Taijin Kyofusho

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11-1-2011
Throughout the world there are many different kinds of phobias that affect a wide range of people. Some phobias are understandable, being of things that can cause obvious harm to yourself or others, such as poisonous snakes, spiders or insects. Other phobias are more harmless, but still frightening, such as large crowds or speaking in front of other people. Among all of the phobias that can be found around the world, social phobias are the most common place, and wholly universal phobia in existence.¹ Even among social phobias there are different types with different symptoms and causes, some found worldwide, some, like Taijin Kyofusho, are culturally specific.

A social phobia is a psychological disorder that is defined by the DSM-IV as an intense anxiety or fear of social situations in which a person may be viewed or scrutinized by others.² Social phobias can run from mild, such as being unable to give a speech in front of a classroom of people, to a severe manifestation where someone is unable to go into public without feeling anxiety and fear of being scrutinized by other people. Though social phobias are universal in that they exist in some form or another around the world, there are some that are culturally specific because of the culture itself.

Taijin Kyofusho is the Japanese conceptualization of social phobia and literally translates to “symptoms” (sho) of “fear” (Kyofu) in “face to face situations” (Taijin).³ Of course this literal translation seems just like the definition found for social phobias in any other culture, but what must be remembered is that the Japanese culture is based around a collective ideal instead of an individualistic ideal like the United States has. In Japan the “self” is defined by the group. One person affects the whole group’s appearance, status, and well-being as much as anyone else does.⁴

Japan is a culture based around shame. Cultural norms are set and well defined, meaning that any violation of these social norms is easily identifiable, unlike in a culturally eclectic

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² Ibid.
³ Ibid, 160.
⁴ Ibid, 158.
surrounding seen in the United States. Because of cultural norms being so readily identifiable and the significance of the company people typically keep in public, the idea of violating those social norms pays a higher price.\(^5\) The shame found in the Japanese culture involves the “self” of the person far more than individualistic societies’ definition of shame, and is seen as something irreversibly damaged when a social norm is violated. Someone can apologize for wronging someone, and make it up to them in the future, but someone can’t make up a social violation such as passing gas in front of someone else, because there is no real way to make their discomfort or view of you any better after that action or occurrence.

Japanese people are inherently “embarrassed” over any direct attention brought to the individual specifically.\(^6\) This attention can be positive or negative, either way the attention is seen as a social deviation away from the good of the group, and is therefore embarrassing to the individual. This embarrassment is caused by the failure of the group as a whole to protect the individual’s privacy. Some attention is more effective than others, but the most distressing and obvious is to draw someone’s gaze to an individual. Often people need only imagine someone’s gaze on them for them to feel embarrassment.\(^7\) It is through this embarrassment and avoidance of causing the group detriment in any way in the Japanese culture that Taijin Kyofusho was developed as a form of social phobia.

Taijin Kyofusho is defined as the obsession of shame, manifested by the morbid fear of embarrassing or offending other people.\(^8\) Opposed to other social phobias Taijin Kyofusho is focused around causing other people embarrassment or discomfort instead of the person with the social phobia. The person often focuses on specific body parts or aspects of themselves such as blushing, body odors,

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6 Ibid, 194.
7 Ibid, 195.
improper facial expressions, staring inappropriately, blemishes or other types of physical deformities.\textsuperscript{9} Taijin Kyofusho focuses around the fear of disrupting the group cohesiveness by making others uncomfortable, which is distinct of the Japanese culture.

Taijin Kyofusho was originally defined by Masatake Morita in the 1930’s as a manifestation of shinkeishitsu or nervous characters of temperaments of individuals.\textsuperscript{10} Though Morita had diagnosed people years before he defined the disorder as it was, it wasn’t officially considered a diagnosis to the Japanese until the 1930’s. For many years after that Taijin Kyofusho was considered the core form of social phobia in Japan and to an extent was used synonymously with shinkeishitsu.\textsuperscript{11} In 1995 the diagnostic criteria for Taijin Kyofusho was drawn up for a global use, though many diagnostic manuals have Taijin Kyofusho listed under social phobias instead of having its own individual section.\textsuperscript{12}

While there are other areas of the world that report cases of Taijin Kyofusho such as Korea, various European societies, and even the United States, it is not considered a mainstream social phobia because of such vast cultural differences and is mainly seen in Japan.\textsuperscript{13} The onset of Taijin Kyofusho occurs typically in early adulthood or adolescence, just like with social phobias in western cultures such as the United States. Those affected by Taijin Kyofusho are typically males over females by a ratio of about 3:2, but in recent studies these numbers seem to be changing.\textsuperscript{14}

The severity of Taijin Kyofusho can vary from highly prevalent but mild concerns of adolescents, to a true social phobic level, to a severe level with inordinate concerns with bodily features.\textsuperscript{15} The more severe cases can develop into a somatic type of disorder often accompanied by delusions that the

\textsuperscript{9} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid, 526.
affected person is the center of everyone’s attention because of some serious deformity they possess. *Taijin Kyofusho* is divided into two phobic types, type A being mild and neurotic and type B being severe and delusional. While *Taijin Kyofusho* is chronic it rarely lasts past middle age.

People who suffer from *Taijin Kyofusho* do so in specific settings or around certain people, unlike other social phobias where sufferers are affected almost constantly around everyone. Typically people with *Taijin Kyofusho* do not have strong anxiety around very closely related family or people, as well as complete strangers. It is only around people they are acquainted with though not necessarily intimate with that they suffer the most. Situations such as school, commuter trains, and work places are some places where people with this disorder have the most severe anxiety.

Treatment in Japan for *Taijin Kyofusho* was developed by Masatake Morita in the early 1910’s and has remained largely unchanged for the last 100 years. The goal behind the Morita treatment is to restore the patient’s mind to how it was before the development of the disorder and to have the patient accept their symptoms of the disorder. Treatment would take place in a hospital, away from outside influences of family, friends, or other personal responsibilities. Originally treatment involved enforced isolation, rest and discipline.

The treatment regimen began with isolated hospitalization where the person was not allowed any form of entertainment. The point of this was to allow the person to worry and preoccupy themselves with their problems as much as they wanted. After a few days the person would then be given very light work or chores to do but would remain isolated. The isolation provided a respite for the person to not worry about their problems while still going about their light tasks. During this time the

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17 Ibid.
18 Ibid, 528.
19 Ibid.
patient would write diaries under the influence of their doctor to talk about their worries or thoughts they might still have while alone.

After a period of light work, the patient would then be given a heavier work load, or more chores to do with minimal guidance. The patient would still be denied most entertainment, though would be allowed to read very little.²⁰ Most of their time was spent in reflection and getting well rather than preoccupying themselves. During this time the patient would also attend lectures and meetings where they would listen and participate in talks about their social phobias, participate in constructive tasks and work, and spend their time actively working toward accepting their symptoms.²¹

Typically treatment would last around forty days of constant hospitalization, so it was expensive for most sufferers of Taijin Kyofusho. In the 1930’s the Morita treatment underwent some changes that allowed it to be applied in an out-patient form, thereby cutting hospitalization costs. While it does not sound to the Western culture’s view that the Morita treatment would do much good, there is a high rate of positive results that come from the treatment. Up to 77% of patients report positive outcomes from the treatment, and in the more strict adherents of the Morita treatment report up to 93% of patients having a positive reaction.²²

The Morita treatment works so well, in fact, that it is applied to other psychological disorders from schizophrenia and depression to borderline personality disorder and neurotic disorders.²³ Clinically the treatment works, and works for longer periods than many treatments for social phobias outside of Japan, but with changing times come changing disorders. With the changing in the Japanese social structure and the prevalence of women in the work place and in higher positions of social power, there have been more and more women suffering from Taijin Kyofusho.²⁴

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²⁰ Ibid.
²¹ Ibid.
²² Ibid, 529.
²³ Ibid.
²⁴ Ibid, 527.
Also different is that blushing is becoming less severe of a concern for people with Taijin Kyofusho and problems such as offensive body odor, eye to eye contact, or a possible body deformity are becoming more prevalent.\textsuperscript{25} Avoidance and withdrawal tendencies are also on the rise with the ability to make a living in the home rather than having to leave the house to earn money. This is making it more difficult for those with more severe cases of Taijin Kyofusho to actively seek help before their symptoms become too severe for them to handle alone. Japanese culture is avoidant of people being overt in their attempts to force help on others, so it is more difficult for patients to get outside help without having to force themselves to deal with their social phobia in order to get the help in the first place.

The Japanese culture plays a key role in the development of Taijin Kyofusho just like any other culture plays a key role in the development of social phobias of any kind. The collective viewpoint of people in Japan rather than the individualistic viewpoint of most Western societies makes the development of a vastly different social phobia that is almost completely unknown in other parts of the world very easy. It is through the understanding that the people being offended by another person’s actions or inactions is key to what dictates the development of this disorder, and is one of the main reasons as to why it is found mainly in Japan.

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.
Bibliography


