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Family Matters: The Interaction of Culture, Family Interactions, Peer Relations and Life Satisfaction

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Purpose:
To compare communication patterns of American and Japanese students within their family and peer group, to see if Family Intimacy and Family Cohesion affect Peer Intimacy, Peer Cohesion, and Life Satisfaction.

RQ1:
Do Family Intimacy-Cohesion Communication Practices affect Intimacy-Cohesion in peer relationships?

RQ2:
How do Family Intimacy-Cohesion, Family Conflict, Peer Intimacy-Cohesion, and Peer Conflict impact overall Life Satisfaction?

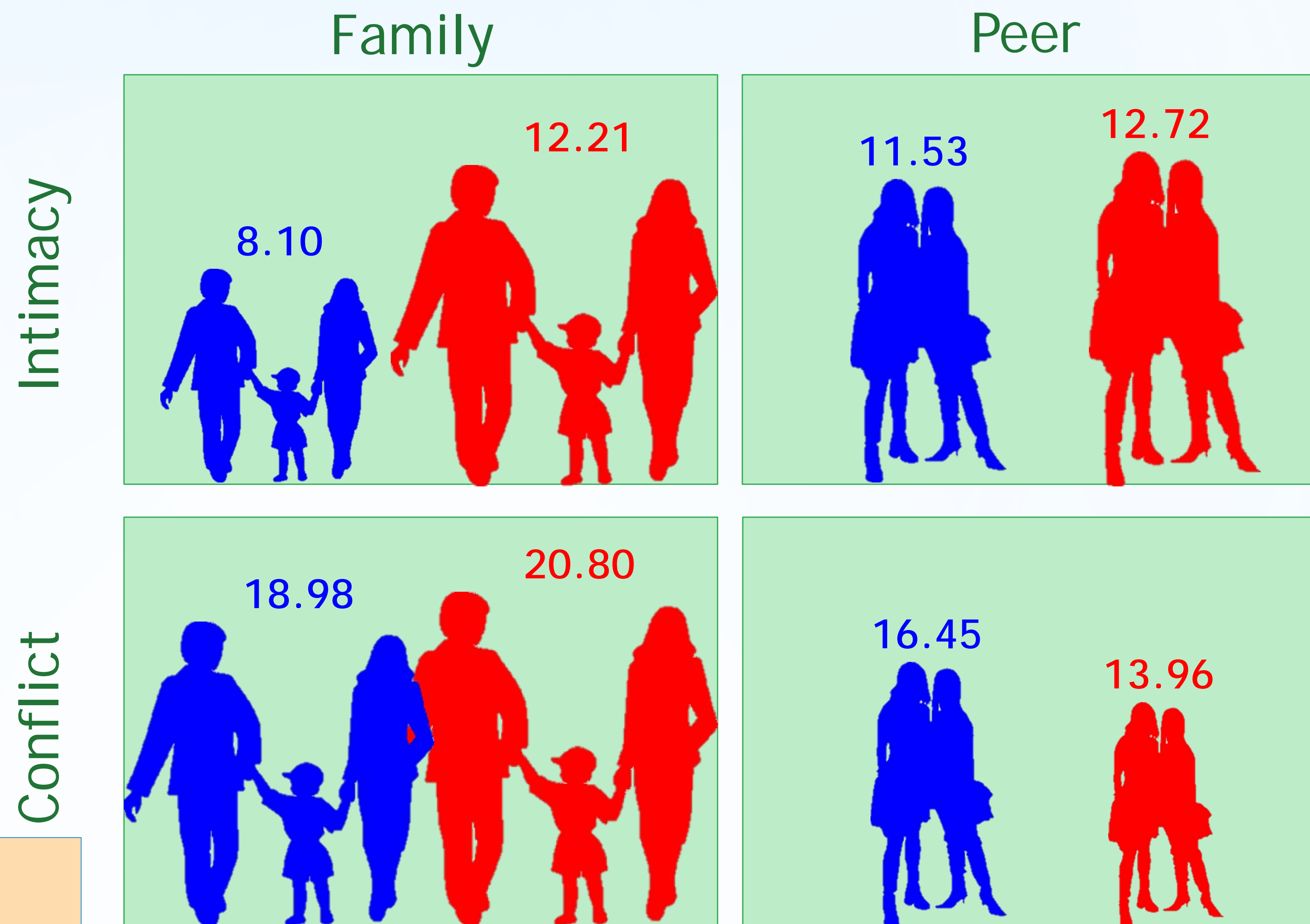
RQ3:
How do levels of Family Intimacy-Cohesion, Family Conflict, Peer Intimacy-Cohesion, and Peer Conflict differ between American and Japanese college students?

Intimacy-Cohesion & Conflict Communication Styles Defined

- **Conflict:**
 - **Non confrontation** (avoidance)
 - **Control** (criticism, blame, rejection)
 - **Compromise** (mutual agreement)
 - **Management** (reframing; win-win strategies)
- **Intimacy-Cohesion:**
 - Direct declarations
 - Absolute statements
 - Private language
 - Inclusive pronouns
 - Compliments
 - Gifts
 - Support

Methods:

- Online survey
 - (translated for Japanese students)
- Participants:
 - 188 American students
 - 77 Japanese students
- Age: 18-23, college/university students
- 5 scales of measurement:
 - Family Intimacy-Cohesion
 - Family Conflict (adapted from Straus, 1979)
 - Peer Intimacy-Cohesion
 - Peer Conflict
 - Life Satisfaction (Argyle and Hills (2008)



Key: Japan/USA MEAN LEVEL OF CONFLICT & INTIMACY BY RELATIONSHIP

Conclusions

The results suggest that positive family relationships established early in life are important in developing positive peer relationships, which gain importance as a person matures and selects peers with whom they want to have personal connections. Conflict in relationships is not necessarily negative, as demonstrated by positive correlation between Family Conflict and Life Satisfaction. The higher Family Conflict in Japan may come from a high stigma attached to failure (Triandis, 1995), paired with parents' high expectations of children. Peer intimacy is the biggest predictor of Life Satisfaction, which is especially surprising in Japan, because collective values strongly emphasize the family unit (shown by a higher Family Intimacy score for Japanese students).

Results:
An analysis of communication means on by Country indicated that Family Intimacy, Family Conflict, and Peer Intimacy were all higher in Japan ($p < .05$). Peer Conflict was higher in the USA ($p < .05$).

Regression analysis revealed that for both countries, Peer Cohesion-Intimacy (PI) was the best predictor of overall Life Satisfaction (LS) ($F = 29.77, p < .001$), although Family Intimacy communication patterns were positively correlated with Life Satisfaction in both USA and Japan, ($r = .35, p < .001$).

FC and PC were positively correlated in both countries ($r = .45, p < .001$), as was FI with PI ($r = .30, p < .001$).