

**Social Loafing Cross-Cultural Gender Study:
Women in Taiwan and the US**

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Introduction

Most of the tasks in society are accomplished in groups. Each individual in the group puts forth a certain amount of effort to help the group achieve its goal. Although one would expect every group member to put in as much as effort as if each person were working alone, this is not always the case. Such is the phenomenon of social loafing, and it has generated many studies since the late seventies into its causes and effects in different settings.

Many studies have been conducted on individuals in various cultures, but most of them have observed differences among men and have never observed women in a cross-cultural manner. The purpose of this research is to shed more light on the subject of cross-cultural differences for women with social loafing. In particular, the study under consideration will deal with how women respond in groups under an optimizing task and collective effort task in the United States and in Taiwan.

Background

Research cross-culturally has often showed a singular trend among collectivistic and individualistic societies. In more group-oriented cultures, individuals tend to demonstrate an effect opposite of social loafing called social striving. Instead of performing worse, group-oriented individuals perform better than if they worked alone. According to Gabrenya, Wang, and Latané (1983), the social loafing phenomenon is present in Chinese students in

Taiwan and in White American students in a sound producing task. When asked to produce sound by clapping or shouting, the collective sound intensity was less than the sum of the individual efforts. However, the social loafing phenomenon was not as great for those Chinese students. In a follow up study completed in 1985, Gabrenya, Wang, and Latané found that Graduate students in Taiwan tended to show the opposite of social loafing, social striving, on a qualitative counting task as opposed to the quantitative sound producing task. Both studies showed a greater social loafing phenomenon in America than in Chinese students in Taiwan. In addition, the qualitative task oriented study showed that social loafing in American subjects and social striving in Chinese subjects increased as the student grade level increased. However, this phenomenon was not seen in females when compared to Chinese male students. With regard to females, the qualitative study indicated that women had maintained relatively constant social loafing levels. The quantitative study, on the other hand, suggested that women loafed in both America and in Taiwan, but again not as much as their male counterparts. Both studies lacked evidence to compare women in a cross-cultural context.

Prior to the work of Karau and Williams in 1993, the consensus was that collective orientations of nations like Japan and Taiwan would mask gender differences maintaining the same social loafing tendencies for women as men in those countries. According to Karau and Williams, women will not engage in social loafing tendencies

because they view collective tasks more important than individual tasks. There is much lacking in this prediction, and primarily it is that Karau and Williams did not put this statement into a cross-cultural context. They did not offer reasons for why women would conform or follow dutifully through a collective task, would they always conform on certain tasks over others, and would the degree of conformity vary between cultures.

These questions are still hard to answer today, and few attempts have been undertaken to try to answer them. One attempt, however, deals with Japanese gender differences and social loafing (Kugihara, 1999). Participating in a rope-pulling test, participants were aggregated to pull on a rope and induce a tension in the rope that was measured in kilograms. Then, subjects were tested individually and collectively on how hard they would pull on the rope. Kugihara used several different combinations of male and female participants to generate a social loafing ratio for both men and women. Here, she discovered that nearly 20% of the men and 60% of the women pulled with full effort. Obviously, this confirms that men loaf more than women, but it also dispels the idea that women on the whole do not loaf.

Kugihara tries to explain why women will or will not loaf using individual achievement motivation as her criterion. Referring to Tachibana and Koyasu (1978), Kugihara explains that women who have strong achievement motivation will always put forth their best effort in situations where they do not know that the task at hand is

being tested for high achievement. On the other hand, they will tend to do poorly if told otherwise. The opposite was true of men in that men with strong achievement motivation do better when told they are being tested for high achievement than if they were not told. As a result, men tend to loaf in group-work more because they do not have the same expectation of being monitored for high achievement, as they would have individually. This is similar to how individual evaluation potential (Karau and Williams, 1993) may lead to social loafing. Arguably, this would indicate that women might individually loaf more or less depending on what women believe the study is trying to accomplish. This theory, however, again fails to put things in cross-cultural perspectives. Nevertheless, it does provide insight into testing strategies.

Hypothesis

From Kugihara's study it is clear that women loaf under certain tasks and settings. This research proposal will try to test for differences in loafing among women in Taiwan and the United States in a qualitative and quantitative task. Since only females are being tested, the main difference in testable variables between the two sets would be culture. With respect to both tests, a "social loafing score" will be generated per individual that will act as a dependent variable. The ultimate goal would be to detect any differences in the social loafing scores over the two group settings, which will act as the independent variable in both studies.

The preceding literature does little to show that a significant difference may exist between women from different cultures. However, the idea that collectivistic societies tend to loaf less than individualistic societies may imply that women from Taiwan will loaf less than their American counterparts. It is, also, likely that a difference may not exist between cultures for women. Nevertheless, previous research suggests the only difference along cultural lines is in the degree of collectivism of a society.

Method

The participants in both tests must be a group of approximately 50 women from each country, at least. A group of women below 30 makes the sample non-representative of the population at large. Picking a random sample may be tough in both countries. Although not completely random, picking graduate and undergraduate women from U.C. Berkeley and National University in Taiwan, for example, would not hinder the study by much. Gabrenya, Wang, and Latané offered a similar sample in their 1985 study. The age difference in the group should not vary more than five years. The idea of paying subjects does not seem to warrant any real worry about results skewing in any particular direction. It may be necessary to pay individuals a nominal amount to generate the number of participants needed.

Test 1: Quantitative Test: Sound Production

Once the participants have been gathered, the test examiners must split each group into five-woman teams. These teams will comprise the basic unit of the loafing analysis. The examiners will then blindfold each woman in the group of five. It is important for the group to be selected first, making sure each woman knows that she is in a group, and then proceeding with the blindfolding. At the same time, the participants will use headphones to inhibit them from hearing each other. In addition, headphones allow the test examiners to speak to each individual separately while the individual may be under the illusion that the tester is speaking to the group as a whole. The sound production test should be conducted in an isolated place, preferably a sound proof room, allowing the participants to not worry about looking or sounding foolish to the outside world. In previous shouting studies, it appeared that the shyness factor takes some time for test subjects to get over.

The test examiner will begin the sound production test by instructing each person to shout as loud as possible for five seconds. First, each individual should be informed that they are being tested individually. The test examiner should say, "At this point, you will be tested alone. When you hear the tone, please begin." A tone will be played over the headphones of each individual separately to indicate the beginning of the test. One by one the test examiner will measure the magnitude of each individual's shout using a decibel meter. Repeating this drill for at least ten times

on each woman, an "individual effort" score for each participant will be the result of the average of all the tests.

Next, test examiners will inform the women individually that they will be tested with the group this time. The test examiner should say, "In this portion of the study, you will be tested with the rest of the group. Please wait for the tone to begin." Instead of testing the group at one time, repeating the procedure of testing each individual one by one would be ideal. While the women are blindfolded and cannot hear each other, they will perceive that they are shouting in a group and, therefore, provide a way to measure an individual's effort as if they were working in a group. Again this examination should be repeated ten times at least for each woman. The average of these magnitudes will represent each participant's "group effort." If at any point, the illusion of group work has been destroyed, either by technical malfunction or some other means, then the examiner must discard the data and release the group for a new group.

Once the data has been collected, a social loafing ratio for each individual of "group effort" to "individual effort" can be generated (Gabrenya, Wang, and Latané, 1985). A score of "1" indicates that no loafing took place, less than "1" that loafing was present, and higher than "1" that social striving occurred. These scores should be collected for each woman in the five-person groups. Using the total scores, a range can be developed for the total sample's loafing tendencies.

Test 2: Qualitative Test: Counting tones

Taking the same sample of individuals for both America and Taiwan, the sample will split into pairs, and undergo the following test.

The tone counting test, as presented by Latané, Williams, and Harkins (1979), takes an examiner and a pair of individuals. Each individual wears a pair of headphones. The pair will be composed of a left individual and a right individual. The examiner will produce three sets of tones at about 50 db in magnitude: a common tone heard in the right headphone of the left individual and in the left headphone of the right individual, a left tone heard only by the left individual in her left headphone, and a right tone heard only by the right individual in her right headphone. The examiner will produce a sequence of ten right, ten left, and ten middle tones. The actual sequence should be random but the examiner should know each sequence during the examination. There should be at least ten different tone sequences in places

When a tone is generated, both individuals in the pairing should raise either their left or right hand if they hear the tone in the respective headphone. It is important that the pair of individuals know that their partner in the pair can also hear the middle tone. However, to prevent any influence one individual's response can have on the other, a partition like a curtain or a piece of long cardboard must be placed between the paired individuals. An alternative method would be to blindfold the

participants and use appropriate headphones to prevent them from knowing the responses of their partner.

The test examiner should mark down the correct tones each individual responds to corresponding to the right, middle, and left tones. An "individual effort" score for the left individual will be generated by taking the ratio of the number of correctly recognized left tones to the total number of left tones. Similarly, the right individual's effort score will be produced by a ratio of correct responses to total right tones counted. Doing a similar ratio on the middle tone for each individual produces a "group effort" score. To reduce the chance of procedural variables confounding the experiment, the examiner should then request the individuals to change sides and repeat another sequence of tones at least 10 times. This may require the examiner to maintain at least 20 separate tone sequences. To get the overall "individual effort" for an individual, ratio the total correct for the individual's non-middle tone responses to the total non-middle tone responses in both experiments. Likewise, do the same for the "group effort" score. Taking the "group effort" score and dividing it by the "individual effort" score can produce a final social loafing score.

Hypothesized Results/Discussion

As proposed earlier, prior research on men suggests that a more collective society should produce individuals that loaf less than those from individualistic societies. Since there is little evidence

from intra-women studies across cultures, one can only suspect that women from collectivistic societies will also show the same tendency to loaf less. With regard to the quantitative test, it is possible that the women will demonstrate the affect that Kugihara reported about women and achievement motivation. However, on the qualitative test, the achievement motivation effect should remove itself since there is no direct bearing to the individual with respect to the quality being tested. This was the reasoning behind having two tests because, otherwise, the achievement motivation affect may skew the data.

All previous research has shown that compared to men, women tend to loaf less. Between women, however, differences must exist on social loafing levels across cultures. It would be surprising to see if, cross-culturally, women maintained the same amount of social loafing. Reporting such results would purport some innate behavior to women overall. The fact that women do better in groups and "high field" (Kugihara, 1999) environments may need more research in to why they do better in groups. Personally, the chance of these results occurring seems slim. From Karau and Williams (1993) and Latané (1979), it appears that culture ought to have an effect. The goal of this study is to make explicit that culture has an effect and to show how great a difference exists between individualistic and collectivistic women.

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