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Cultural Factors in Social Anxiety: A Comparison of Social Phobia Symptoms and *Taijin Kyofusho*¹

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Abstract — The present study examined two forms of culturally-defined social anxiety: social anxiety or phobia, as defined by *DSM-IV*; (i.e., a concern of public scrutiny or embarrassment) and *Taijin Kyofusho* (TKS), a Japanese form of social anxiety centered around concern for offending others with inappropriate behavior or offensive appearance. These versions of social anxiety are also examined in relation to culturally-determined self definition as independent and interdependent. One hundred eighty-one U.S. students and 161 students enrolled in Japanese universities were administered scales to assess social anxiety and phobia and TKS symptoms and behaviors, as well as construal of self as independent or interdependent. Factor analyses of the three scales

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¹ We have chosen to use the spelling, *Taijin Kyofusho*, and the acronym, TKS, to represent this condition after Kirmayer (1991). We recognize that other authors have used alternate spellings of this disorder, such as *Taijin - Kyofu - sho* (Kasahara, 1988; McNally et al., 1990), *Taijin-kyofu-sho* (Reynolds, 1976), and *tai-jin kyofu* (Takahashi, 1989).

used to assess social anxiety yielded three factors, each clearly corresponding to the respective scales and defining TKS and *DSM*-defined social anxiety. A case analysis indicated that there was an approximate 50% co-occurrence between high scorers on the TKS and social phobia scales. Multiple regression analyses resulted in a different set of predictors of TKS and SPS for the U.S. and Japanese respondents. Results were interpreted as suggesting that cultural variables can mediate the expression of social anxiety but that both forms of social anxiety can be found in each sample. © 1997 Elsevier Science Ltd

The experience of intense anxiety or fear associated with social situations in which one might be viewed or scrutinized by others appears to be a universal phenomenon (e.g., Good & Kleinman, 1985; Mesquita & Frijda, 1992), and possibly extends down the phylogenetic scale to lower primates and below (Mineka & Zinbarg, 1995). This social anxiety reaction, as with all anxiety responses, is elicited by some form of perceived threat to the person. It is likely, however, that there are numerous cultural variations, both in the expression of such anxiety and in the situations and contexts in which it is elicited. That is, there is likely to be cultural variation in the perception of what constitutes social threat.

Such cultural variation in social anxiety, in part, is likely a function of how a given culture shapes the way in which its members define or construe the self as the object of social threat (Kirmayer, 1991; Takahashi, 1989). Among some cultures, particularly those of East Asia, such as the Japanese, the self is defined largely by one's familial or social group, such that one's self is an extension of that group (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Marsella, 1985; Singelis & Sharkey, 1995). An accomplishment or social deviation reflects directly and foremost upon the group. Individualism, self-aggrandizement, or deviation from the group is not tolerated; "the nail that stands out gets pounded down" (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). In such cultures, often referred to as "collectivist" (e.g., Kim, Triandis, Kagitcibasi, Choi, & Yoon, 1994; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1989, 1995), one's sense of self is interdependent with one's group. The individual is defined only with reference to his or her larger group and is but a part of a larger whole.

In contrast to collectivist cultures that foster an interdependent construal of self, other cultures, such as the dominant white cultures of North America, tend to foster a definition of the self as more individualistic or independent. In those cultures, individualism is encouraged and one receives praise for standing out from the crowd. Individualistic cultures tend to promote an independent sense or construal of self. Indeed, one's sense of self is defined by one's unique, individual characteristics and abilities. The sense of self is developed through achieving independence from others and is conceived of as an autonomous, bounded entity (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Singelis, 1994). The person who always goes along with the crowd is said to have "no sense of self." Thus, if one commits a social *faux pas* or misstep, it is one's own self who is responsible. Thus, embarrassment and shame are brought primarily upon the individual.

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