA. A gender main effect, F (1,108)=7.82, p < .01, and a Gender x Respondent Culture interaction effect, F=6.02, p < .05, suggested that Australian women thought their group identification would be affected more than did their male counterparts (1.79 vs. 1.17 in Australia; but 1.33 vs. 1.29 in Japan). An Identification main effect, F (1,108) = 5.44, p < .05, and a Valence x Identification interaction effect, F (1,108) = 12.56, p < .01, suggested that respondents who identified more strongly with their friendship group thought their identification would strengthen more, in positive situations in particular.
Author Note

We thank Dr Masaki Yuki from Hokkaido University for collecting Japanese data, and for his valuable comments on an earlier draft of this manuscript.
References


Hornsey, M. J., & Jetten, J. (2004). The individual within the group: Balancing the need to belong with the need to be different. Personality and Social Psychology Review, 8, 248-264.


Table 1:

Coefficient $\alpha$, the mean social identification, and SD, with family, friendship group, university and society (Study 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Australians ($n = 55$)</th>
<th></th>
<th>Japanese ($n = 48$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$\alpha$</td>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>$SD$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>6.08</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendship Group</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>5.93</td>
<td>1.06</td>
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<tr>
<td>University</td>
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<td>4.24</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>4.62</td>
<td>1.06</td>
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</table>
Figure Captions

Figure 1. Identification with family, friendship, society, and university groups (Study 1)

Figure 2. The effects of identification-enhancing and -reducing situations sampled from Australia and Japan on identification with society (Study 2)

Figure 3. The effects of identification-enhancing and -reducing situations sampled from Australia and Japan on identification with friendship group (Study 3)
Fig. 1

Family

Friendship Group

University

Society

Notes. 1 = Cognition, 2 = Affect, 3 = Psychological tie.
Fig. 2

Situations sampled
- from Australia
- from Japan

Estimated degree of identification change

Note. Error bars present +/- 2SE
Note. Error bars present +/- 2SE
### Appendix

Examples of situations sampled from Australia and Japan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Societal Identification</th>
<th>Positive situations from Australia</th>
<th>Blood donation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>When I got my driving license</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive situations from Japan</td>
<td>When I catch public transport.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>When I take out rubbish every week.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative situations from Australia</td>
<td>When I did not leave the house for the entire day</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Being sick and bed ridden for two weeks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative situations from Japan</td>
<td>When I don’t agree with others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not knowing the latest gossip</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Friendship-Group Identification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive situations from Australia</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive situations from Japan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative situations from Australia</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative situations from Japan</td>
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</table>