

**Research Proposal:  
Mother-daughter Relationships in the USA, Germany and Austria and  
among Pakistani immigrants to the U. S.**

Donna Goetz, Elmhurst College, Illinois

**I. Project summary**

The purpose of the study is to understand how cultural conditions influence self-concept and the relationship between mother and daughter. Dr. Chizuko Sugita, from Bukkyo University, Kyoto, Japan and I collaborated on a project in comparing mother-daughter pairs between Japan and the U. S. and we presented our results at the Annual Meeting of the International Council of Psychologists (2000).

Now I am interested in expanding this work and have obtained agreements from three other researchers who will participate. Dr. Roswith Roth of the University of Graz and Dr. Gabrielle Dietz of Humboldt University in Berlin have agreed to collect data using our research design. Dr. Anie Kalayjian has access to Pakistani women who have immigrated to the U. S. and will also collect data in Chicago.

The measures that we will use are a short demographic questionnaire, an open-ended response form which requests that the daughter “describe your mother in your own words” in writing, and a mother-image questionnaire. The next questionnaire requests that the daughters rate their attitudes towards their own childhood and their plans for the future, including work and plans for marriage and children. The mothers are requested to complete only one questionnaire, they rate themselves on a self-concept questionnaire, the same one that their daughters completed as the mother-image questionnaire.

**II. Narrative**

1. Current Situation: Goetz and Sugita (2000) analyzed data comparing college age daughters in the U. S. and Japan. We found that the cognitive mother-image of the

daughters in the United States and in Japan were more similar than different. There was much overlap in the open-ended descriptions of their mothers. The great majority of the terms used by both samples were positive. About two thirds of the most frequently used terms by the Americans were also utilized by the Japanese daughters. Although the Americans used “loving,” as one of the most frequent terms, the Japanese did not use “loving.” This could indicate that the love of a mother is taken for granted but not spoken of directly in words. This would be similar to the custom in many German families that it is unnecessary to speak of love, which should be demonstrated through actions rather than words. (Summers, 2000). The term “loving” also has erotic connotations in Japanese, and therefore would not be used to describe a mother’s love.

It is unclear why “sacrificing” and “would do anything (for me)” were used by Americans, while “egocentric (selfish)” was used by some Japanese. “Independent” clearly fits the American culture, which stresses individualism rather than the interdependence and harmony emphasized by the Japanese. We found substantial similarity in the terms used for describing mothers and in the structure of the mother–image, and the way the mothers rated themselves.

The subtleties of language as well as the differences in cultural values were reflected in our findings. Sugita (2000) agreed with my rephrasing the Japanese term, “obatarian” or “pushy middle-aged woman” as “assertive middle-aged woman” in English. A number of the American mothers endorsed that description of themselves. However, “obatarian” is viewed as a negative term in Japan, has only come into use recently, and few Japanese women use this term to describe themselves. “Opinionated” and “not wishing to take care of others” were viewed as negative qualities in the U. S., but not in Japan. Although “opinionated” has a negative connotation in English, the Japanese equivalent, according to Sugita, is neutral, meaning having one’s own opinion.

**2. The Project Plan.** Some of the data that I am proposing to collect will be from two western European individualistic cultures: Austria and Germany. I expect the pattern of mother-daughter relationships to be more similar to the U. S. pattern. I expect the pattern of the Pakistani women to be more similar to the Japanese pattern as the eastern cultures are termed collectivist.

A review of the literature found that little research has been done on cross-cultural similarities and differences in adult mother-daughter relationships. Kitayama and Markus (1995) argued that although social science research has assumed that “the individual is a self-contained entity who ...comprises a unique configuration of internal attributes (e.g. preferences, traits, abilities, values, rights, etc.).... This model of the self is quite simply not like the one held by the majority of the people in the world” (p. 366-67). Japan is said to be a collectivist culture and the U. S. an individualist culture. According to Lebra (1994, p. 107), “the Japanese self (or presented) is *socially* defined, contextualized , or embedded...the Japanese person not only acts in response to but also *perceives* him/herself as contingent upon a given social nexus...these characterizations correspond to the linguistic absence of the fixed ‘I’ (or ‘you’) as well as the lexical variety of ‘I’ substitutes.

One might expect that the mother-daughter relationship would be a primary and one of the earliest ways of learning the cultural meaning of “self.” Although the mother-daughter relationship is important in most cultures, Boyd (1989) concluded that there was a lack of cross-cultural research focusing on the mother-daughter bond in adult women. Although there are many articles on mother-infant comparisons, a recent search (March, 2002) of the literature yielded only two articles reporting on a cross-cultural comparison of mother-daughter relationships during adolescence and one investigating mother-adult daughter relationships.

There are only two studies in the literature reporting on cross-cultural comparisons of the mother-daughter relationship. I will summarize both of them. Rastogi and Wampler (1999) compared an Asian Indian American (AIA) group to a Mexican-American (MA) and a European-American (EA) group. They measured closeness, reliability, and collectivism through both open-ended questions and a culturally sensitive measure, which they developed, the Mother Adult Daughter questionnaire. Rastogi and Wampler note that Western theories assert that the ideal state for an adult is high autonomy, closeness, and intimacy and low dependence and low hierarchy. There is an implication that cultures with high dependence are negative and this demonstrates a Western individualistic bias. Rastogi and Wampler concluded that

family practitioners and researchers need to investigate meanings of constructs of family relationship satisfaction.

Gilani (1999) compared forty British (white) and forty Pakistani Muslim immigrants using mother-daughter dyads. She used both interviews and questionnaires to study how mothers and daughters resolved their disagreements with one another. The Pakistani daughters were more connected to their mothers and were less differentiated. They also exhibited a collectivist attitude toward themselves and their families. In the Pakistani culture individuality, separateness and self-assertion are not promoted. These models developed in the West and based on a nuclear family do not apply to collectivist cultures. The British daughters reported more conflict and were equal in their levels of connectedness and individuality from their mothers.

Sugita (1999) reported that she found an eight-factor structure to the cognitive mother-image of Japanese college women. Sugita (2000) later revised this to a five-factor structure. We collaborated on a project in 2000. I used Sugita's initial procedure to obtain open-ended descriptions of mothers and then administered two questionnaires developed by Sugita, based on the open-ended responses of the Japanese women. Goetz and Sugita (2000) describes the results from the U. S. sample and compares Japanese and American responses.

The next section describes the materials and questionnaires that were used by Goetz and Sugita (2000) and that will be used in the present study:

Open-ended response form. Participants completed a short demographic form and then were asked to "describe your mother in your own words" in writing. This is the same initial procedure used by Sugita (1999) to develop the Mother-image questionnaire.

Mother-image questionnaire. Then participants completed the 67-item Likert-type scale on their perception of their mothers, developed by Sugita (1999) based on open-ended responses from Japanese college students. Sugita provided an English translation of the questionnaire and the American researcher checked with her to get a more colloquial American phrasing of the adjectives or short statements. In order to check for the reliability of the translation, a method recommended by Brislin (1970) was used. The questionnaire was back-translated or double-translated. A professor of Japanese at College of DuPage translated the English form of the questionnaire back into Japanese.

Sugita (2000) confirmed that the questionnaire had been translated correctly. The result of a factor analysis for the Japanese and the U. S. sample is that the daughters viewed their mothers as strong, hard-working, patient, and serious.

"I" self-concept. Sugita (1999) used the term "I" in quotations because there is no direct equivalent in Japanese, the concept "I" always includes an element of social role. The forty-five item questionnaire was completed by the daughters on their attitudes towards their own childhood, and their plans for the future, their dedication to work, and plans for marriage and children (Sugita, 1999). These items were rated on a five point Likert-type scale. The factor analysis of the U. S. sample yielded four factors and the Japanese yielded six factors.

Self-ratings by mothers. The mothers completed the same questionnaire that the daughters completed as the "mother-image," Both Japanese and U. S. mothers saw themselves as a "strong-willed, person with guts." In the U. S. "decisive and persevering and seeking freedom" were endorsed next most frequently. However, the Japanese mothers stressed that they were "hard-working and serious."

In the continuation of this research, we will collect data from three other groups, Austrian, German, and Pakistani immigrants to the U. S. I will add a measure of family relationship satisfaction due to the recommendations made by Rastogi and Wampler (1999).

3. Faculty Expertise I have already conducted research in this area with my colleague, Dr. Sugita. Our presentation was accepted by the International Council of Psychologists for their Annual Meeting in 2000 and I presented in English and Dr. Sugita was in attendance.

4. Plans for Evaluation and Dissemination: I will discuss this work with my colleagues when I lead a student group on a travel course in the 2003 January term. I plan to submit the completed research results to the International Council of Psychologists for presentation at the 2003 meeting. Afterwards, I will submit this for publication in the Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, Journal of Marriage and the Family, or Family Relations.

**III. Timeline.**

Some of the data will be collected during the spring semester and early summer. Most of the work of doing the statistical analyses will take place during the first half of June. I will do most of the writing of the report in July and August. I will not be teaching summer school.

**IV. Budget**

- |                            |            |
|----------------------------|------------|
| 1. Travel for presentation | \$1000     |
| 2. Faculty salary          | 2400       |
| 3. Photocopies             | <u>100</u> |
|                            | 3500       |

I am listing the salary that I would receive for teaching one course in summer school.

**V. Previous grants.**

I have received travel grants to present papers at national conferences, and I was able to attend the Bradley Seminar in Berlin/Prague in 1998. I also traveled with Wally Lagerwey in January 2001 to prepare me to lead my own travel-study course in 2003. I have not received a research grant from Faculty Development or any other group.

### References

- Brislin, R. W. (1970). Back-translation for cross-cultural research. Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 1, (3), 185-216.
- Boyd, C. (1989). Mothers and daughters: A discussion of theory and research. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 51, 291-301.
- Gilani, N. P. (1999). Conflict management of mothers and daughters belonging to individualistic and collectivistic cultural backgrounds: A comparative study. Journal of Adolescence, 22, 853-865.
- Goetz, D. J. & Sugita, C. (2000), Mother-daughter relationships in Japan and the United States. Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the International Council of Psychologists, Padua, Italy, July.
- Kitayama, S. & Markus, H. R. (1995). Culture and self: Implications for internationalizing psychology. In N. R. Goldberger & J. B. Veroff. The culture and psychology reader. NY: New York University Press.
- Lebra, T. S. (1984). Japanese women: Constraint and fulfillment. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Rastogi, M. & Wampler, K. S. (1999). Adult daughters' perceptions of the mother-daughter relationship: A cross-cultural comparison. Family Relations, 48, 327-336.
- Sugita, C. (1999). Students cognitive mother-image and its structure. Paper presented at the 1999 Annual Convention of the International Council of Psychologists, Salem, Massachusetts, USA on August 18.
- Sugita, C. (2000). Personal communication, spring 2000.
- Summers, C. (2000). Personal communication, spring 2000.