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Emotional Frankness and Friendship in Polish Culture

Abstract: *According to Wierzbicka (1999), one of the core values of Polish culture is sincerity and emotional frankness, in this study we tested this assumption analyzing display rules operating between friends. 100 respondents completed modified version of the Display Rule Assessment Inventory (Matsumoto, Yoo, Hirayama, & Petrova, 2005). Results show that Polish participants endorse more expression with close friends than with acquaintances and strangers. The obtained differences between those groups were quite large and similar to a pattern typical for collectivistic cultures. On the other hand, we reported high level of overall expressivity, typical of individualism. Such a high expressivity was found for all studied emotions, but pride, which is consistent with previous research on self-presentational modesty in Polish culture (e.g. Dabul, Wosińska, Cialdini, Mandal, & Dion, 1997).*

Key words: *display rules, emotional frankness, friendship, cultural psychology*

Friendship is usually defined as a close relationship, which is voluntary, intimate, and nonromantic (e.g. Fehr, 1996; Rubin, 1985). Although it seems to be a universal phenomenon, there is a bulk of research pointing to the significant cultural differences in the way people define and "perform" friendship. For instance, in their anthropological study Bell and Coleman (1999) suggested that friendship is less easily established in cultural settings where kinship structures remain strong.

In psychology, scholars typically explain cross-cultural differences focusing on Individualism-Collectivism (IC) (Hofstede, 1980, 2001). Four attributes define this dimension (Triandis, 1995): self, goals, relationship and determinants of behavior. On one hand, individualistic cultures foster the development of independent construals of self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), favor personal goals over ingroup goals (Yamaguchi, 1994), encourage rationality and interpersonal exchange (Kim, Triandis, Kagitcibasi, Choi, & Yoon, 1994), and place more importance on attitudes as relatively important determinants of behavior. On the other hand, collectivistic cultures foster interdependent selves and ingroup goals, encourage communal relationships, and place relatively more importance on norms as determinants of behavior.

A hypothesis that individualistic cultures might facilitate different norms of friendship than collectivistic cultures was originally formulated in a study by Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai and Lucca (1988). According to this hypothesis in collectivistic cultures friendships were more intimate and long lasting than friendship in individualistic cultures. Additionally Triandis et al. (1988) predicted that while individuals in collectivistic cultures form their friendships within their respective in-groups, individualists are much less selective and consequently may have more friends than collectivists. These predictions have been supported in a subsequent study by Wheeler, Reis, and Bond (1989), however, the results of more recent studies (French, Bae, Pidada, & Lee, 2006; Sheets & Lugar, 2005) casted doubt upon validity of the original hypothesis.

In this study we focus on just one culture, namely Polish, capitalizing not only on research related to individualism/collectivism, but also on psycho-cultural analyses of Anna Wierzbicka (1994; 1999). According to Wierzbicka (1994), *szczerość* (roughly, sincerity) is one of the core values of the Polish culture. The cultural scripts of szczerość concern the value of presenting one's feelings 'truthfully', that is saying, and 'showing' what one really feels. As Wierzbicka put it: "In Polish culture, the

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expectation seems to be that the expression of a person's face mirrors their current psychological state, and that to fully understand another person one has to engage not just in verbal dialogue, but also in a 'facial dialogue' […]" (Wierzbicka, 1999, p. 269).

Showing what one really feels seems to be expected especially in close relationships, in the recent Polish national survey (TNS OBOP, 2008) the majority of subjects considered sincerity to be the most important quality of friendship. This finding was confirmed by the subsequent research (Szarota, 2013; Szarota & Cantarero, submitted).

Sincerity may be analysed on the verbal and emotional level, however when we analyse expressiveness (as we do in this particular study) a term emotional frankness seems more suitable. Despite the fact that Polish culture encourages values typical of both - individualism (e.g. value of personal freedom) and collectivism (e.g. familism)[1], the cultural focus on emotional frankness may result in cultural rules facilitating emotional expressiveness typical of high individualism.

The hypothesis that individualistic cultures are associated with norms endorsing greater overall expressivity has been supported by a cross-cultural study by Matsumoto et al (2008). In that study individuals of all cultures endorsed expressions toward ingroups (operationalized as close friends) more than toward outgroups (operationalized as acquaintances). Individualism was positively associated with endorsement of expressions of negative emotions toward ingroups, but it was also positively correlated with expressions of happiness and surprise. These findings indicated, therefore, a lack of emotion specificity in these relationships, and that individualistic cultures endorse the expression of more emotions in general in ingroups. The findings with outgroups were different - individualism was negatively correlated with all negative emotions, but positively correlated with happiness and surprise.

In the present study we decided not to use ingroup-outgroup distinction, focusing on differences between display rules towards three groups of targets 1) close friends, 2) acquaintances, and additionally - 3) strangers. We focused on four emotions instead of seven covered by Matsumoto et al. (2008), choosing happiness, sadness, and anger, but excluding contempt, disgust, and fear - as they were the least endorsed emotions with both close friends and acquaintances (Matsumoto et al, 2008). Instead of surprise we chose pride as the emotion with similar positive flavor, but at the same time socially disengaging (Kitayama, Mesquita, Karasawa, 2006). Thus we ended up with two positive emotions: happiness being socially engaging, and pride socially disengaging, and two negative emotions: sadness being socially engaging, and anger being socially disengaging.

Hypotheses

We predict that in Polish culture individuals endorse more expression with close friends and less with acquaintances and strangers (*Hypothesis 1*).

Moreover, taking into account Polish preoccupation with sincerity and emotional frankness especially in close relationships, we predict that different emotion endorsement strategies exist in close friends setting than in two other situations (*Hypothesis 2*). We expect that with close friends, differences between strategies for separate emotions (positive and negative, socially engaging and socially disengaging) will be nullified.
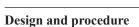
Method

Participants

100 students (59 women, 40 men, one participant did not state her/his gender; *M* = 23.3 years, age range – 19-34 years) participated in the study. No course credits nor financial remuneration were granted in exchange for participation in the study.

Instrument

Participants filled in a shortened and modified version of the Display Rule Assessment Inventory (DRAI) questionnaire (Matsumoto, Yoo, Hirayama, & Petrova, 2005). The original version of DRAI questionnaire and its Polish adaptation (see: Szarota et al., 2009) asked participants what they should do if they felt each of seven emotions toward 21 target interactants in two contexts – public and private. The emotions were anger, contempt, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness, and surprise. In the modified version we focused on close friends and acquaintances, adding strangers as a third category. We asked participants to state the way they should display their emotions and the way they actually would display their emotions, however did not differentiated between contexts of behaviour (private vs. public). We focused on just four emotions instead of seven, namely happiness, pride, anger, and sadness.

The response alternatives were those corresponding to the theoretical modes of expression management originally described by Ekman and Friesen (1969, 1975): Amplification (*You express the feeling but with more intensity than one's true feelings*), Expression (*You express the feeling as is with no inhibitions*), Deamplification (*You express the feeling but with less intensity than one's true feelings*), Neutralization (*You try to remain neutral; express nothing*), Qualification (*You express the feeling, but together with a smile to qualify one's feelings*), and Masking (*You smile only, with no trace of anything else, in order to hide one's true feelings*).

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[1] Research show that Poland could be located just in the middle of Hofstede's I-D scale (Nasierowski & Mikuła, 1998).

Design and procedure

We used a quasi-experimental design. The gender of participants was a between subject measure and emotion expression a within subject measure. Participants completed the forms in class.

Scoring. Similarly as in Matsumoto et al. (2008) we recoded the nominal expressive mode responses into scalar values: Amplify – >1.0989, Express –> 0,918, Qualify –> 0,412, Deamplify –> 0,3793, Mask –> 0,151, Neutralize – > 0. This allowed us to receive a score of overall expressivity ranging from 0 (not displaying anything) to 1.10 (displaying more than one feels). We then aggregated mean scores across categories that were the focus of our study. We received a mean score of actual expressivity of emotions by averaging all the responses regarding actual emotion expression (across types of emotions and types of interactants). We did similarly so to receive a mean score of normative expressivity of emotions (averaging all the responses regarding what one *should* express). We also averaged replies regarding the four types of emotions separately for each one of them. Additionally, we averaged replies concerning different types of interactants separately. Finally, we calculated an overall mean of the replies which gave us an indicator of an overall expressivity.

Results

The overall expressivity did not differ between men and women as shown by results of a one way between groups ANOVA $F(1, 97) = 1.97$, $p = .164$. Results of a mixed factors ANOVA on emotion expression with gender of participants as between subject measure and a question format (*what should be expressed versus what actually is*) as a within subject factor, showed that there was no difference between normative and actual expressivity of emotions $F(1, 97) = 1.55$, $p = .216$ and the interaction term was also insignificant $F(1, 97) = 1.00$, $p = .320$. Results of a mixed factor ANOVA with type of interactant and type of emotion as within subject measures and gender of participants as between subject measure on emotion expression showed a significant main effect of type of emotion $F(2.337, 226.703) = 31.87$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .25$, type of interactant $F(1.648, 159.90) = 141.51$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .59$ and a significant interaction between these two factors $F(6, 582) = 15.33$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .14$.

Mean comparison with Bonferroni correction showed that among the types of emotions that were under study, the expressivity of happiness was significantly higher than the expressivity of all the other emotions and the expressivity of sadness was significantly lower than the expressivity of anger. The mean values of expressivity are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Means and standard deviations of expressivity depending on the type of emotion

	Mean	Standard deviation
Happiness	.74	.18
Anger	.60	.17
Pride	.53	.23
Sadness	.50	.19

Comparison of mean results of types of interactants with regard to emotion expressivity with Bonferroni correction revealed that all the means were significantly different. Emotion expressivity was the lowest when targeted towards a stranger and the highest when targeted towards a close friend (*Hypothesis 1* supported). These mean values are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Means and standard deviations of expressivity depending on the type of interactant. The table shows also an overall result for expressivity

	Mean	Standard deviation
Stranger	.38	.21
Acquaintance	.61	.15
Close Friend	.79	.17
Overall	.59	.11

Simple effects analysis with Bonferroni correction was conducted. Analysis of the interaction term revealed that in the case of expressivity towards strangers, all of the emotions differed significantly between one another apart from one pair: anger and pride. The difference in expressivity of anger and pride was also insignificant, when the target of the expression was an acquaintance. Towards this target, the expressivity of sadness and pride did not differ significantly. The other means differed significantly when targeted at acquaintance. A different pattern was found while analyzing replies regarding expressing emotions towards a close friend. Only the expressivity of pride differed significantly from all the other emotions, the other means did not differ significantly from one another (*Hypothesis 2* only partially supported). These results are shown in Figure 1. (See next page)

Table 3 presents mean results and standard deviations for the emotion expressivity categorized by the type of emotion and the type of interactant. (See next page)

Figure 1. Expressivity of sadness, anger, pride and happiness towards a stranger, an acquaintance and a close friend.
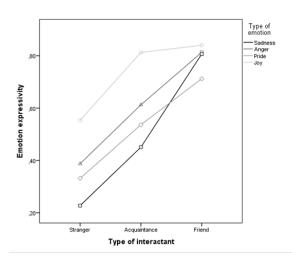

Table 3. Means and standard deviations of expressivity categorized by the type of interactant and the type of emotion.

	Stranger		Acquaintance		Close Friend	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Sadness	.23	.27	.45	.30	.81	.24
Anger	.38	.30	.62	.27	.82	.22
Pride	.33	.29	.54	.32	.71	.29
Happiness	.56	.30	.82	.22	.84	.23

Discussion and Conclusions

The data in Table 2 indicated that, as predicted, overall expressivity levels differed significantly for all types of targets. Previous research (Matsumoto et al, 2009) shows that the reported difference between close friends and acquaintances is most probably culturally universal, however it is not obvious what display rules might be universally valid in interaction with strangers. Facility in interacting with strangers is a primary feature of individualism (Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002) and one might expect that in highly individualistic cultures differences between prescribed modes of interaction with strangers and acquaintances would be much less pronounced than in collectivistic cultures. The differences obtained in our study are quite large and consistent with pattern typical for collectivistic cultures presented in Matsumoto et al. (2008) study.

The ultimate aim of this research was to document the extent of emotional frankness in context of friendship. We predicted that with close friends Poles not only are more expressive than with acquaintances or strangers, but this endorsement strategy is equally valid for all studied emotions no matter how negative or socially disruptive they are. This

pattern happened to work for all studied emotions, but pride. It seems that pride is considered significantly less acceptable (hence deamplification or masking) than negative emotions like anger or sadness. Such effect points to the qualities of Polish culture, which are typical of collectivistic cultures, where boasting about own achievements is strongly avoided (e.g. Kitayama, Mesquita, Karasawa, 2006). It is also consistent with previous research pointing to modesty as the popular self-presentation strategy in Poland (e.g. Dabul, Wosińska, Cialdini, Mandal, & Dion, 1997), and negative perception of individual success (Mandal, 2007; Wojciszke, 2006). It seems that the norm of modesty might be as much important in understanding the specificity of Polish display rules, as the norm of sincerity.

This study was not conducted without limitations. Assessing display rules the way we did means that we can access only those rules that can be verbalized; this is a limiting factor because display rules can be preverbal and operate with minimal or no consciousness (Matsumoto & Lee, 1993). Another limitation of the study was the fact that all respondents were university students. Despite these limitations, we hope that the present study provides interesting preliminary findings that would be further explored in future research.

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