



706/F

On culture and shyness: a cross-cultural study comparing shyness in Great Britain and Sri Lanka

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Shyness is not classified as a psychological disorder either in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders of the American Psychiatric Association (DSM-IV) or in the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (10th Revision) of the World Health Organization (ICD-10). Yet, considering its impact on individuals, shyness can be understood as a form of excessive self-focused pre-occupation with one's thoughts, feelings and physical reaction that could hinder a person from pursuing their own interpersonal and professional goals. Despite the prevalence of the condition in all cultures and nations, there is a dearth of shyness research outside of the USA. A cross-cultural study on shyness was conducted in Great Britain and Sri Lanka using the Henderson/Zimbardo Shyness Questionnaire (2000). As hypothesized, the socio-cultural differences (explained by nationality) had a statistically significant effect [$F(1, 206) = 12.85, p < .001$] on shyness quotients (Shy Q) of the two groups, where the British sample reported higher levels of shyness compared to the Sri Lankan sample. The British participants ($n = 112$) reported a shy Q of 2.75 and the shy Q for the Sri Lankan sample ($n = 118$) was 2.53. The collective group mentality appears to have contributed to the low shy Q in the Sri Lankan sample while the British individuals were more self-critical in areas that were perceived as "I'm not good enough". The results are discussed in detail in the theoretical frame of collectivism and individualism that demonstrate a notable distinction between the two cultures.

Acknowledgement: Financial assistance by the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission and the University of Worcester UK, in the form of 'Commonwealth Shared Scholarship for Masters level studies'.