

# Cross-Cultural Variations in Patient-Nurse Relationship Rules

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine cross-cultural variations in Patient-Nurse Relationship Rules by surveying nursing students. One hundred and six Japanese nursing students (106 females) and 56 American nursing students (9 males, 47 females) took part. The mean scores and standard deviations were calculated for 45 rules endorsed by nurses and 41 patients separately for each culture. By using the t-test, significant differences ( $p < .001$ ) in endorsed rules according to culture were noted. While Americans tended to endorse rules concerning self-presentation and role responsibilities of nurses, Japanese tended to endorse rules concerning emotional commitment. Further, Americans tended to regard a patient as an independent person, while Japanese tended to regard a patient as a person who leans on another's goodwill.

**Key words:** Patient-Nurse Relationship, cross-cultural variation, rule, nursing student

## I. Introduction

Globalization has developed rapidly. As a part of this trend, it is not unusual for Japanese nurses to work or study nursing in a foreign country. Because opportunities for employment of foreign nurses have been increasing more and more, it is imperative to be fully aware and understand one's culture and what is expected of them to avoid conflicts and misunderstandings. It is especially important for nurses to understand the role of nurses and the role of patients in other cultures.

A number of people have argued that social behavior is rule-bound (*e.g.* Harré).<sup>1)</sup> All relationships are governed to some extent by the rules of law. In addition, there are a lot of informal rules, which members of a culture believe should be followed. Some of these rules, when broken, lead to the collapse or disruption of the relationship. Some of these rules are familiar while others are less obvious. Argyle and Henderson *et al.*<sup>2)</sup> investigated the informal rules, which are some of the most important components of relationships. Their studies are useful to understand not only the most effective skills

to use in a relationship, but also the concept of relationships themselves. However, they have not investigated the nurse-patient relationship yet (Sota *et al.*).<sup>3)</sup>

Understanding the rules for nurses and patients provides a key to the skills needed to cope with patients successfully, and helps us to understand these relationships better. The purpose of our study is to examine the cross-cultural variations in the Patient-Nurse Relationship Rules by surveying nursing students.

## II. Methods

### 1. Questionnaire

A rule is defined as behavior which members of a group believe should or should not be performed in a certain situation. The questionnaire consisted of two parts made up of 33 rules which might apply to any social relationship (relationship-common rules) developed by Argyle *et al.*<sup>4)</sup> (Table 1-1), and specific rules developed by the authors (Table 1-2) that were thought to apply to the Patient-Nurse relationship. The 33 relationship-common rules were translated into Japanese by permission of Argyle. Participants were asked to rate how strongly they felt each rule applied to Patient-Nurse relationship ranging from 1 (should rule *strongly* agree), through 4 (agree), 5 (Rule does not apply), 6 (should not rule agree) to 9 (should not rule *strongly* agree) (Figure 1). This enabled the respondent to specify the *salience* of the rule and the *direction* of the rule. Each questionnaire was prefaced by standard set of instructions and an example of how to use the rating scale. Information was also collected on age, sex, education and country of origin in order to establish the representativeness of the sample.

### 2. Participants

One hundred and six Japanese nursing students and 56 American nursing students took part in our study (Table 2). All Japanese participants' country of origin is Japan. On the other hand, American participants' country of origin consists of many countries. It is representative in America because America is a multiracial society.

| Should  |   |   |   | Should not |                    |       |                  |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|------------|--------------------|-------|------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1   | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5          | 6                  | 7     | 8                | 9 |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Strongly Agree  | ← |   |   | Agree      | rule doesn't apply | Agree | → Strongly Agree |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| RULES FOR THE PATIENT   |   |   |   |            |                    | SCALE |                  |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 1. Address the nurse by his/her first name                    |   |   |   |            |                    | 1     | 2                | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 2. Disclose to the nurse one's feelings and personal problems |   |   |   |            |                    | 1     | 2                | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| ⋮   |   |   |   |            |                    |       |                  |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |

Figure 1. Example of Questionnaire

## Cross-Cultural Variations in Patient-Nurse Relationship Rules

**Table 1-1.** List of 33 common rules used across relationships  
(developed by Argyle *et al.*)

|   |
|---|
| 1. Invite the other person as a guest to dine at a family celebration       |
| 2. Seek to repay debts, favours or compliments no matter how small          |
| 3. Engage in joking or teasing with the other                               |
| 4. Appear neatly or smartly dressed when with the other                     |
| 5. Strive to present oneself to the other person in the best light possible |
| 6. Feel free to take up as much of the other person's time as one desires   |
| 7. Discuss personal financial matters with the other person                 |
| 8. Show unconditional positive regard to the other person                   |
| 9. Inform the other person of one's personal schedule                       |
| 10. Share news of success with the other person                             |
| 11. Respect the other person's privacy                                      |
| 12. Look the other person in the eye during conversation                    |
| 13. Be emotionally supportive to the other person                           |
| 14. Address the other person by his/her first name                          |
| 15. Disclose to the other person one's feelings and personal problems       |
| 16. Offer to pay for the other person when going out together               |
| 17. Give birthday cards and presents  |
| 18. Visit the other person socially unannounced                             |
| 19. Use swearwords in the company of the other person                       |
| 20. Talk to the other person about religion and politics                    |
| 21. Talk to the other person about sex and death                            |
| 22. Show anger in front of the other person                                 |
| 23. Show distress or anxiety in front of the other person                   |
| 24. Obey the instructions of the other person                               |
| 25. Show affection for the other person in public                           |
| 26. Shake hands with one another on meeting                                 |
| 27. Intentionally touch the other person                                    |
| 28. Ask the other person for material help                                  |
| 29. Ask the other person for personal advice                                |
| 30. Criticize the other person publicly                                     |
| 31. Stand up for the other person in their absence                          |
| 32. Discuss that which is said in confidence with the other person          |
| 33. Indulge in sexual activity with the other person                        |

**Table 1-2.** List of specific rules which could apply to the  
Patient-Nurse Relationship  
(developed by the authors)

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Rules for the Nurse</b>   |  |
| 1. Listen carefully to the patient                                   |  |
| 2. Always explain everything clearly to the patient                  |  |
| 3. Become personally involved with the patient                       |  |
| 4. Be frank with the patient   |  |
| 5. Be completely honest with the patient                             |  |
| 6. Respect patients wishes   |  |
| 7. Demand a reward for his/her labor                                 |  |
| 8. Keep on smiling   |  |
| 9. Adjust his/her pace to the patient's pace                         |  |
| 10. Always be calm, cool, and collected                              |  |
| 11. Enter a patient's room by knocking or announcing himself/herself |  |
| 12. Respond quickly whenever the patient calls                       |  |
| <b>Rules for the Patient</b>   |  |
| 1. Express gratitude to the nurse                                    |  |
| 2. Follow the nurse's instructions carefully                         |  |
| 3. Question the nurse if unclear or uncertain                        |  |
| 4. Be completely honest with the nurse                               |  |
| 5. Have confidence in the nurse                                      |  |
| 6. Give the nurse all relevant information                           |  |
| 7. Ask the nurse for anything he/she wants                           |  |
| 8. Call the nurse whenever he/she likes                              |  |

**Table 2. Participants' Characteristics**

| Sex                      | Japanese (106) | Americans (56) |
|--------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Female                   | 106            | 47             |
| Male                     | 0              | 9              |
| <b>Age</b>               |                |                |
| under 20 yrs.            | 53             | 15             |
| 21-30yrs.                | 52             | 23             |
| 31-40yrs.                | 0              | 10             |
| 41-50yrs.                | 0              | 7              |
| u. c.                    | 0              | 1              |
| <b>Country of origin</b> |                |                |
| Japan                    | 106            | 0              |
| U. S                     | 0              | 44             |
| Philippine               | 0              | 2              |
| Vietnam                  | 0              | 2              |
| Korea                    | 0              | 1              |
| Afghanistan              | 0              | 1              |
| u. c.                    | 0              | 5              |

### III. Results and Discussion

The mean scores and standard deviations were calculated separately for each culture for the 45 rules endorsed for nurses and the 41 rules endorsed for patients. Rules which showed a group mean at either end of the bipolar scale of 3.0 or less and 7.0 or more were defined as highly endorsed rules.

Table 3. Rules for the Nurse (Mean Score and SD)

| Rules which were endorsed by both cultures                                | Japanese |           | Americans |           |
|---|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
|   | M        | SD        | M         | SD        |
| 1 Don't invite the patient as a guest to dine at a family celebration     | 7.11     | 1.84      | 7.96      | 1.36      |
| 2 Don't discuss personal financial matters with the patient               | 7.80     | 1.62      | 8.14      | 1.62      |
| 3 Don't visit the patient socially unannounced                            | 7.19     | 1.75      | 8.27      | 1.37      |
| 4 Don't use swearwords in the company of the patient                      | 8.12     | 1.29      | 8.77      | 0.69      |
| 5 Don't show anger in front of the patient                                | 7.05     | 1.82      | 8.00      | 8.77      |
| 6 Don't ask the patient for material help                                 | 8.11     | 1.52      | 7.54      | 2.09      |
| 7 Don't criticize the patient publicly                                    | 8.63     | 0.98      | 8.68      | 0.92      |
| 8 Don't discuss that which is said in confidence with the patient         | 8.33     | 1.51      | 7.58      | 2.43      |
| 9 Don't indulge in sexual activity with the patient                       | 7.60     | 1.86      | 8.80      | 0.88      |
| 10 Don't demand a reward for his/her labor                                | 7.76     | 1.92      | 7.88      | 1.88      |
| 11 Respect the other's privacy  | 1.58     | 1.77      | 1.46      | 1.17      |
| 12 Look the patient in the eye during conversation                        | 1.80     | 1.54      | 2.38      | 1.53      |
| 13 Be emotionally supportive  | 1.89     | 1.42      | 1.67      | 1.08      |
| 14 Shake hands with one another on meeting                                | 2.54     | 1.60      | 3.00      | 1.53      |
| 15 Listen carefully to the patient  | 1.53     | 1.07      | 1.21      | 0.49      |
| 16 Always explain everything clearly to the patient                       | 2.26     | 1.56      | 1.21      | 0.87      |
| 17 Respect patients wishes  | 2.87     | 1.60      | 2.04      | 1.87      |
| 18 Adjust his/her pace to the patient's pace                              | 2.69     | 1.70      | 3.00      | 1.79      |
| 19 Enter a patient's room by knocking or announcing himself/herself       | 1.39     | 1.02      | 1.20      | 0.55      |
| 20 Respond quickly whenever the patient calls                             | 2.72     | 1.79      | 2.50      | 1.31      |
| <b>Rules which were endorsed by the Japanese</b>                          | <b>M</b> | <b>SD</b> |           |           |
| 1 Don't feel free to take up as much of the patient's time as one desires | 7.02     | 1.75      |           |           |
| 2 Don't inform the patient of one's personal schedule                     | 7.08     | 1.85      |           |           |
| 3 Show unconditional positive regard to the patient                       | 1.98     | 1.64      |           |           |
| 4 Keep on smiling   | 2.05     | 1.55      |           |           |
| <b>Rules which were endorsed by the Americans</b>                         |          |           | <b>M</b>  | <b>SD</b> |
| 1 Don't disclose to the patient one's feelings and personal problems      |          |           | 7.91      | 1.78      |
| 2 Don't offer to pay for the patient when going out together              |          |           | 7.44      | 1.80      |
| 3 Don't talk to the patient about religion and politics                   |          |           | 7.02      | 2.16      |
| 4 Don't show distress or anxiety in front of the patient                  |          |           | 7.64      | 1.90      |
| 5 Don't ask the patient for personal advice                               |          |           | 8.30      | 1.23      |
| 6 Don't become personally involved with the patient                       |          |           | 7.42      | 2.09      |
| 7 Don't seek to repay debts, favours or compliments no matter how small   |          |           | 7.13      | 2.30      |
| 8 Appear neatly or smartly dressed when with the patient                  |          |           | 2.46      | 1.41      |
| 9 Strive to present oneself to the patient in the best light possible     |          |           | 2.60      | 1.85      |
| 10 Be completely honest with the patient                                  |          |           | 1.75      | 1.03      |
| 11 Always be calm, cool, and collected                                    |          |           | 2.38      | 1.71      |

### 1. Rules for the Nurse

The Japanese participants highly endorsed 24 rules while the American participants highly endorsed 31 rules for the nurse. Twenty of these were endorsed by both cultures. Four rules were highly endorsed by the Japanese but not so by the Americans. On the other hand, 11 rules were highly endorsed by the Americans but not so by the Japanese (Table 3).

### 2. Rules for the patient

Both participants highly endorsed 12 rules. Six of these were endorsed by both cultures. Six rules were highly endorsed by the Japanese. Another 6 rules were

**Table 4.** Rules for the Patient (Mean Score and SD)

| Rules which were endorsed by both cultures                      | Japanese |      | Americans |      |
|---|----------|------|-----------|------|
|   | M        | SD   | M         | SD   |
| 1 Don't visit the nurse socially unannounced                    | 7.11     | 1.69 | 7.68      | 1.67 |
| 2 Don't indulge in sexual activity with the nurse               | 7.14     | 1.94 | 8.65      | 1.24 |
| 3 Respect the nurse's privacy                                   | 2.64     | 2.05 | 1.80      | 1.77 |
| 4 Show distress or anxiety in front of the nurse                | 2.60     | 1.76 | 2.80      | 1.65 |
| 5 Question the nurse if unclear or uncertain                    | 2.16     | 1.68 | 1.34      | 0.77 |
| 6 Have confidence in the nurse                                  | 2.63     | 1.56 | 1.91      | 1.20 |
| Rules which were endorsed by the Japanese                       | M        | SD   |           |      |
| 1 Don't strive to present oneself to the nurse in the best li   | 7.10     | 1.54 |           |      |
| 2 Don't offer to pay for the nurse when going out together      | 7.53     | 1.98 |           |      |
| 3 Don't intentionally touch the nurse                           | 7.85     | 1.52 |           |      |
| 4 Don't ask the nurse for material help                         | 7.02     | 2.06 |           |      |
| 5 Don't discuss that which is said in confidence with the nurse | 7.31     | 1.78 |           |      |
| 6 Share news of success with the nurse                          | 2.71     | 1.43 |           |      |
| Rules which were endorsed by the Americans                      |          |      | M         | SD   |
| 1 Don't use swearwords in the company of the nurse              |          |      | 7.18      | 1.65 |
| 2 Don't criticize the nurse publicly                            |          |      | 7.50      | 1.68 |
| 3 Obey the instructions of the nurse                            |          |      | 2.47      | 1.37 |
| 4 Follow the nurse's instructions carefully                     |          |      |           |      |
| 5 Be completely honest with the nurse                           |          |      | 1.59      | 1.06 |
| 6 Give the nurse all relevant information                       |          |      | 1.57      | 1.08 |

endorsed by the Americans (Table 4).

The rules for nurses which were highly endorsed by both groups consist of rules referring to task-orientation, intimacy and self-presentation. Intimacy rules were the main ones especially endorsed by both cultures.

The encouraging, protecting, and regulating rules are those that facilitate an efficient completion of the task at hand, and that allow the relationship to continue long enough and smoothly enough to complete the task. However, one of the most important ways in which relationships differ is in the desired and appropriate level of intimacy. With the Patient-Nurse relationship, both cultures, but the Americans more so, endorsed many of the rules that regulate intimacy in order to keep it low.

'Keep on smiling' is a rule of self-presentation endorsed by the Japanese that at the same time encourages intimacy. On the other hand, rules of self-presentation endorsed by the Americans encourage the self-confidence of a nurse.

### 3. Characteristics of rules according to differences of means

By using the t-test ( $p < .001$ ), significant cultural differences in endorsed rules were distinguished. Figure 2 shows the example rules that are more strongly endorsed by the Americans than the Japanese.

The Americans endorsed the rules for patients referring to the patient's obligation to 'respect the nurse's privacy, express gratitude to the nurse, question the nurse if unclear or uncertain, be completely honest with the nurse, give the nurse all relevant information' and not to 'criticize the nurse publicly or indulge in sexual activity with

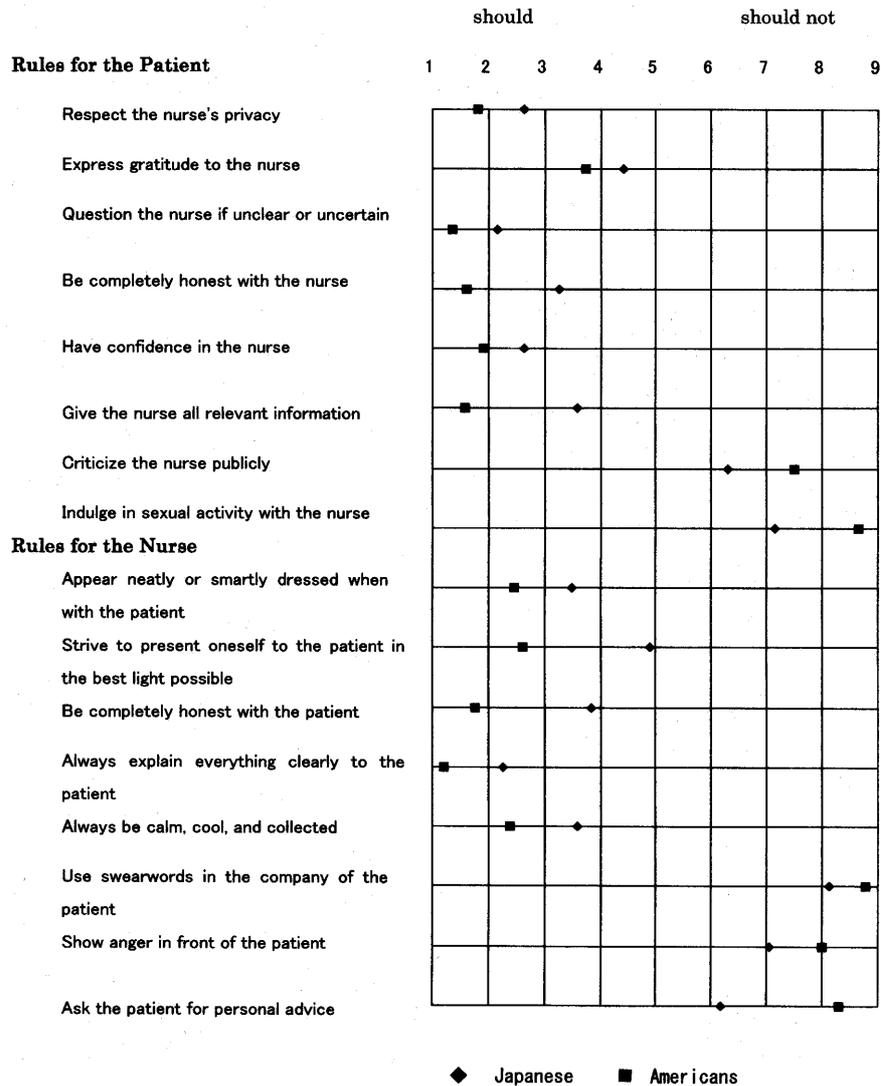


Figure 2. Rules were endorsed strongly by the Americans than the Japanese ( $p < .001$ )

the nurse'. They indicated that patients should carry out their task as a patient. The Americans tended to regard a patient as an independent person. But the Americans also indicated that nurses should 'appear neatly or smartly dressed when with the patient, strive to present themselves to the patient in the best light possible, be completely honest with the patient, always explain everything clearly to the patient' and should not 'use swearwords in the company of the patient, show anger in front of the patient, or ask the patient for personal advice'. These responses indicate that the Americans tended to endorse rules concerning self-presentation and role responsibilities of nurses.

In the other, there are the rules that were endorsed strongly by the Japanese than the Americans. In addition, they are the rules that were opposite in response between the Japanese and the Americans (Figure 3). As the above results, the Americans endorsed many more rules than the Japanese in the Patient-Nurse relationship. However, there are five rules that were endorsed significantly stronger by the Japanese than the Americans. The Japanese indicated that the patient should 'share

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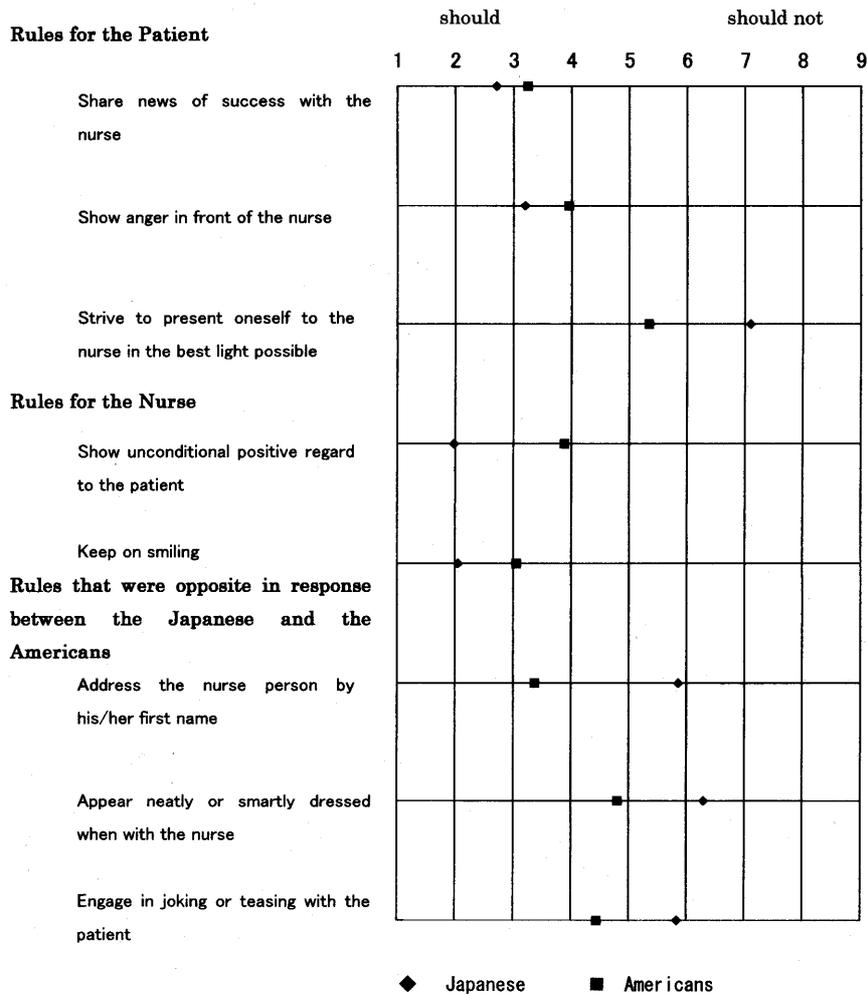


Figure 3. Rules were endorsed strongly by the Japanese than the Americans ( $p < .001$ ) and Rules that were opposite in response between the Japanese and the Americans.

news of success with the nurse' and should not 'show anger in front of the nurse, or strive to present oneself to the nurse in the best light possible'. On the other hand, they also indicated that the nurse should 'show unconditional positive regard to the patient, and keep on smiling'. In other words, the survey shows that the Japanese tended to regard a patient as a person who leans on another's goodwill, and endorsed rules for nurses concerning emotional commitment. In Japan there is the concept of *amae* or the wish to lean on another's goodwill and to be dependently self-indulgent. Doi<sup>5)</sup> notes that it is expressed in families and with close friends, but especially between husbands and wives. It may be presumed that the rules that were endorsed by the Japanese in the Patient-Nurse relationship are surely not irrelevant to the issue of *amae*, while at the same time, the rules which were endorsed by the Americans are surely not irrelevant to the issue of the Western ideal of self-reliance.

### IV. Conclusion

The study was limited by the fact that all the rules investigated had their origins in previous British study. This probably explains why more rules were endorsed in

America than in Japanese. If we had started in Japan, possibly the Japanese would have been found to have the most rules.

We would like to add the following points, we need to conduct study with a bigger sample and a related study with experienced registered nurses as they might have different view on these relationships.

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