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ARTICLE

Theorizing the interpersonal aspect of ikigai ('life worth living') among Japanese university students: A mixed-methods approach

Shintaro Kono · Gordon Walker

Abstract: Wellbeing literature has greatly benefited from cross-cultural and non-Western research. However, most studies have been guided by Western, English constructs such as "happiness." Thus, a large amount of non-Western, non-English words related to wellbeing remain unstudied, leaving a crucial gap in our knowledge on wellbeing. To address this gap, we conducted a mixed-methods project to develop a theory of how Japanese university students experience *ikigai* ('life worth living'), and particularly its interpersonal aspect. First, we deployed a qualitative approach, in which photo-elicitation interviews were conducted with 27 Japanese university students, with the data analyzed using grounded theory. Our results suggested that students' ikigai was strongly influenced by *ibasho* ('authentic relationship'). In such relationships, students felt that they could be true to who they were (i.e., be self-authentic), and that their close others sincerely cared about them without considering personal gains (i.e., they experienced genuine care). These perceptions were fostered and maintained by two types of interactions: experiencing together; and communicating experiences. The former involved directly engaging in personally valued experiences with close others, while the latter meant keeping close others updated about their important experiences and obtaining support from them to further pursue such experiences. These interactions were conditioned by echoed values (a state where people and close others understand and respect each other's personal values), and trust (the belief that they do not violate each other's privacy and do offer support when needed). This theory guided a second quantitative study which analyzed online survey data from 672 Japanese students by using partial least squares structural equation modeling. Our results suggested that our new measures for the constructs were valid and reliable, and that the hypothesized relationships among them are significant. Our findings are discussed in relation to both Japanese *ikigai* literature and Western wellbeing research.

Keywords: culture, grounded theory, ikigai, mixed-methods, structural equation modeling, subjective wellbeing

Introduction

Subjective wellbeing (SWB) has been studied across cultures (e.g., Knoop & Delle Fave, 2013; Uchida & Ogihara, 2012). An extensive amount of Western (mostly Anglophone) research has established, for example, the operationalization of SWB as comprising a cognitive appraisal of life satisfaction together with a salutary balance of positive and negative affect (Pavot & Diener, 2013).

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Western-oriented research has also identified many socio-demographic correlates of SWB, such as marital status and income (Pavot & Diener, 2013). By contrast, non-Western and cross-cultural research has shown that the very meaning of "wellbeing" differs across nations (e.g., Delle Fave, Brdar, Freire, Vella-Brodrick, & Wissing, 2011; Uchida & Ogihara, 2012). Moreover, even the same predictor of SWB (e.g., social support) can have different impacts across cultures (Uchida, Kitayama, Mesquita, Reyes, & Morling, 2008).

However, although these non-Western/cross-cultural studies have made substantial contributions to our understanding of wellbeing, many have been guided by Western (and often English) terms, such as "happiness" and "quality of life" (e.g., Knoop & Delle Fave, 2013; Uchida et al., 2008). Consequently, there is a dearth of knowledge about non-Western wellbeing-related concepts (Lahti, 2019; Lomas, 2016). One such culturally unique terms is *ikigai* in Japanese, which roughly translates as "purpose in life" (Kamiya, 1966) or "life worth living" (Mathews, 1996). Recently, *ikigai* has been associated with meaning in life (Martela & Steger, 2016) and more broadly eudaimonic wellbeing (Kumano, 2018). In the following quotation, Christopher Peterson (2008) succinctly summarizes the potentiality of *ikigai* research: "Ikigai is a good reminder to positive psychologists in the United States that our science should not simply be an export business. … no language has a monopoly on the vocabulary for describing the good life" (para 3).

Despite its potential, the *ikigai* literature remains limited. For instance, after conducting a systematic review of 144 articles, Hasegawa, Fujiwara, and Hoshi (2015) concluded that studies adopted inconsistent and often unclear definitions and measurements of *ikigai*, and moreover underutilized qualitative methods. Another review by Kumano (2015, as cited in Kumano, 2018) pinpointed the lack of English articles on *ikigai*. It is important to clearly conceptualize and measure *ikigai*, while also using various methods and communicate the results with non-Japanese audiences. The purpose of the current project was, therefore, to develop a theory of how people pursue *ikigai* within the Japanese university student context. Specifically, we focused on understanding people's subjective perception of having *ikigai*, and the factors related to it, rather than the metaphysical issue of whether one believes life in general has worth, which is consistent with recent discussions on meaning in life (Martela & Steger, 2016). To achieve ou purpose, we employed a mixed-methods design, specifically combining grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) and structural equation modelling (SEM; Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2017). This particular manuscript focuses on the interpersonal aspect of *ikigai*.

Literature Review

Ikigai and Interpersonal Factors

In terms of its etymology, Kanda (2011) found that *ikigai* did not register any mainstream Japanese dictionary until 1908. Kanda also observed that once it became part of the modern vocabulary, *ikigai* has been used to mean the worth/effect of life, and/or subjective feelings that life is fulfilling. Kanda (2013) further traced back the origin of *ikigai* to "*ikiru-kahi*," which was used at least since the Heian era (B.C. 747 to 1192). Kanda's (2013) review of classical literature also suggested that the original meaning of *ikiru-kahi* was the gratitude for being alive as something fortunate that happens(ed), especially among ordinary (non-aristocrat/samurai) people. In that sense, *ikiru* refers to "live" or "be alive," whereas *kahi* or *kai* refers to "worth" or "effect."

Ikigai research was pioneered by Kamiya (1966), a psychiatrist. Comparing it to *shiawase*, another Japanese word for happiness, she maintained that *ikigai* more closely relates to people's

sense of self and personal values, which may reflect their interpersonal relationships. Kamiya also theorized that to feel *ikigai*, individuals have to satisfy the need for *hankyo* (resonance). This need is satiated, according to her, by having meaningful interpersonal relationships, and more deeply by loving and dedicating oneself to others.

More recently, Kumano (2012) conducted a series of psychological studies on *ikigai* that included interpersonal factors. In her survey of 1,171 college students and adults, acceptance from and interaction with others were positively correlated with *ikigai* feelings, while rejection from others was either negatively related or unrelated to these. Kumano also observed that the effect of these interpersonal factors on *ikigai* was smaller among students (R2 = .45) than among middle-aged and older adults (R2 = .62 and .65, respectively). Accordingly, she speculated that students' *ikigai* may be more individualistic. Another survey of college students, however, showed a different picture: when regressed together, interpersonal life events were more strongly associated with two sub-domains of *ikigai*—meaning in life and existential value—than their personal counterparts. Similarly, among older adults, there is evidence that perceived social support positively predicts *ikigai* feelings (Aoki, 2015). Relatedly, Kumano (2018) content-analyzed qualitative data on lay views of differences between *ikigai* and *shiawase*, and found that interpersonal relationships—especially doing something for others—were more associated with the former (10.5%) than the latter (4.4%).

Ikigai has also been studied from disciplinary perspectives. For instance, Mathews (1996) conducted ethnographic multi-wave interviews with Japanese and Americans and discovered two distinct mechanisms to experience *ikigai*. In collectivistic cultures like Japan, commitment to groups (e.g., family, colleagues) was normative, while in more individualistic cultures like the U.S., self-realization was predominant. From a sociological perspective, Takahashi (2001) argued the type of relationships that pertain to *ikigai* may differ across cultures. Meaningful relationships in the West, Takahashi observed, tend to involve equal independent selves, whereas in Japan meaningful relationships are more often formed around a group (e.g., family) and interdependent selves (e.g., students who are dependent on their parents). Takahashi also speculated that as Japanese society globalizes and people adopt more individualistic values, their *ikigai* experiences may also shift in emphasis from group commitment to self-realization.

Subjective Wellbeing and Interpersonal Factors

The extant research on SWB, especially eudaimonic wellbeing, has also recognized social aspects of wellbeing (Huta & Waterman, 2014). For example, Ryff's (2014) concept of psychological wellbeing includes the sub-dimension of positive relations, including having "warm, satisfying, trusting relationships" and being "concerned about the welfare of others" (p. 12). Keyes's (1998) definition of social wellbeing involves five facets: social integration (i.e., being part of society); social acceptance (i.e., perceiving others as kind and industrious); social contribution (i.e., one's ability to contribute to society); social actualization (i.e., one's belief that society is improving); and social coherence (i.e., making sense of societal events). In his PERMA model, Seligman (2011) underscored the importance of positive relationships, and particularly people's perception of having others in their lives who genuinely care about them. Then, in addition to identifying interpersonal elements in the wellbeing state itself, other research has identified interpersonal factors that predict personal wellbeing.

Perceived social support. One of the most studied interpersonal predictors of wellbeing is perceived social support, defined as "people's subjective judgments about the availability of help

from friends and family during times of need" (Lakey, 2013, p. 847). Lakey's review found a positive correlation (r = .20 to .40) between perceived social support and SWB. Interestingly, it is perceived support, rather than enacted support per se, that more closely relates to wellbeing (e.g., Lakey & Cohen, 2000). A common explanation is the buffering thesis, namely that the more social support people perceive, the less stress they feel (Lakey, 2013). However, this interpretation has not been well supported empirically (e.g., Lakey & Cronin, 2008), perhaps because coping is essentially "remedying negativity," which is related to, yet distinct from, enhancing wellbeing.

Lakey and Orehek (2011) proposed an alternative theory focused on positive affect, called relational regulation theory. This theory holds that "people regulate their happiness through ordinary, yet affectively consequential conversation and shared activities" (Lakey, 2013, p. 853). There is emerging evidence that the relationship between perceived support and positive affect is mediated by ordinary conversations and shared activities (e.g., Lakey, Vander Molen, Fles, & Andrews, 2016). Feeney and Collins (2015) also posited that social support allows individuals to not only cope with life adversities, but also pursue goals through life opportunities. Having said this, Uchida et al. (2008) showed that although the association between perceived support and SWB became non-significant among Americans when the effect of self-esteem was controlled for, it remained significant and positive among Japanese people. Thus, social support may be more relevant to wellbeing in collectivistic cultures than in individualistic cultures.

Capitalization. Another oft-cited, interpersonal predictor is capitalization, i.e., the process through which people share their positive life events with others (Gable & Reis, 2010). Capitalization positively correlates with SWB (Gable, Reis, Impett, & Asher, 2004), a relationship which remains significant even after taking into account the effect of positive life events themselves (Gable & Reis, 2010). The effectiveness of capitalization depends on the response from the person with whom one shared positive news (Gable & Reis, 2010). Active and constructive feedback (e.g., asking details about good news) increases wellbeing, while passive (e.g., indifference) or destructive (e.g., seeing negative sides of a positive) feedback does not. People tend to capitalize with close others, such as partners, friends, siblings, and parents (Gable et al., 2004). Life events that one considers as more valuable tend to be capitalized more than other events (Gable et al., 2004). Interestingly, capitalizing behaviors also vary across cultures: people from collectivistic cultures are less likely to capitalize due to concern about negative influences on their relationships (e.g., jealousy) (Choi, Oishi, Shin, & Suh, 2019).

Self-determination theory. Self-determination theory (SDT) researchers have long argued that the need for interpersonal relatedness—the feeling of being connected, understood, and loved—is an essential ingredient of wellbeing (Ryan, Huta, & Deci, 2008). Satisfaction of the relatedness need correlates with life satisfaction (e.g., Sheldon & Niemiec, 2006) and meaning in life (Martela, Ryan, & Steger, 2018). In their comprehensive review, Baumeister and Leary (1995) hypothesized that the need can be fulfilled when individuals have: (a) positive frequent interaction with others, and (b) stable, caring relationships. The need for relatedness, and its implication for wellbeing, may be universal, with Sheldon, Elliot, Kim, and Kasser (2001), for example, finding that American and South Korean students rank it as their second-most and most important need respectively.

Another interpersonal concept within SDT is authenticity, namely the state/trait of being self-authored (i.e., acting in a self-endorsed manner) and being genuine (i.e., behaving in accord with who one thinks one really is) (Ryan & Ryan, 2019). The self-authorship part means that people can be authentic even when behaving according to social norms and expectations, as long as they

personally endorse the value of the act. Hence, authenticity can be nurtured by autonomy-supportive environments (Ryan & Ryan, 2019), which are characterized by types of interaction such as attentive listening, perspective taking, and emotional expressions (Reeve, 2006). The genuineness part suggests that adaptive self-concealment—strategically hiding parts of one's identity to avoid potential conflicts—takes a toll on wellbeing (Ryan & Ryan, 2019). Overall, the more authentic individuals are, the greater wellbeing they report (e.g., Lakey, Kernis, Heppner, & Lance, 2008) even across different cultures (Lynch, La Guardia, & Ryan, 2009).

In summary, our review suggests that *ikigai* is influenced by various interpersonal factors (e.g., Kamiya, 1966; Kumano, 2012; Mathews, 1996). However, the literature remains inconsistent as to what exactly such predictors are, ranging from acceptance and support from others (Aoki, 2015; Kumano, 2012), to altruism (Kamiya, 1966; Kumano, 2018) and commitment to a group (Mathews, 1996; Takahashi, 2001). Also debated is the extent to which these interpersonal factors are relevant to *ikigai* within the current study's population: young adults and students (Kumano, 2012; Takahashi, 2001). The extensive SWB literature adds that wellbeing as an outcome can also involve interpersonal elements (Huta & Waterman, 2014). It also identifies interpersonal predictors of wellbeing, such as social support (Lakey, 2013), capitalization (Gable & Reis, 2010), and relatedness need (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). However, the lack of non-Western insights may leave important gaps in our understanding of wellbeing (e.g., Choi et al., 2019; Uchida et al., 2008). Here, we echo the existing criticism that positive psychology and wellbeing studies have been, to an extent, Eurocentric, uncritically accepting Western concepts and assumptions (e.g., Christopher & Hickinbottom, 2008), which may have been facilitated by the un-critical use of English words. Thus, the current study could contribute to both lines of research on *ikigai* and SWB.

Qualitative Method

Although our method has been described elsewhere (Kono & Walker, 2020), we outline some of the key characteristics below.

Sampling and Sample

The current project focused on Japanese university students. This decision was made because, besides their accessibility, past studies have identified young adults as being relatively deprived of *ikigai* (Kumano, 2012). We conducted our sampling at a large-size private university in the Kanto region of Japan in 2015. Our inclusion criteria were that students had to be Japanese natives and must have used a smartphone for one year or longer, with the latter a necessary condition of our photo-elicitation interview (PEI) method (described below). At first, we adopted maximum variation sampling to enhance generalizability (Patton, 2015), targeting students of varying sex, age, and academic backgrounds. Our later sampling process was guided by theoretical sampling, specifically recruiting participants who can provide information that advances our emerging theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). In our case, for example, we invited students who were in romantic relationships. We ceased our data collection when the concurrent analysis indicated that our sample and theory was "saturated," in that new data did not substantially change the theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). A total of 27 PEIs were conducted. The students' average age was 20.26 years, and 14 were females.

Data Collection

Our data collection method involved participant-driven PEIs (Tinkler, 2013). First, students interested in the study were asked to sign a consent form and to fill a short questionnaire about their *ikigai* level and demographic characteristics. Second, those who met the maximum variation or theoretical sampling criteria were given several days to: choose a maximum of 10 photographs in their smartphone which they thought were associated with their *ikigai*, make a title for each picture, and describe their pictures (e.g., location, time). This photo-selection encouraged students to reflect on their perspectives on and experiences of *ikigai*. Third, these pictures were printed out and used in the subsequent semi-structured interview (with the first author, in Japanese). The average interview length was 106 minutes. Our main interview questions included: "what in this photograph makes you feel *ikigai*?"; "with whom do you usually feel *ikigai* in your everyday life?"; and "what does *ikigai* mean to you?" Some questions, like the second example, could potentially have primed participants to discuss interpersonal issues, which may have resulted in our finding of *ibasho*. The participants were also asked to group and rank their *ikigai* photographs to further explore the meanings behind them (Tinkler, 2013). All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed within several days in Japanese by the first author and professional transcribers. This immediate transcription made it possible to simultaneously analyze the data, which is crucial in grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). A total of 1,293 pages of transcripts were collected. We offered each participant 3,000 JPY.

Data Analysis

Our data analysis also closely followed Corbin and Strauss's (2015) grounded theory procedure, with the support of NVivo 10. As soon as the transcripts were ready, the first author read them multiple times and corresponding research journals, and coded them in English. First, open coding was applied to natural breaks within the texts to examine different possible meanings of the excerpts (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). As codes accumulated and the coding schemata became clearer, axial coding was conducted by inspecting the data around emerging categories and generating codes that linked the categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Also employed was what Corbin and Strauss called "paradigm": an analytical technique to understand what agents (in our case, students) did and what were the conditions for and consequences of their actions and interactions. To mitigate the risk of losing theoretically important nuances unique to the original language, in-vivo coding was also adopted by turning Japanese words or phrases into codes.

The above analysis process was also accompanied by memo writing, where the authors' assumptions were critically challenged and the meanings of and relationships among categories were elaborated on (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). In these memos, different cases (students) were constantly compared with one another to identify common patterns and boundaries of such patterns (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Also created were diagrams, or visual representations of an emerging theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Diagramming aided in clarifying the relationships among emerging categories, identifying the core categories, and finding gaps in the theory. A total of 496 codes and 136 memos were created. After selective coding, including sorting the memos and writing summary memos (Corbin & Strauss, 2015), three core categories were established, along with three interrelated substantive theories: (a) valued experience, (b) life directionality, and (c) *ibasho* (authentic relationship). The current manuscript focuses on the third theory. Except for the first paragraph of the results on valued experience, none of the other themes has been reported previously.

Trustworthiness

First, as a form of expert debriefing (Patton, 2015), the second author monitored randomly selected memos throughout this qualitative study. He ensured that the first author's interpretations and logic were sound, while also comparing emerging categories with constructs in the relevant literature, which facilitated theorization (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Second, to enhance transparency, some of the memos were shared on the first author's website (https://www.shintarokono.com/). Third, member-checking was also implemented by asking the interviewees to review our initial findings almost a year later. Of the 27 participants, 12 agreed to do so. They read brief descriptions of our overall theory and the core categories. They also completed a questionnaire to gauge what level of *ikigai* they would feel if they engaged in theoretically *ibasho*-inducing interactions (quantitative data), and to give advice for a hypothetical friend who faced difficulty in achieving *ibasho* (qualitative data). The former quantitative data indicated that the *ibasho*-inducing interactions generate high levels of *ikigai* (8 or higher on a scale of 0 to 10), and the latter qualitative data were added to our analyses. This qualitative study was approved by the research ethics boards at the University of Alberta, Canada (Pro00056332) and Tokai University, Japan (15046).

Qualitative Results

Our overall analysis indicated that central to Japanese university students' *ikigai* was *keiken*, i.e., personally valued experience (Kono & Walker, 2020). Four distinct types of experience were of particular importance, namely ones that are: enjoyable (i.e., intrinsically attractive experiences, e.g., attending music events); effortful (i.e., challenging experiences that require persistence, like academic studies); stimulating (i.e., new experiences that sometimes alter one's points of view, such as traveling); and comforting (i.e., ordinary experiences that give emotional relief, for example playing with pets). Having a variety of valued experience made students perceive that their lives were worth living.

In addition to these individual factors, our data clearly indicated that close others in students' lives, and their interpersonal relationships with them, also played key roles in enhancing students' *ikigai*. Our interviewees called these *ikigai*-related relationships *ibasho*, or "the place to be." For instance, ID3-female associated several pictures of hers with this concept:

> [*Ibasho*] is the place where you feel that the version of you in that place was appreciated. Like, varsity teammates and coach, my [boss] and colleagues at my part-time job … The teachers who took care of me say, "This is the place where you belong." I guess it's the place where you feel secure.

As further described below, we identified two factors that distinguished the interpersonal relationship students called *ibasho* from other relationships: self-authenticity and genuine care. As to the former, students perceived that, at least in their mind, they could be who they thought they really were in their *ibasho* relationships. With regard to the latter, students felt that their close others in these relationships truly cared for them, without consideration of personal gains. We found what is common between these two factors is the perception of "trueness" or authenticity—one about their sense of self and the other about the caring attitudes of others. Therefore, we conceptualized *ibasho* as authentic relationship.

The Consequences of Ibasho

Self-authenticity. When students developed *ibasho*, they perceived that they could be true to who they really were in their close relationships. We call this self-authenticity. The feeling was often described with the Japanese word *su* ("plain"). For example, ID26-female's photograph of her and her high-school varsity teammates getting face-painted and having fun represented how "plain" she could be with these friends:

> [With the high-school friends] I am, like, more "plain." And I say things, without being so worried about [what they think]. When I'm with these [other college friends], I often think of various things, including "what would happen if I say this," before actually saying it.

ID18-female, a first-year sport management student, already found herself being true to who she was—a baseball fanatic: "Everyone [in the academic program] likes sports, so … they connect us. … Here it feels easier to hang out with other students. … Since I came here, I can show my 'plain' side, so it makes things easy." ID24-male characterized his relationship with his girlfriend as "carefree":

> We say whatever we want to say. For instance, in extreme cases, we may say, "You look ugly" or "That's disgusting." We say things that normal couples would not say to each other. … We aren't concerned about each other['s judgment]. … The time and space shared with her feels so natural.

Genuine care. The other feeling that accompanied *ibasho* was what we call genuine care or the perception that students' close others truly cared about them without consideration of personal gain. For example, ID17-female included a picture of her high-school homeroom teacher because he sincerely cared about her and was like "family" to her. She noticed this during her college admission:

> [From my high school] only 10 students could enter [my college program]. And I was 11th. Who was most upset? My teacher. (Laughter) … When I got admitted, my teacher burst into tears and looked so happy. … I realized that he really cared about me.

ID12-female ranked her family photograph as the most important factor for her *ikigai*, because simply being with them made her feel supported, cared for, and "warm": "When things didn't go well with friends or I couldn't [play music well] on the varsity [brass band] team, I really wanted to go home. … my home feels warm or hmm… they accept me." There were some cases in which others cared about students to the extent where they almost seemed inauthentic. For example, ID11-male recalled his interaction with his girlfriend: "There was the time when I was still doing job-hunting. I told her, 'I got rejected …' But, she was like, 'It's alright. The company that doesn't hire you is … no good' … I was like, 'Ah, so kind.'" Assuming that these remarks did not truly represent his girlfriend's assessment of the company and that ID11-male did not believe in their authenticity, what was genuine here was the girlfriend's empathy for him. Thus, although self-authenticity and genuine care are interrelated, they are distinct constructs.

The Ibasho Interactions

To develop and maintain authentic relationships, our informants engaged in two distinct types of interaction with their close others: (a) experiencing together, and (b) communicating experiences.

Experiencing together. Our interviewees valued their interactions with their close others through their communal valued experiences (i.e., *keiken*). We term this "experiencing together." *Keiken* reflected students' personal values, and thus doing *keiken* together was an experiential process of learning each other's values. Doing so brought students and others closer. Experiencing together was most salient in the context of enjoyment and effort. An example of communal enjoyable experiences was ID20-female's picture of her and her best college friends taken at the end of their get-together. She chose this particular picture because they "scribbled" messages that directly signaled their closeness: "We scheduled to go to [a neighboring city] to play bowling, and this picture was taken after having so much fun … They wrote 'love you all!' without any hesitation. That made me so happy."

ID18-female included a picture taken from a recent barbeque party hosted by a student group she just had joined. The cheerful and social atmosphere at this event allowed her to meet "different senior [members]" and realize "they were kinder and funnier than [she] expected," which brought them closer. When effortful experiences were shared with close others, interactions added elements of competition, encouragement, and communal achievements and growth. An example of this was ID4-male's high-school varsity experience: "There were many problems [in the team], but we overcame them together. … I can still tell anything [to them]." Similarly, ID6-female's experience of being academically challenged during a study abroad program resulted in her close friendship with other participants:

> It was really tough. But, we helped each other and divided assignments among us. … There was no morning, day, or night. We spent every minute together … If I am in trouble and tell them "I am having this issue," they will make some action for me.

Communicating experiences. The other form of *ibasho*-producing interaction was communicating the information about their *keiken* with close others who were not directly involved in these experiences. We call this "communicating experiences." In some cases, students simply updated close others about the progresses and consequences of their valued experiences. Doing so was an effective way to maintain their relationships, as *keiken* represented the parts of their everyday lives they viewed as valuable and noteworthy. For instance, ID15-male communicated his success as a part-time bridal photographer with his family:

> In [an album for bloom and bride], there was one of my pictures. That made me soooooo happy. As soon as I got home, I called my parents to tell, "Hey, [my photograph] was used!" … They got really excited, too. … That made me happy.

Describing their updating behaviors, many interviewees used the term *guchi* ("complaints"), which connotes complaining about issues that one cannot resolve. This was the case for a recent conversation between ID8-male and his high-school best friend. The point of *guchi* was not to get help, but rather to inform close others of their major experiences and to make sure that their relationships were still strong:

> It's like updating about recent things … When I am in trouble, … I just go talk to [my high-school best friend]. Well, he doesn't tell me anything [particular to do], but he listens to me. … He really knows bad sides of me. (Laughter) … So, I feel that I really still need him.

There were also cases where students had clear intentions to obtain support, either emotionally or materially, especially in the face of challenging experiences and/or short-term setbacks. People whom students viewed as their *ibasho* were particularly rich sources of support, not only because they genuinely cared about the students, but also because they could provide critical feedback when necessary, due to the self-authentic nature of their relationships. This was the case for ID12-female's interaction with her high-school best friend:

> [My high-school best friend] knows me more than anyone. … For example, when I go talk to others, people around me are like, "It'll be alright." … But, she is the only one who honestly says things like, "You are wrong here, [ID12-female]."

The Conditions for Ibasho

Echoed values. The above interactions between students and their close others revolved around students' *keiken* that represented their personal values. Hence, these interactions were preceded by moments when students and others revealed their values to each other and respected them. We call this "echoed values." For instance, ID6-female became close to her study buddies when they realized they all valued making efforts vis-à-vis academic experiences:

> People around me are not the type of students who, for example, study hard in a library until late night, … But, I want to … increase my score in [an English exam], and study abroad. … When I told [my study buddies] that …, they totally agreed with it. That made us much closer to each other.

ID20-female described similar phases of learning about each other with her college friends through enjoyable conversations:

> So, every time I got a new friend, we had lunch together on the roof. … Over lunch, we talked about what we liked, and we dug up each other's favorite things and things we were interested in. And we got really close to each other.

Trust. Another important condition for experiencing together and communicating experiences was trust between students and their close others. This was because often *keiken* involved private issues for students (e.g., personal failures), and sharing it—directly or indirectly—required the belief that others would not violate their privacy and would offer necessary support. ID14-female, for example, consulted her old friends when issues arose in relation to her valued experiences: "When it comes to deep talks, I really feel that my local friends are different. I guess I can't trust [my college friends]. … The length of our friendships is different [from college friendships]." This quotation indicated that trust might be nurtured over an extended period of time.

There were also some cases where students faced difficulties with their future close others, which led to the rapid formation of rapport between them. For instance, ID8-male failed a college entrance exam and had to spend a year preparing for the following year. He called this time "the rock-bottom," but cherished his relationship with his friends who went to the same preparatory school:

> "I counted on them very much. … Toward the end, my [score] was bad … but they didn't care about those things, and talked to me. Well, how to put it, they get me, you know?"

In summary, our grounded theory of *ibasho* explains how students develop authentic relationship, which is an integral part of their *ikigai* (life worth living). The theory suggests that having authentic relationship is characterized by two distinct types of subjective perceptions: self-authenticity and genuine care. Authentic relationship was often developed and maintained through two modes of interaction: experiencing together, and communicating experiences. Lastly, these interactions were conditioned by echoed values and trust. These constructs and relationships are summarized in Figure 1, which served as the theoretical model for the second quantitative study.

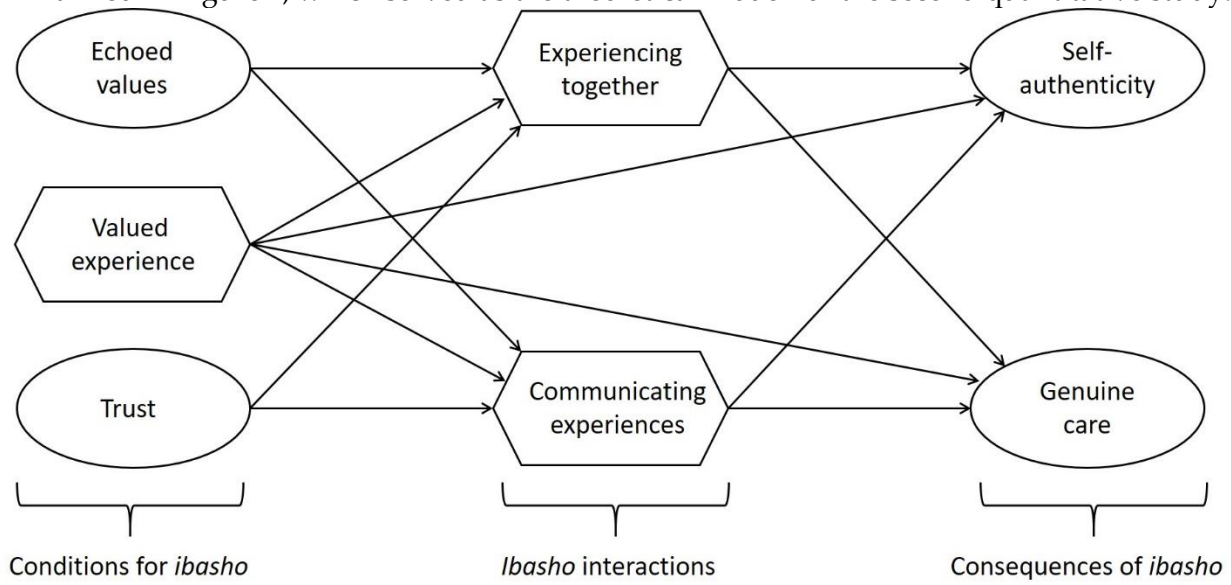

Figure 1. A grounded theoretical model of *ibasho* (authentic relationship). All relationships are hypothesized to be positive.

Quantitative Method

To test the generalizability of the *ibasho* theory, quantitative data from a larger sample of Japanese university students were collected by using a cross-sectional online survey. The data were analyzed through partial least squares SEM (PLS-SEM), since it suits an exploratory stage of theory building, accommodates different types of measurement models, and includes more variables and relationships than its covariance-based counterpart (Hair et al., 2017; Sarstedt, Hair, Ringle, Thiele, & Gudergan, 2016). This quantitative study was approved by the University of Alberta's research ethics board (Pro00066212).

Sampling

As described elsewhere (Kono & Walker, 2020), we used a Japanese online survey company to collect data from its university student panelists living across the country. In August 2016, we randomly invited student panelists via email to answer screening questions in order to ensure that they: had Japanese nationality; spoke Japanese as their native language; and attended a four-year university/college in Japan. A total of 4,328 panelists satisfied these criteria. Of them, 2,921 were randomly invited to our main survey, considering our target sample size of 650 and given that a potentially low response rate is common in online surveys (Manfreda, Bosnjak, Berzelak, Haas, & Vehnovar, 2008). This target sample size was determined by adding some extra cases to 602, which was calculated a-priori based on a larger model by using G*Power (linear multiple regression, small effect f2 = .02, α of .05, statistical power of .80, and four predictors per endogenous variable). This stage of sampling was also stratified in that we targeted almost the same numbers of members from gender groups and academic-year groups. Our final sample size was 674, which made our response rate 23.1%. Participants were compensated with gift points worth a few hundred JPY.

Instruments

To precisely measure the constructs in our *ibasho* theory, new measures were developed. We employed different measurement models for the constructs: namely, the reflective model for self-authenticity, genuine care, echoed values, and trust; and the formative model for experiencing together and communicating experiences. The reflective model is commonly adopted in social science studies and assumes that a common factor causes equal covariances across indicators (Hair et al., 2017; MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Podsakoff, 2011). Conversely, in the formative model, a set of indicators can represent distinct (and sometimes uncorrelated) aspects of a construct, which are then linearly combined and define the meaning of the latent variable (Hair et al., 2017; MacKenzie et al., 2011). We applied the formative model to the two types of *ibasho* interactions because our qualitative study identified some sub-dimensions of these constructs (e.g., enjoyment vs. effort in experiencing together) that do not necessarily have a single, underlying cause (Hair et al., 2017; Jarvis, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2003). In other words, the fact that a student enjoys time with close others does not always mean she also engages in effortful experiences with them. The use of the reflective model would make such an assumption. We also developed items for *keiken* (valued experience) as a control, as the existing research on interpersonal predictors of SWB controls for the effects of positive life events (Gable & Reis, 2010). As valued experience consists of the four sub-dimensions (e.g., enjoyment, effort), its measure followed the formative model too.

The different types of measurement model led to somewhat diverging item development procedures (MacKenzie et al., 2011). For both types, an initial pool of items was constructed based on the qualitative study. The second author and another Japanese researcher commented on these items, which resulted in identifying potential items and refining them. We then had eight researchers who have published in the area of *ikigai* and/or Japanese wellbeing expert-review our items. Using a 5-point scale, the experts assessed how accurately each of the reflective items represented the definition of the corresponding construct, as well as how distinct it was from the other constructs, that is, convergent and discriminant validities (Dunn, Bouffard, & Rogers, 1999). They evaluated the formative measures, using the same scale, as to how well each item reflected the target construct's definition and how comprehensive a set of items was, with the latter being content validity (MacKenzie et al., 2011). Based on these numerical data, we computed Aiken's validity coefficients

(Dunn et al., 1999). We revised a few items with low, non-significant values, while using the experts' comments as a guide. Echoed values and trust did not go through this expert review process as we were afraid of "expert fatigue," due to there being too many variables to be reviewed (Benoit & Wiesehomeier, 2009). Lastly, all items were piloted with a small sample of Japanese students (N = 14) to identify any clarity issues. A list of the final items is presented in Table 1. All new items were administered using a 5-point Likert-type scale. Except for the valued experience items used in Konno and Walker (2020), none of the other items has been used elsewhere.

Table 1
Validity and Reliability of the Ibasho Measures

Variable	Item	α/ρ_A	AVE	Loadings	Weights	VIF	Redundancy analysis (R^2)
Experiencing together[F]		N/A	N/A				**.49**
	ET1: I have enjoyed my experiences more when they were shared with my close others.			.91***	**.43*** **	**2.49**	
	ET2: With my close others, I have enjoyed pretty much anything.			.86***	**.33*** **	**2.06**	
	ET3: With my close others, I have gone through very difficult experiences.			.81***	**.23*** **	**2.22**	
	ET4: I have made more efforts than usual when I faced a challenge with my close others.			.83***	**16** **	**2.63**	
	*Recently, I have experienced valuable things with my close others.						
Communicating experiences[F]		N/A	N/A				**.55**
	SE1: I have talked to my close others about my recent experiences.			.87***	**.29*** **	**2.41**	
	SE2: I have shared my recent experiences with my close others.			.91***	**.46*** **	**2.29**	
	SE3: I have turned to my close others for material or emotional support when I faced a problem in my recent experiences.			.84***	**.30*** **	**2.24**	
	SE4: I have asked my close others for advice about my recent experiences.			.76***	**<u>.11</u>**	**2.11**	
	*I have been connected to my close others through interactions related to my recent experiences.						

Self-authenticity[R]		**.83/.84**	**.75**				N/A
	SA1: In my close relationships, I feel that close others and I can say what we really want to say to each other.			**.88*** **	.39***	2.12	
	SA2: In my close relationships, I feel that close others and I can show bad sides of ourselves.			**.84*** **	.37***	1.74	
	SA3: In my close relationships, I feel that close others and I can be who we really are.			**.88*** **	.40***	2.04	
Genuine care[R]		**.82/.83**	**.74**				N/A
	GC1: In my close relationships, I feel that close others and I give heart-warming words to each other.			**.87*** **	.41***	1.89	
	GC2: In my close relationships, I feel that close others and I care about each other from the bottom of our hearts.			**.88*** **	.40***	1.99	
	GC3: In my close relationships, I feel that close others and I do what we can do for each other without thinking about personal gains.			**.83*** **	.36***	1.73	
Echoed values[R]		**.74/.75**	**.80**				N/A
	EV1: My close others and I share find value in similar experiences.			**.88*** **	.54***	1.54	
	EV2: My close others and I have similar value systems around what is important in our daily lives.			**.90*** **	.58***	1.54	
Trust[R]		**.80/.80**	**.83**				N/A
	TR1: I trust my close others so that I can talk about private issues.			**.91*** **	.54***	1.81	
	TR2: I believe that my close others will help me when I am in trouble.			**.92*** **	.56***	1.81	
Valued experience[F]		N/A	N/A				**.61**
	VE1: I have enjoyed my recent experiences.			.81***	**.17**	**2.40**	
	VE2: I have felt joy in my recent experiences.			.85***	**.31*** **	**2.37**	
	VE3: Recently, I have been engaged in experiences that required me to make efforts.			.56***	**.15***	**1.72**	

VE4: I have striven in my recent experiences.	.70***	**.15**	**2.18**
VE5: Recently, I have participated in stimulating experiences.	.73***	**.15***	**2.19**
VE6: Recently, I have been engaged in novel experiences.	.69***	**.02**	**2.27**
VE7: Recently, I have had comforting experiences.	.76***	**.32****	**2.08**
VE8: Recently, I have had relieving experiences.	.69***	**.08**	**2.02**
*I have found value in my recent experiences.			

Note. [R] indicates the reflective model, while [F] signifies the formative model. Bolded are the metrics relevant to each measurement model. Underlined values do not meet the corresponding thresholds. The Japanese versions of these measures are available by contacting the first author.
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Additionally, we also used Kondo's (2003) single-item *ikigai* scale to validate our new *ibasho* measures. This item was administered with a unipolar 11-point scale, with the higher scores indicating a higher level of *ikigai*.

Data Analysis
Data were cleaned by inspecting univariate non-normality, univariate and multivariate outliers, heteroscedasticity, missing values, and multi-collinearity. Two cases were deemed potential outliers based on Mahalanobis's distances and a conservative p-value of .001 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013, p. 74), as well as on visual examination of relative distance scores, which were excluded from further analyses. This made the final sample size of 672. Then, descriptive statistics were derived and the new measures' validity and reliability examined. Lastly, our *ibasho* theoretical model (Figure 1) was tested by using PLS-SEM with the SmartPLS 3 software program.

Quantitative Results
Descriptive Statistics, Reliability, and Validity
Our sample (N = 672) equally represented both sex groups (337 females, 50.1%) as well as different academic years (at least 24.9% for each year). The mean age was 20.14 years (SD = 1.33). The most commonly reported academic major was arts and humanities (22.3%), followed by management and economics (19.3%), engineering (13.4%), and social sciences (13.4%). Although the majority did not know/want to report their parental income (50.1%), reported income levels were diverse, ranging from less than 2,500,000 JPY (11.5%) to 10,000,000 JPY or greater (8.0%).

Table 2 displays the means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations of the main and control variables (i.e., sex and age). Medium to large positive correlations (Cohen, 1992) between the single-item *ikigai* scale and our new *ibasho* measures were taken as initial evidence for criterion-related validity. Table 1 contains the information on reliability and convergent validity of the new measures obtained by running our theoretical model with the PLS algorithm and bootstrap

procedure. For the reflective measures, all of our Cronbach's α and composite reliability ϱA coefficients, which signifies internal consistency reliability, exceeded the .7 threshold (Hair et al., 2017). All AVE scores as an indicator of convergent validity surpassed the .5 threshold (Hair et al., 2017). All loadings were also greater than .7 (Hair et al., 2017). In terms of the formative measures, all weights of *ibasho* items were significant except for one communicating experiences item (w = .11, p = .07). This and four *keiken* items with non-significant weights were retained for the sake of content validity as they had substantial loadings (Hair et al., 2017). All VIF scores were less than five, suggesting that our items were free from multi-collinearity (Hair et al., 2017). To examine convergent validity, we also ran a series of redundancy models in which a set of formative indicators predicted the corresponding global, single-item measure of the construct (asterisked in Table 1; Hair et al., 2017). The resultant R2 in Table 1 were near or beyond the .5 threshold. Table 3 summarizes conservative indicators of discriminant validity called heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratios. All of our values met the .9 or lower threshold for exploratory studies (Hair et al., 2017).

Table 2
Means, Standard Deviations, and Zero-Order Correlation Coefficients

	M	*SD*	1[a]	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Sex (female = 2)											
2. Age	20.14	1.33									
3. *Ikigai* single item	6.80	2.22	.13**	.02							
4. Self-authenticity	3.32	0.88	.16**	.07	.39**						
5. Genuine care	3.32	0.81	.17**	.08*	.46**	.74**					
6. Experiencing together	3.38	0.87	.15**	-.01	.45**	.61**	.62**				
7.Communicating experiences	3.27	0.90	.20**	.04	.42**	.54**	.61**	.69**			
8. Echoed values	3.18	0.89	.15**	-.01	.52**	.55**	.59**	.55**	.60**		
9. Trust	3.40	0.97	.23**	.00	.46**	.64**	.64**	.61**	.64**	.66**	
10. Valued experience	3.27	0.79	.14**	-.03	.67**	.45**	.53**	.51**	.50**	.53**	.49**

Note. *N* = 672. The *ikigai* single item was measured using a 11-point scale, while all the other *ikigai* related measures were administered with a 5-point scale. [a] As gender was a dichotomous variable, we conducted point-biserial correlation by using Brown's (2001) formula and Excel software.
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 3
Discriminant Validity of the Reflective Measurement Models based on Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) Ratios and 95% CI

	1	2	3
1. Self-authenticity			
2. Genuine care	.89 [.84; .94]		
3. Echoed values	.70 [.62; .77]	.78 [.68; .83]	
4. Trust	.79 [.72; .84]	.78 [.72; .84]	.86 [.80; .92]

Note: According to Hair et al. (2017), HTMT ratios should be .9 or lower for exploratory studies.

PLS-SEM

With regard to the structural model, all VIFs were lower than the threshold of 5 (Hair et al., 2017). In terms of global model fit assessment, PLS-SEM methodologists have noted that the meaning of "fit" differs between PLS-SEM and covariance-based SEM (CB-SEM) (Hair et al., 2017). Specifically, CB-SEM algorithms work to minimize the gap between theoretical and empirical covariance matrices, whereas the regression-based PLS-SEM estimator maximizes the variance in endogenous variables explained by the model (Hair et al., 2017). Most fit indices developed in the CB-SEM context assess "fit" by assuming the covariance residual minimization as the goal. Thus, PLS-SEM methodologists have recommended the use of multiple other indicators (e.g., R^2, f^2) as described below. That being said, Henseler et al. (2014) identified SRMR (the standardized root mean square residual) and RMS_{theta} (the root mean square residual covariance) as potentially useful fit indices in PLS-SEM, and suggested .08 (or below) and .12-.14 (or below) as potential cut-off points. SRMR and RMS_{theta} for our model were .067 and .144, which we deemed acceptable and proceeded with the rest of the assessment.

Figure 2 summarizes path coefficients, statistical significance of the paths, variances explained (R^2), and predictors' effect sizes (f^2 and q^2) based on the PLS algorithm and bootstrap procedure. First, all hypothesized paths were significant and in the expected direction (positive). Especially noteworthy is that the effects of experiencing together and communicating experiences on the outcome variables were significant while controlling for each other's influence, as were the paths from echoed values and trust to the mediating variables. Moreover, the above eight associations remained significant after controlling for the impacts of valued experience. Further, all specific indirect effects (e.g., echoed values → experiencing together → self-authenticity) were significant at .05 level. Second, the overall model explained 44% and 49% of the variance in self-authenticity and genuine care, respectively. These values are considered large (Cohen, 1992) or medium (Hair et al., 2017) effect size in social sciences. Third, f^2 values shown in Figure 2 in the parentheses on the left side suggested that trust had medium-size effects on the mediating variables, while the effects of echoed values were small (Hair et al., 2017). Experiencing together had a medium-size effect on self-authenticity, whereas the other effects on the two outcome variables were small-size. Fourth, we computed Q^2, which indicates the model's in-sample predictive ability based on the blindfolding procedure (Hair et al., 2017). The resultant values ranged from .31 for experiencing together and communicating experiences, to .35 for self-authenticity and genuine care. These above-zero values supported the model's predictive capacity. Lastly, q^2 was examined to investigate the predictive relevance of individual predictors. The values displayed in Figure 2 in the parentheses on the right side indicated that all hypothesized links had small-size predictive relevance ($q^2 \geq .02$), except the paths from communicating experiences to self-authenticity and from echoed values to experiencing together, which had minimal relevance (Hair et al., 2017).

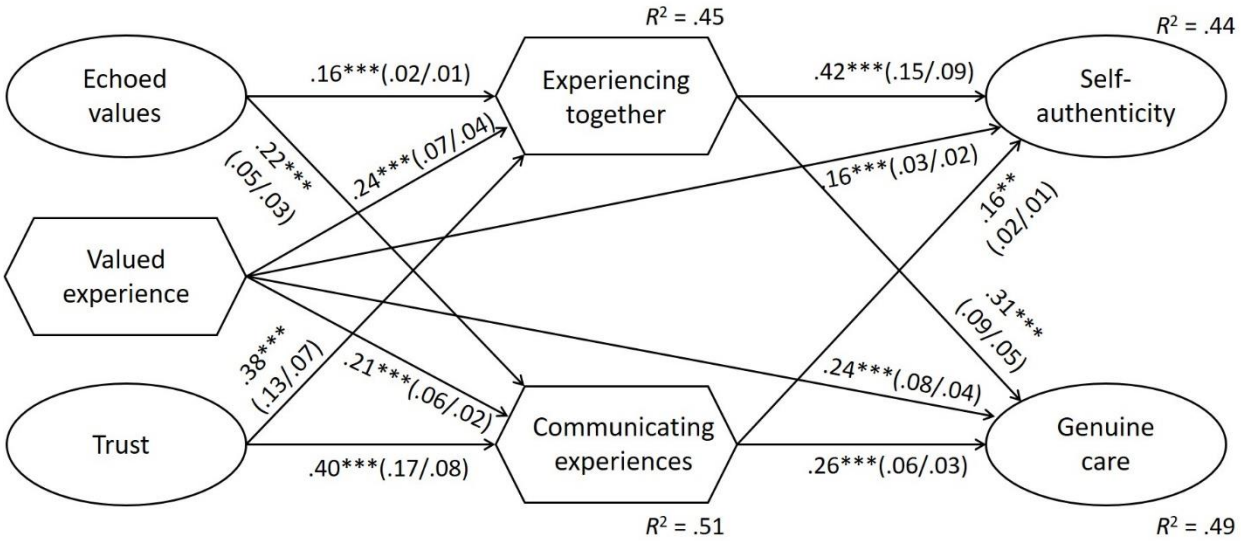

Figure 2. PLS-SEM results of the structural model. Ovals signify reflective models, whereas hexagons designate formative models. Path coefficients are standardized. The left-side values within parentheses are the effect size f^2, while the values on the right side are the predictive relevance metric q^2. The effect of sex and age on all the endogenous variables are controlled for.
** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Discussion

Using a mixed-methods design, the current study developed the substantive theory of *ibasho* (i.e., authentic relationship). This theory explains how interpersonal factors contribute to *ikigai* among Japanese university students. *Ibasho* refers to an interpersonal relationship where people feel authentic and moreover valued and cared for. This finding in the student population supports the relevance of interpersonal factors for young adults' *ikigai* (Kumano, 2012). Also noteworthy is that the premise of *ibasho* is rather individualistic than collectivistic. Although some of our interviewees referred to a group (e.g., varsity team) as a source of their *ibasho*, most discussed individual relationships with particular others (e.g., teammates). Even talking about a group, they did not necessarily focus on committing themselves to it (Mathews, 1996). The very idea of *self*-authenticity means that *ibasho* is about the relationship of students' self *with* a group and others, not self *in* them. This is not to say that students' idea of self is immune to influences of social discourses and cultural norms; however, as Takahashi (2001) observed, it may be that young adults in today's Japan have adopted more individualistic views of wellbeing and *ikigai*. Furthermore, the concept of having a true self is aligned with an essentialist Western philosophy (Kanagawa, Cross, & Markus, 2001)[1]. It is possible that self-authenticity has become more important to Japanese students' *ikigai* due to increasing Western influences (e.g., television shows, music lyrics).

Our *ibasho* theory posits that two subjective feelings, self-authenticity and genuine care, are integral to students' *ikigai*. This is a rather novel suggestion, as extant *ikigai* studies—even sociological ones—have assumed *ikigai*-related perceptions are predominantly individualistic (e.g., meaning, purpose) (Kamiya, 1966; Kumano, 2012; Takahashi, 2001). On the contrary, the SWB literature has long acknowledged that personal wellbeing can involve interpersonal dimensions

[1] We would like to thank one of the reviewers for suggesting this possibility.

(e.g., Keyes, 1998; Ryff, 2014). For example, both Ryff (2014) and Seligman (2011) associated their interpersonal wellbeing perceptions with warm trusting relationships and sincerely caring attitudes, respectively, which is akin to genuine care. Self-authenticity is consistent with recent developments in authenticity research (Ryan & Ryan, 2019). Our *ibasho* theory and the extant research concur that authenticity is an interpersonal issue, and that genuineness is the core of this construct (Lopez & Rice, 2006), although our theory differs in that it identifies self-authenticity as part of the wellbeing state itself, rather than predictor. Our quantitative study found self-authenticity and genuine care are highly correlated with one another (r = .74, Table 2), and thus worthy of being studied under a single framework. The current study is the first to relate these constructs with *ikigai*.

Our *ibasho* theory also specifies experiencing together and communicating experiences as two key interpersonal actions through which students build and maintain authentic relationships. Part of experiencing together is having enjoyable experiences with close others, which is similar to Lakey and Orehek's (2011) proposition that "ordinary but enjoyable" shared activities regulate happiness. In relation to the need for relatedness, Baumeister and Leary (1995) also noted the importance of positive frequent interactions. Our study extends these propositions to the realm of eudaimonic wellbeing. Moreover, experiencing together also involves making efforts with close others, which often comes along with negative emotions (e.g., stress). The literature is curiously silent on this form of shared perseverance. This unique finding may have been because *ikigai* is a form of eudaimonic wellbeing (Kumano, 2018), and its pursuit requires not only pleasure, but also growth and goal achievements. Communicating experiences, especially the sub-dimension of informing close others of one's valued experience, resembles capitalization (Gable & Reis, 2010). Although capitalization applies to any positive life events, past studies also show that it tends to occur after more valuable life events (Gable et al., 2004), which is consistent with our *ibasho* theory. The other sub-component of communicating experiences, obtaining support, has a clear relationship with the social support framework (Lakey, 2013). While our findings give credence to the efficacy of social support in enhancing *ikigai* (Aoki, 2015), communicating experiences consists more of enacted support, whose association with wellbeing has been inconsistent or null in the literature (e.g., Lakey & Cohen, 2000). This may have been because our study focused on eudaimonic wellbeing, which requires actual support for goal pursuits (Feeney & Collins, 2015), and/or on Japan, where support is culturally prioritized (Uchida et al., 2008).

The last two constructs in our *ibasho* theory are echoed values and trust that facilitate students in engaging in the above experience-based interactions. Echoed values may be fostered in autonomy-supportive environments that enhance authenticity (Ryan & Ryan, 2019). Creating such environments requires attentive listening and perspective-taking (Reeve, 2006). Our interviewees engaged in similar interactions. Also relevant may be the role of others' responses in capitalization (Gable & Reis, 2010). Active and positive responses would likely come from those with similar values. What our concept of echoed values adds, though, is that the mutual understanding should be about *keiken*, i.e., what individuals consider as enjoyable, effortful, stimulating, and comforting. In the SWB literature, trust has been recognized as a predictor of wellbeing (Helliwell & Wang, 2011). Our theory explains that this may be because trust encourages people to share their valued experiences with one another either directly or indirectly. Indeed, the capitalization research has shown that this type of interaction tends to occur among close others (e.g., family, partner) who have spent considerable time together and developed trust with each other (Gable & Reis, 2010).

Conclusion

The current study discovered that forming *ibasho* (authentic relationship) is key to students' *ikigai*, and identified relevant variables in this process (Figure 1). While the use of grounded theory led to the contextualized theory, the use of online survey and PLS-SEM resulted in new measures with validity and reliability, as well as quantitative evidence for the theory's generalizability. Broadly speaking, the current study helps addressing the dearth of research on non-Western wellbeing terms (Lahti, 2019; Lomas, 2016), especially the need for more systematic *ikigai* research (Hasegawa et al., 2015; Kumano, 2018). It also bridges *ikigai* and SWB research that sometimes do not communicate well with each other due to language barriers.

Despite these contributions, our study has some limitations. First, both qualitative and quantitative studies are essentially cross-sectional, and thus the resultant theory's causal implications should be carefully interpreted. Second, our samples may not have represented the most "typical" Japanese students, as the interviewees attended a private university, while the survey respondents registered with an online survey company. Third, although PLS-SEM's ability to accommodate the different measurement model types and many variables and relations benefited our quantitative study, the method has some limitations, including the limited repertoire and documentation of global model fit indices (e.g., Rönkkö, McIntosh, Antonakis, & Edwards, 2016).

In terms of future research, longitudinal and experimental designs will help in testing the theory's causality. Longitudinal studies should carefully choose time intervals as young adults' lives tend to be dynamic. We suggest monthly intervals as a good starting point. Experimentally, researchers can have students engage in experiencing together and/or communicating experiences for a certain time (e.g., a week), and measure how their levels of self-authenticity, genuine care, and overall *ikigai* change. Future studies on different age groups (e.g., middle-aged and older adults) will aid in testing our model's generalizability. A major benefit of defining and measuring *ikigai* without using this Japanese word is the facilitation of future cross-cultural studies. Indeed, we also back-translated our Japanese items into English (Table 1) and thus future researchers can use them, at least in Anglophone cultures.

The current study is a testament to Peterson's (2008) observation that no language or culture should dominate wellbeing research; we can learn important insights by carefully attending to wellbeing phenomena in different languages and cultures. Yet, the literature remains concerned predominantly with Western, English terms. Our hope is that this study will inspire future research on different wellbeing concepts around the world.

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