

Cultural differences in perceived social norms and social anxiety

Nina Heinrichs^{a,*}, Ronald M. Rapee^b, Lynn A. Alden^c, Susan Bögels^d,
Stefan G. Hofmann^e, Kyung Ja Oh^f, Yuji Sakano^g

^a*Institute of Psychology, Technical University of Braunschweig, Spielmannstr. 12a, 38106 Braunschweig, Germany*

^b*Macquarie University, Australia*

^c*University of British Columbia, Canada*

^d*University of Maastricht, The Netherlands*

^e*Boston University, USA*

^f*Yonsei University, Korea*

^g*Waseda University, Japan*

Received 12 April 2005; received in revised form 10 August 2005; accepted 6 September 2005

Abstract

Cultural considerations in social anxiety are a rarely investigated topic although it seems likely that differences between countries in social norms may relate to the extent of social anxiety. The present study investigated individuals' personal and perceived cultural norms and their relation to social anxiety and fear of blushing. A total of 909 participants from eight countries completed vignettes describing social situations and evaluated the social acceptability of the behavior of the main actor both from their own, personal perspective as well as from a cultural viewpoint. Personal and cultural norms showed somewhat different patterns in comparison between types of countries (individualistic/collectivistic). According to reported cultural norms, collectivistic countries were more accepting toward socially reticent and withdrawn behaviors than was the case in individualistic countries. In contrast, there was no difference between individualistic and collectivistic countries on individuals' personal perspectives regarding socially withdrawn behavior. Collectivistic countries also reported greater levels of social anxiety and more fear of blushing than individualistic countries. Significant positive relations occurred between the extent to which attention-avoiding behaviors are accepted in a culture and the level of social anxiety or fear of blushing symptoms. These results provide initial evidence that social anxiety may be related to different cultural norms across countries.

© 2005 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Culture; Anxiety; Norms; Behavior; Blushing

Introduction

The past decade has seen a growing recognition of the intricate interplay between culture and psychopathology. Some research has focused on psychopathologic manifestations of a specific disorder across cultures (Draguns & Tanaka-Matsumi, 2003) while in other studies, the focus has been on comparing

*Corresponding author. Tel.: +49 531 391 2808; fax: +49 531 391 8105.

E-mail address: n.heinrichs@tu-bs.de (N. Heinrichs).

disorder-typical symptoms across cultures (e.g., Kleinknecht, Dinnel, Kleinknecht, Hiruma, & Harada, 1997). In addition, Draguns and Tanaka-Matsumi (2003) concluded that, although culture has a considerable impact upon psychopathology, there is a lack of knowledge about “kinds of features or dimensions of culture” that “are implicated in generating the distinctive manifestations of disturbance of a given time and place” (p. 767). It is the purpose of the present study to compare social anxiety across cultures and to examine the association between social anxiety and one such cultural feature, social behavioral norms (could also say “norms for social behavior”).

In considering the relationship between culture and social anxiety, there are two competing hypotheses. First, it might be expected that countries¹ that hold clear and stringent norms about socially appropriate behavior will be characterized by lower levels of social anxiety than countries in which social behavior is less norm governed. In cultures where unequivocal social norms are held by the group, individuals know precisely what is expected from them in a social situation, and this in turn may help to minimize social distress. On the other hand, the opposite may be true. Specifically, levels of social anxiety may be higher in countries in which social norms are clear and extensive than in countries with more relaxed social norms because the consequences of breaking these norms are considerably greater. Hofstede (1984, 2001) introduced the dimension of “Uncertainty avoidance”. This is the extent to which members of a country can tolerate ambiguous situations. These are usually situations which are novel or unknown and may include some uncontrollability. This intolerance of ambiguity at the cultural level has been measured with the Uncertainty Avoidance Index and it is strongly related to anxiety. Thus, there is at least some evidence that a cultural phenomenon is related to anxiety and well-being on an individual level.

Little attention has been focused on the question of which countries hold more stringent social norms and expectations. However, another related concept that has been given a considerable degree of attention in cross-cultural research is the notion of individualism/collectivism (Hofstede, 1984, 2001; Singelis, 1994). In collectivistic cultures, harmony within the group is the highest priority and individual gain is considered to be less important than improvement of the broader social group. Thus, in collectivistic countries it is likely that more overt social norms will exist to maintain social harmony. In contrast, in individualistic societies, individual achievements and success receive the greatest reward and social admiration. Hence, social norms may be less frequent and less overt since fitting into society is a less valued concept.

Lucas, Diener, Grob, Suh and Shao (2000) demonstrated that social contacts serve different purposes in individualistic versus collectivistic cultures. In individualistic cultures, individual feelings and thoughts determine behavior more directly. In collectivistic cultures, harmony within the group is the highest priority, and norms and role expectations impact on behavior considerably. Thus, in collectivistic cultures more rules and guidelines for social behavior should exist that make social slips more obvious than in individualistic cultures.

In continents and countries like Asia, South America, or Pacific Islands, strict social rules are supposed to be provided about what behavior is appropriate in certain social situations (e.g., Argyle, 1986). If an individual deviates from these social rules, they are threatened by sanctions, such as exclusion from the group. It is therefore highly relevant for individuals in such countries that their social behavior is evaluated as appropriate and positive (Suh, Diener, Oishi & Triandis, 1998). Further, norms are strong predictors of life satisfaction in collectivistic but not individualistic countries (Suh et al., 1998).

A concept that is related to social anxiety is embarrassment (APA, 1994). Again, it is possible that embarrassment and, more specifically, the fear of embarrassment is related to social norms in a culture. Singelis and Sharkey (1995) have suggested that it is easier to embarrass individuals from South-East Asia because more rules for social behavior exist there. Asian individuals should therefore be more concerned about their social behavior because social deviations are easier to detect. Other authors have also suggested that embarrassment is more common in collectivistic cultures because it is induced by external sanctions whereas

¹Although often done, considering countries as the unit of analysis is certainly too global because cultures are not equal to countries (Triandis, 1995). However, since nationality is easier to assess than culture and prevalence rates usually have been reported by countries and not by cultures, we use these terms interchangeably for the purpose of present study. The reader who is interested in the differences between these two concepts and the implication for genuine cross-cultural research is referred to Triandis (1995).

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

ISIArticles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات