Nakama Consciousness and Social Behavior
Reported by Adult Japanese Males and Females

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This paper investigates attitudes reported by 38 male (Age = 41.84) and 44 female (Age = 37.95) adult Japanese toward their ingroup *nakama* personal relationships. Five of the 33 items show a significant difference (p < .05) by gender. Japanese females report they are less willing to stay late together with nakama, to refuse an invitation by nakama, to exchange basic personal information with a stranger, or to disregard their public behavior while away from nakama. Contrarily, they feel worse after an argument with nakama than with a family member. These findings suggest that Japanese females are both more sensitive to invisible, public opinion (*seken*) and more concerned with maintaining smoother nakama relationships than males.

Western researchers label Japanese society as being a collectivistic culture which requires individuals to fit into groups where they define themselves by referring to their relations with others (Gudykunst & Nishida, 1994). Japan is further defined as a horizontal, collectivistic culture since its members are not expected to stand out (Triandis, 1995, as cited in Gudykunst, Ting-Toomey, & Nishida, 1996). Nakane (1967, 1973) has called Japan a vertical society (*tateshakai*) with one's main group organized along the leader-follower hierarchy, in a clear rank order. Yoneyama (1986) acknowledges that workplace nakama follow a strict hierarchy but that where nakama pursue sports, games, or hobbies, a sense of equality exists. Within these social groups, a leader-follower relationship comes about but it is based mainly on popularity rather than on individual skills (Yoneyama, 1986).

Nakamura (1964) points out that Japan's mountainous topography, with its isolated villages, may have encouraged Japanese to not only accept clannishness but also to feel the pleasure and warmth of communal living. Western researchers classify personal relationships into *ingroups* and *outgroups* but Japanese use their native terms of *uchi* and *soto* to sharply differentiate human relationships in society. English-language equivalent words often differ for uchi, which may be called *in*, *inside*, *ingroup*, or *interior* while the term soto may be referred to as *out*, *outside*, *outgroup*, or *exterior* (Akasu & Asao, 1993; Koike, 2007; Nishida, 1996; Sugimoto, 2003). Within the collectivistic framework, some ingroups place an emphasis on family, but the company is often regarded as the primary ingroup for Japanese (Gudykunst, Ting-Toomey, & Nishida, 1996). Yoneyama (1986) clearly acknowledges that his family unit is almost as important as his workplace.

Japanese are socialized to be aware of those people who are inside of uchi and outside of soto, their personal and social groups. Uchi, or possibly spelled *uti* these days, carries a loaded nuance in the Japanese language and culture. Uchi is actually a colloquial form for *ie* (household, family) and it implies closeness or intimacy which extends beyond one's direct household members to include those work groups that affect one's social and economic life (Nakane, 1967), including a company where its employees qualify as members of the

household (Nakane, 1974). Soto, on the other hand, simply refers to outside (Masuda, 1974) but *yoso* is often substituted for it (Nakane, 1967; Nishida, 1996).

The Japanese character uchi is combined with another character to intensify the strength of the relationship. The following two examples signify the innermost group: *miuchi*, those people within one's family circle, and *nakamauchi*, one's circle of friends or colleagues (Doi, 1973; Nishida, 1996). One's innermost reference group, miuchi, and outermost reference group, *tanin* or *yosonohito* (strangers), establish one's frame of reference toward the standards of behavior (Inoue, 1982). Japanese tend to exclude all outside people, including other Japanese and foreigners, who have no meaningful relationship with them (Clark & Takemura, 1979; Nakane, 1967).

Before examining nakama*,* two other crucial social relationship terms are first mentioned: *shinyuu* and *tomodachi*. Shinyuu may be translated as, "a close friend; one's best friend; a buddy; or an intimate (friend)" (Masuda, 1974, p. 1564), while tomodachi can be translated as "a friend; a companion" or it may be combined with *shobai* to form *a business friend* (Masuda, 1974, p. 1825). Nakama is differentiated from these two relationships since it is less intimate than shinyuu but more intimate than tomodachi.

Nakama can refer to either people who associate with each other at their workplace or through their various social activities. Yoneyama (1986) acknowledges that workplace nakama follow a strict hierarchy but that where nakama pursue sports, games, or hobbies, a sense of equality exists. Within these social groups, a leader-follower relationship comes about but it is based mainly on popularity rather than on individual skills (Yoneyama, 1986).

A Japanese-to-Japanese dictionary clarifies the meaning and usage of nakama with two closely related definitions. The first definition is "the person you do something together with, the same kind, a partner, and the same species," and the second one means "other people in the same cooperative within the same industry" (Shinmura, 1984, p. 1784). Masuda (1974, p. 1176) offers an assortment of English synonyms for nakama to suit the exact context; for example, nakama could refer to "a companion, a mate, a comrade, a colleague, an associate, a partner, or an accomplice." The two Japanese characters for nakama are added as a suffix to nouns to connote one's purpose of association or one's relationship with that person or group. Four examples of this usage include: *gakkonakama* (classmate), *tsurinakama* (fishing companion), *ishanakama* (the medical fraternity), or *shobainakama* (a business partner) (Masuda, 1974). In a paper researching cross-cultural relationship terms, Gudykunst and Nishida (1986) differentiate workplace and social nakama with the English terms *colleague* and *cohort*, while Cargile (1998) calls nakama a *work group*.

Nakama rarely appears in English-language, cross-cultural materials but it frequently describes relationships in Japanese sociological literature, though not often in colloquial Japanese. Namba (2005) interviewed Japanese adolescents about their various personal relationships and activities to aid in categorizing those relationships. This research led to creating a conceptual diagram which distinguishes the shinyuu, tomodachi, and nakama relationships by intimacy and activity levels.

Namba's (2005) four-quadrant diagram shows a mid-point vertical line with the top representing high personal intimacy and the bottom being low personal intimacy. The mid-point, horizontal line shows a high level of shared goal-oriented activities on the right side

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and a low level of shared goal-oriented activities on the left. The shinyuu grouping occupies the upper left quadrant and it symbolizes very high personal intimacy but with low shared goal-oriented activities. Nakama, shown in the far, upper right quadrant, represents very high goal-oriented activities and medium to high personal intimacy. Namba (2005) depicts the tomodachi relationship term as encompassing the whole four-quadrant diagram which suggests that adolescents may, at times, say that tomodachi includes both the shinyuu and the nakama relationship.

White's (1993) research results indicate that the Japanese socialization process encourages the separation of adolescent males and females. Japanese teenagers typically form three distinguishable groups of same-sex friends. The most intimate group includes two or three best friends or shinyuu, another group commonly comprises six to eight same-sex peers, and the third group consists of same-sex student club members who conform to the *sempai-kohai* (senior-junior) interpersonal relationship hierarchy (Nakane, 1973). Contrarily, American teenagers also develop opposite-sex friendships in addition to same-sex friendships (White, 1993, as cited in Gudykunst & Nishida, 1994). Actually, this Japanese practice of segregation by gender continues across all age groups. Same-sex pairs or groups seem to participate more prevalently in public than do opposite-sex ones. This practice could indicate that Japanese develop diverse male and female behavioral patterns since they mainly associate with the same sex.

This paper concerns social behavior as well as exploring Japanese social relationships. Japanese seem well-behaved in public and Japanese youth are not prone to delinquency. Japanese citizens self-govern their behavior rather than relying on formal laws or rules dictating what behaviors are or are not permissible. The underlying cultural concept of *seken* (public opinion) acts as a self-imposed psychological constraint on one's outward behavior (Koike, 2007). Sugimoto (2003) lists seken as one of the means of rendering psychological compliance among citizens and that it acts as an invisible, implicit instrument to control personal behavior.

This current research on the Japanese nakama social relationship has practical implications for non-Japanese. Social integration by foreigners into a Japanese, close-knit shinyuu relationship seems improbable. These relationships typically germinate from a common, formal setting, such as the same junior or senior high school section (*gumi*), one's unique university seminar, or from one's school club or school activity. Shinyuu relationships develop, strengthen, and flourish after years of physical and emotional closeness. Entering into a nakama relationship, on the other hand, is both possible and feasible for non-Japanese who reside in Japan.

Foreigners are often employed by Japanese companies or educational institutions where they commonly form work-associated nakama relationships. Also, foreigners who regularly partake in socially-oriented activities, such as ikebana, judo, or activities at a local sports club, would build relationships there. The data presented in this paper, by examining the individual items and their associated mean scores, offer non-Japanese a guideline into what behavior is deemed proper or inappropriate within a nakama relationship.

Unlike most empirical research about contemporary Japanese attitudes that are drawn from an intact, university population, this data mostly includes a working, adult Japanese

population which should be more representative of contemporary Japanese thought and behavior. The data are analyzed and separated into male and female responses to identify potential gender gaps.

Method

Subjects

Thirty-eight Japanese males (Age = 41.84) and 44 females (Age = 37.95) returned valid samples. The self-reported status of these subjects was: student ($n = 15$), teacher ($n = 3$), company employee ($n = 31$), housewife ($n = 16$), and other ($n = 17$).

Apparatus

The survey titled *"Ningen Kankei ni Kansuru Chosa"* ["A Survey for the Examination of Human Relationships"] contained a brief section for biographical data, a sample example, followed by 34 statements. Subjects evaluated each statement by marking a check for each response on a six-point scale: *I strongly think so* (6), *I think so* (5), *I rather think so* (4), *I rather do not think so* (3), *I do not think so* (2), and *I completely do not think so* (1). After these 34 statements, the last four sections allowed participants to voluntarily write their opinions about the nakama relationship in three sections or add a personal comment in the last section.

Response items were selected to shed light on the Japanese nakama interpersonal relationship and general social behavior. Items were not only chosen from the literature review but also from the authors' knowledge of the Japanese language and observable public behavior.

Procedure

The distribution process included parts of both the intact-group handout method and the direct mail method. Subjects known to the first and the second authors were allowed to refuse any surveys or to take from one to three surveys, with the two additional surveys intended for their parents.

The third author collected data from her part-time workplace and from her social group. Her part-time job supervisor distributed the survey packets to his restaurant patrons. For her social group, she directly handed out the survey packets to those available individuals.

Each survey packet included: (1) a self-addressed, stamped envelope, directed to the third author, (2) the survey instrument, and (3) a crisp, new United States one-dollar bill as a memento. University students were requested to complete the survey and to either mail it back or to deposit it into a convenient, hallway locker. Participants known to the third author returned the survey only by regular mail.

Table 1		Male		Female		
Some Characteristics of the Nakama Relationship		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Sig.
1	The worst thing that can happen to me is to be ostracized by my nakama group.	3.62	1.587	3.43	1.453	*ns*
10	I automatically go with my nakama until everyone goes back home.	2.84	1.259	2.19	1.018	.014
11	Nakama forgives my mistakes more than my family members.	2.81	1.076	2.66	1.010	*ns*
13	I can feel more relaxed in public with my nakama than when I am alone.	3.31	1.411	2.89	1.243	*ns*
17	Togetherness with nakama is more important than the content of the conversation topics.	3.39	1.315	2.82	1.263	*ns*
31	I speak more politely to higher educated people than to lower educated people.	2.41	1.279	2.41	1.207	*ns*
34	I feel anxious when I have no contact with my nakama for one whole day.	2.32	1.226	1.86	1.002	*ns*

To ensure an accurate translation of the original English statements into the final Japanese-language version, the authors followed with the committee approach (van de Vijver & Leung, 1997) where cooperation among bilinguals produces an accurate translation, capturing cultural nuances when necessary. A post hoc examination of the Japanese-language survey, however, revealed that Item 26 was unsuitable, so Item 26 was removed and only 33 instead of 34 items were analyzed.

Results

Twenty-eight of the 33 items were loaded onto six factors with each item being compared by mean score and gender. Mean scores furthest from the center value of 3.5 suggest how strongly or how weakly the subjects evaluated the statement. Only 5 of the 33 items show a difference of $p < .05$ across gender. These five items may identify how the males and females view the statement which in turn could signal possible differences in their personal behavior.

In an attempt to make more sense of the results, the authors paraphrased the statements of each item. The original and rephrased statements could provide a clue into what actions are considered proper behavior with nakama. One example is Item 11, which suggests that people should avoid making mistakes with nakama since they appear less forgiving than one's own family members.

Table 1, *Some Characteristics of the Nakama Relationship*, suggests the following: that nakama are less forgiving than family members, that being ostracized is not the worst experience in life, that being with nakama in public is not as peaceful as being alone, what is said is more important than the camaraderie of the nakama, that women are less likely to stay together with nakama until everyone returns home from an outing, and that a lack of daily contact does not cause anxiety.

Table 2, *Opening Up to Nakama*, implies some preferred communication styles. Judging the direction of mean scores and re-written sentences from the item implies communication preferences with nakama, such as, it might be possible to express true feelings and still maintain a good relationship, it is not always necessary to stick to superficial topics, displaying emotions through facial expressions are fine, and paying attention to both the public surroundings and nakama is necessary.

Table 2	Male		Female		
Opening Up to Nakama	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Sig.
9 The relationship with family members is less important than with my nakama.	3.16	1.041	3.47	1.141	ns
15 To keep good relationship with nakama, I avoid expressing my true feeling.	2.92	1.187	2.95	1.180	ns
18 I prefer superficial topics when I talk with nakama.	3.27	1.500	3.18	1.187	ns
20 I don't show my feelings through my facial expressions when I am with my nakama.	2.43	.929	2.55	1.088	ns
24 I only care about nakama around me when we are together in public.	2.78	1.109	2.49	1.032	ns
27 I avoid people paying attention to me when I am in public.	3.68	1.226	3.59	1.168	ns

Table 3	Male		Female		
Expressing Personal Information with Nakama and Others	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Sig.
3 I can express my different opinions to my nakama.	4.78	.886	4.57	.873	ns
16 I can easily refuse an invitation from nakama when I have another appointment.	4.38	1.139	3.82	1.281	.043
28 I like to meet strangers who look interesting.	3.65	1.296	3.25	1.314	ns
29 I don't mind exchanging basic personal information with a stranger such as on a long train	3.59	1.322	3.00	1.327	.049
30 I am more careful communicating with seniors (sempai) than with juniors (kohai).	3.59	1.481	3.70	1.440	ns

Table 4	Male		Female		
Family Ties Closer Than Nakama Relationships	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Sig.
5 Time spent with family members is more comfortable than time spent with nakama.	3.76	1.365	3.61	1.450	ns
7 Family relationships are stronger than nakama relationships.	4.51	1.346	4.61	1.466	ns
8 I feel anxious when I have no contact with a family member for one whole day.	2.73	1.326	2.93	1.634	ns

Results reported in Table 3, *Expressing Personal Information*, suggest that nakama can express different opinions, that nakama don't worry so much when they turn down an invitation, that women are more hesitant to meet and exchange personal information with a stranger, and that women are a bit more careful talking to seniors than to juniors.

Table 4, *Family Ties Closer than Nakama Relationships*, appears to suggest that people are a little more comfortable being around family members and that these family relationships are stronger than the ones with nakama. Family members need not contact each other every day and they don't get upset about it.

Items in Table 5, *Supportive Nakama Relationship*, reveal that people must maintain a good atmosphere around nakama who might support them in their absence, but people try not to derive mutual gain or profit from the nakama relationship. One's relationship with family members is still more important than the relationship with nakama.

Generally speaking, items in Table 6, *Public Behavior*, show that it is not good behavior for women to put on cosmetics in public but it is all right for people to keep time to music. Not paying attention to strangers in public is normal.

Table 5	Male		Female		
Supportive Nakama Relationship	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Sig.
6 The relationship with family members is less important than with my nakama.	2.00	.850	1.73	.973	*ns*
12 If people speak ill of me, my nakama supports me when I am not there.	3.56	1.107	3.85	.989	*ns*
14 I depend on my nakama for mutual benefit.	3.30	1.351	2.77	1.192	*ns*
25 It is essential to keep a good atmosphere with nakama.	4.70	.996	4.91	.802	*ns*

Table 6	Male		Female		
Public Behavior	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Sig.
21 I don't mind people who keep time to music when they listen to music on iPods in public.	3.65	1.844	4.02	1.577	*ns*
22 I don't mind women who put on cosmetics in public.	3.03	1.384	2.45	1.422	*ns*
23 I can disregard the strangers around me when I am alone in public.	3.78	1.267	3.86	1.250	*ns*

Table 7	Male		Female		
Low Factor Loadings Below .450	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Sig.
2 I am careful about expressing my personal opinions to my nakama.	4.16	1.118	4.11	1.125	*ns*
4 I feel worse after an argument with a family member than with nakama.	3.57	1.365	2.47	1.120	.000
19 I don't care about my behavior when I am in public but away from my nakama.	3.00	1.155	2.30	1.059	.006
32 Wives don't interfere with husbands going out on Sundays.	3.61	1.460	3.81	1.258	*ns*
33 Children think that their fathers have to keep good relationships with their nakama.	3.53	1.207	3.60	1.275	*ns*

Table 7, *Low Factor Loadings Below .450*, shows the five remaining items that failed to load onto any of the previous six factors. People are careful about expressing their opinions to nakama. Women, unlike men, seem to feel worse after an argument with nakama than with a family member. Women on their own seem to pay more attention to their public behavior than do men.

Discussion

Before offering possible reasons why Japanese males and females report a significant difference ($p < .05$) on five items, Item 12, *If people speak ill of me, my nakama supports me when I am not there*, and Item 1,*The worst thing that can happen to me is to be ostracized by my nakama group*, are first examined since they were added to verify the opinions made by former researchers or to confirm the research results of others.

Formerly, five researchers (Argyle, Henderson, Bond, Iizuka, & Contarello, 1986) compared responses from four countries, (i.e., United Kingdom, Hong Kong, Japan, Italy) about highly endorsing rules toward 22 possible relationships, including close friend, work colleague, work subordinate, and work superior. On the rule, *Should stand up for the other person in their absence*, Japanese subjects endorsed no relationships while the other three

groups endorsed from five to 12 (Argyle et al., 1986). Item 12 shows no significant difference between males and females since it is rated near the mid-point.

The *tsukiai* activity (Atsumi, 1979; Taylor, 1983) is a normal eating and drinking session held by Japanese salaried workers after normal business hours where business talk and relationship-building is pursued. Men tend to participate in such gatherings for various reasons, such as, to better their chances for advancement or to keep others from gossiping about them. Japanese native discourse style may not require people to speak up for their friends, including nakama, in their absence.

These findings also failed to support Item 1 by regarding the personal trauma of being shut out from one's group. Doi (1973) states that group or peer ostracism (*nakama hazure*) is considered the greatest form of shame and dishonor. Doi (1973) may have targeted close, work-group relationships with this statement rather than one's less formal social-group associations. Possibly, Japanese society has evolved over the years to allow for both an increased number of weaker social-group contacts and for more personal mobility to join and to quit such social groups without serious repercussions.

The results obtained from Japanese males and females on 5 of the 33 items indicate a significant difference ($p < .05$). Some of these items may point to differing cultural expectations on gender roles or social behaviors. The first item under examination could be related to the tsukiai phenomena. In addition to being used with business outings, the term tsukiai may also refer to male-female dating.

Item 10, *I automatically stay with my nakama until everyone goes back home*, is negatively assessed by both males and females with the females' value nearer to 2.0 (*I do not think so*). The effect is significant, $F(1,77) = 6.379$, $p < .014$. As mentioned previously, male salaried workers often go out with their colleagues after work for food and drinks. In this sample, 22 of the 38 males called themselves company, salaried workers but only 9 of the 44 women did. Fifteen women selected *housewife* as their status, so it seems logical that they would leave their social-group gatherings to attend to regular household duties like grocery shopping and preparing meals. This reason may account for an even lower rating by the females.

Item 16, *I can easily refuse an invitation from nakama when I have another appointment*, with a significant effect of $F(1,79) = 4.25$, $p < .043$, is rated below 4.0 (*I rather think so*) by women while men rate the item above 4.0. Women are more often housewives, with part-time work, than regular, company employees. Consequently, their social networks may constitute closer, personal relationships than their husbands' so they pay greater attention to maintaining smoother social relationships.

Item 29, *I don't mind exchanging basic personal information with a stranger, such as on a long train ride*, with a significance of $F(1,78) = 4.005$, $p < .049$, is rated at around 3.5 by men but women indicate a tendency to select around 3.0 (*I rather do not think so*). Men would undoubtedly encounter a wider range of people during their normal work routine than most women. This added social exposure for men could possibly facilitate more small-talk routines with unfamiliar people, such as with strangers. Women may naturally be more reluctant to communicate outside of their known ingroups. Women may report more talk with a same-sex stranger but the gender of the stranger was not specified in Item 29.

Possibly the most difficult outcome to explain is Item 4, *I feel worse after an argument with a family member than with nakama*, $F(1,78) = 15.740$, $p < .000$. Men rate it around the mid-point while women rate it between 3.0 (*I rather do not think so*) and 2.0 (*I do not think so*). These results suggest that some women may feel worse after an argument with nakama. Mann, Mitsui, Beswick, and Harmoni (1994) state that Japanese children clearly differentiate their relationship endorsement rules more toward parents and teachers than do Australian children. They present two statements about endorsing rules. First, Japanese rules are person- and situation-specific, and second, family members tolerate the occasional omission of politeness because of the strong family bond (Mann et al., 1994, as cited in Gudykunst, et al., 1996). This citation suggests that Japanese family members learn to put up with gruffness among themselves, at times, but not necessarily outside of their family ingroup.

Item 19 also shows a significant difference, $F(1,78) = 7.942$, $p < .006$. The negative bias mean scores for Item 19, *I don't care about my behavior when I am in public but away from my nakama*, can possibly be attributed to the aforementioned concept of seken where Japanese unconsciously gauge their public behavior to conform to their surroundings, even when they are surrounded by strangers. Because of this invisible pressure to fit in, women may adapt their public behavior more than men do.

The data collection method for this study exemplifies the need to develop good human relationships in Japan in order to achieve success. This methodology included parts of both the intact-group, handout-and-complete method, and the return of filled- in surveys by regular mail.

With intact, university-student populations, teachers often entice students by offering bonus points or by threatening them with the deduction of project participation points. Such incentives attempt to ensure an adequate sample size. For self-selected populations, however, data are commonly gathered with the direct mail method that offers no immediate reward.

One online marketing research service guarantees a direct mail response rate of over 20% (Focus25, 2009). Another online site, that simply provides tips for small business marketing, probably reports a more realistic assessment: from 1,122 industry-specific campaigns, the average direct mail response rate was 2.61% (Gaebler, 2009). Through personal contacts, however, the authors managed to collect a sufficient quantity of survey results.

Data for this project were mainly collected from the first author's university student contacts and from the third author's work and social contacts. These voluntary university students, in turn, were requested to collect data from their parents. No class points were used as leverage, only a new, U.S. one-dollar bill was given as a memento. From this university-student route, 36 valid samples were returned from the 166 distributed survey packets which resulted in a response rate of about 21%.

The third author distributed 81 surveys through her work-related group and her social-activity group. Knowing the importance of this data toward her academic studies, her restaurant supervisor could not refuse her face-to-face request for assistance. On her behalf, he requested his patrons to help her out by filling out and returning the survey packet. Likewise, the social-group members felt compelled to go along with her request since they had also developed smooth, personal relationships together over the past year. Forty-five valid samples were returned to her university mailing address, resulting in about a 56% response

rate. Without this nakama affiliation, and her well-developed, pleasant human relationships with them, these Japanese citizens could easily have ignored her call for assistance.

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