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How Do We Decide Whom Our Friends Are? Defining Levels of Friendship in Poland and the United States

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ABSTRACT. Participants were 57 U.S. college students and 56 Polish university students and copper mine workers who judged the intimacy of 9 hypothetical relationships and also rated the intensity of their relationships with a best friend, a friend, and an acquaintance on the Friendship Intensity Measurement Scale (FIMS; T. S. Arunkumar & B. Dharmagadan, 2001). The present results confirmed that people perceive (a) relationships with best friends as more intense and intimate than other friendships and (b) other friendships as more intense and intimate than acquaintanceships. The results also indicated that Americans perceive all of their relationships, ranging from mere acquaintanceships to intimate friendships, as more intense and intimate than do Poles. It was somewhat surprising that there were no sex differences in either country in the perception of relationships. The authors discussed the research in the context of the difficulty of defining what friendship is and how an individual's cultural background might interact with person variables such as age and sex.

Key words: friendship, cross-cultural comparison, relationships

PEOPLE USE THE WORD "FRIEND" to describe an astonishing range of relationships. Friendships vary in purpose, intimacy, duration, and style, and no single set of attributes seems to adequately capture the spirit of the many forms that friendship can take (Adams, Blieszner, & De Vries, 2000). Complicating matters, peoples' definition of someone as a friend often has little relationship with how often they actually see that person (Rubin, 1985). Consequently, there is still no generally accepted definition of friendship. Yet, many scholars have tried to craft

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such a definition. They commonly use the following terms: *voluntary, intimate, trust, respect, commitment, support, generosity, nonromantic, loyalty, acceptance, caring, liking, and confiding* (Fehr, 1996; Monsour, 2002; Rubin). Researchers have asked individuals to identify the criteria that are most important in defining their own friendships, and participants have named almost two dozen different factors. Levels of self-disclosure, sociability, amount of help or support in the relationship, and having shared interests and activities consistently emerge as among the most important (Adams et al.; Parks & Floyd, 1996).

At least part of the problem of defining friendship stems from the hazy use of terms such as *closeness* and *intimacy* and a lack of agreement about the role that these concepts play in defining our friendships. Parks and Floyd (1996) compared the meanings of closeness with the meanings of intimacy within friendships. In their study, 270 university students reported on a relationship with either a same-sex individual or an opposite-sex individual whom they would describe as a "good" friend. Parks and Floyd asked the students to report what being "close" in this friendship meant to them and how being close was different in same-sex friendships and opposite-sex friendships. Parks and Floyd also asked them if they would use the term "intimate" to describe the relationship. The participants in Parks and Floyd's study were about evenly split as to whether the word "intimacy" could be appropriately applied to a relationship with a "good friend." Many of the participants in the study felt that "intimacy" could only be meaningfully applied to relationships that had a physical and sexual component, expressing a common sentiment that has also been identified by other researchers (e.g., Monsour, 1992). In any event, strong mutual agreement about the level of intimacy in a relationship seems to be an important ingredient in that relationship's being defined as a "friendship" (Monsour, Betty, & Kurzweil, 1993). Parks and Floyd concluded that "closeness" is a broader concept than "intimacy" and one that can be used to define almost all relationships, whereas "intimacy" is only a defining feature in a much more limited range of relationships. Thus, it seems that the construct of closeness will be the more reliable construct for distinguishing friendships from other types of relationships.

Although our list of friends may overlap with the other categories of people in our life—such as those of coworkers, relatives, and neighbors—bestowing the label of "friend" on someone clearly communicates a level of closeness and an affective evaluation of the relationship that moves beyond mere categorization. We distinguish friendship from acquaintanceship by the intensity and mutual commitment of the relationship, and simply spending time together and talking a lot are not enough to create a friendship (Abrahams, 1999; Carrier, 1999). Many researchers have asked people to compare friendships with other types of relationships such as dating relationships, relationships with parents and other family members, and relationships with coworkers and teachers (Berndt, 1981; Berndt & Perry, 1986; Blyth & Foster-Clark, 1987; Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984; Davis & Todd, 1982; Raffaelli & Duckett, 1989; Thorbecke & Grotevant, 1982;

Wilmut & Shellen, 1990). The goal of these researchers has been to distill the essence of what makes friendship so special and so different from the other kinds of relationships in our lives. The researchers' results have indicated that friendships provide more feelings of freedom, closeness, and pleasure and higher levels of self-disclosure and also seem able to meet a wider variety of needs than other relationships (Argyle, 1987; Fehr, 1996; Larson & Bradley, 1988; Mendelson & Kay, 2003). North Americans have indicated that relationships with friends are more numerous and more intense or intimate than are relationships with relatives (Berscheid, Snyder, & Omoto, 1989; Fischer, 1982). Participants have mentioned friends as a source of happiness more frequently than they do family, religion, or success in one's career (Fehr, Klinger, 1977). Researchers believed that one of the reasons friends are so emotionally rewarding is that the greater amount of shared knowledge between them leads to a greater empathic connection and sensitivity to each other (Colvin, Vogt, & Ickes, 1997). Researchers have found that changes in friendships usually accompany major life transitions, such as going away to college or getting married, but maintaining friendships throughout such transitions can also help to buffer the stress associated with major life changes (Brooks, 2002; Oswald & Clark, 2003). Although friendships are usually positive and pleasurable experiences, friends also have the potential to provoke more negative emotions, such as anger, than do other people (Averill, 1983; Brendgen, Markiewicz, Doyle, & Bukowski, 2001; Fehr & Baldwin, 1996; Russell & Fehr, 1994). Another curious aspect of friendships is their level of ambiguity. Thus, our relationships with coworkers or kin clearly begin with our employment or birth and end when we leave our jobs or die, respectively. However, no such clear lines mark the beginning and end of friendships (Rubin, 1985).

Longitudinal researchers have shown that although a person may describe friendship differently at different times of life, core conceptions of friendship do not appear to change much after early adolescence (Candy, Troll, & Levy, 1981; Wall, Pickert, & Paradise, 1984; Weiss & Lowenthal, 1975). Friendship tends to be most salient and important in one's youth, and it becomes less so after marriage, especially for women (Leyton, 1974; Ott, 1981; Reed-Danahay, 1999). In many cultures, adult friendships appear to exist at least partially to compensate for the failings of kinship networks (Reed-Danahay). However, to say that friendships are more important in our youth is not to imply that they are unimportant when we get older. For example, Gilligan (1982) reported that friends were more important for maintaining morale in old age than grandchildren.

There is a stereotype that women have more intimate and satisfying friendships than do men. Also, there is clear evidence that women are more likely than men to explicitly discuss with their friends the closeness of their relationships (Parks & Floyd, 1996). Although the results of some studies conform to that stereotype, the results of other studies do not (Fehr, 1996). Rubin (1985) conducted in-depth interviews with 300 men and women. From these interviews, she concluded that men tend to use the word "friend" more loosely than do women

and that men also expect less from friendships than do women. In Rubin's study, three fourths of single women had identified a "best friend," but less than one third of single men were able to do so. Those women who were not able to name a best friend expressed more regret about that than did the men in the study. Other studies have confirmed that women are more likely than men to distinguish "close friends" from people who are "just a friend" (Bukowski, Newcomb, & Hartup, 1996; Roberto & Kimboko, 1989). Similarly, in another study, teenage girls rated the quality of their friendships more positively than did boys and also exhibited more positive behaviors toward their same-sex friends (Brandgen et al., 2001). On the other hand, Oxley, Dzindolet, and Miller (2002) found no gender differences in the number of close friends or the willingness to offer advice to solve friends' problems, and Benenson and Christakos (2003) found that female adolescents between 10 years and 15 years of age actually reported shorter friendships and more hurtful friendship experiences than did male adolescents of the same range of age. Thus, it appears that gender may indeed be an important determinant of the dynamics of friendship, but the exact nature of these gender effects is still far from clear (Fehr).

Part of the difficulty in pinning down the role of variables, such as age and sex, in friendship is that most studies of friendship have occurred in one culture at a time, usually in the highly similar societies of Britain, Canada, and the United States. Studies elsewhere have indicated the possibility that people's culture is at least as important in influencing how people approach friendship and that the culture can modify the effect of person variables such as age and sex (Basu & Mukhopadhyay, 1986; Kon & Losenkov, 1978; Reisman, 1990; Worebe, 1987). For example, researchers have found Indian men to be more expressive and interdependent with their male friends than are Americans (Berman, Murphy-Berman, & Pachauri, 1988). Self-disclosure differences between men and women, which are well-documented in the U.S., do not appear in China (Wheeler, Reis, & Bond, 1989). Similarly, the primacy of adolescent friendships over other adolescent relationships may not be universal. Claes (1998) reported that although 11-18 year olds in Canada rated friends as forming the most important relationships, family was much more important to Italians of the same age, and Belgian teens fell somewhere between these two extremes.

In the present study, we were especially interested in how people determine who qualifies as a "friend." Penning and Chappell (1987) found no difference across cultures in the average number of individual's reported friends. But Penning and Chappell did find differences in the ease with which people could identify a "close" friend. Anthropologists Bell and Coleman (1999) believed that friendship is less easily established in cultural settings where kinship structures remain strong. Even within cultures that facilitate friendship, the concept is more salient to some social classes than to others (Carrier, 1999). The idea of friendship may be more a tool for people to think and talk about relationships than a strict set of criteria that they can use to evaluate a relationship (Smart, 1999). The few

truly cross-cultural studies of friendship have clearly indicated that people in different places prefer different labels for relationships that would appear to be very similar to a disinterested observer. For example, Ruan (1993) reported that in China only 6.6% of people in one's social network are described as friends, whereas in America the number is 67.8%! It is highly unlikely that the typical American actually has that many more friends than his or her counterpart in China, so the issue seems to be one of definition. While no other researchers have directly examined this issue, Smart did find that the Chinese make less of a distinction than do Westerners between friendships that are based on sentimental or emotional bonds and friendships that have a more instrumental and mutually beneficial purpose. Other researchers in Asian countries have shown differences between how the Japanese and Americans think about relationships (Takahashi, Ohara, Antonucci, & Akiyama, 2002). Also, other researchers have discovered that Koreans have lower expectations about friendships than do Americans and that they generally report less intimate relationships with their friends (You & Malley-Morrison, 2000). However, it does seem to be true cross-culturally that friendships are most easily maintained when there is a high degree of similarity and social equality between individuals (Allan, 1989; Rezendé, 1999; Silver, 1989).

Researchers can trace at least part of the differences between cultures that these earlier studies have indicated to the circumstance that the term "friend" is simply used much more freely and loosely in Western societies, especially in the United States (Fehr, 1996; Rubin, 1985). This circumstance may occur because the word "acquaintance" in English has acquired a rather cold connotation over time, so that people may have expanded their use of the term "friend" to put a more positive spin on their interactions with others (Abrahams, 1999).

We undertook the present study to clarify the criteria that are used to distinguish friends from nonfriends and to discriminate between different levels of friendship. We also wanted to explore these questions in more than one country so as to contribute to the database on the cross-cultural criteria for the value of friendship. Specifically, we compared how people in the United States define friendships with how people in Poland do. Previous researchers have shown that Americans and Eastern Europeans define relationships somewhat differently and that all Central and Eastern European cultures have words that distinguish between different degrees of friendship (Abrahams, 1999; Searle-White, 1996).

In Poland, there are three words that describe three different degrees of friendship. From the most intimate to the least intimate, these terms are "przyjaciół," "kolega," and "znajomy." Each of these Polish words has an approximate English equivalent. A *przyjaciół* is a person with whom one probably has a lifelong relationship with a great deal of honesty and self-disclosure. The best English translation would probably be "best friend," although this phrase is used more liberally in the United States than "przyjaciół" is used in Poland. The least intimate term, "znajomy," corresponds very closely to the word "acquaintance" in English and is used in completely unambiguous situations in which both parties

agree about their relationship status. This status shown by the formal addresses of "Ms.," "Mrs.," and "Mr.:" There is even a ritual by which a znanomy moves into a more intimate relationship and becomes a kolega. This ritual occurs when the two parties—apparently regardless of their sex—give mutual permission to address each other in the future by their first names. A celebration involving drinking frequently follows, often with the pair drinking shots of alcohol while their arms are linked. The English terms that are closest to "kolega" are "buddy," "colleague," and "companion."

Because of Poles' more formalized and precise use of words to describe levels of friendship, we predicted that they would differentiate more easily and consistently between different types of friends than would Americans. We also examined sex differences in judgments made about friendship, and on the basis of previous studies, expected that women in both countries would probably make more discriminating judgments about relationships than would men.

Method

Participants

Participants were either American (i.e., U.S.) students or Polish students. The U.S. participants were 57 college students at a small liberal arts college in the Midwest United States (25 men, 32 women). The mean age of the American men was 20.67 years ($SD = 2.17$ years). The mean age of the American women was 19.66 years ($SD = 1.65$ years). All U.S. participants were born and raised in the United States. The Polish participants were 56 people (24 men, 26 women), including university students at a large university in Poznan and employees of a copper mine in Lubin. The mean age of the Polish men was 22.96 years ($SD = 2.56$ years). The mean age of the Polish women was 21.44 years ($SD = 6.14$ years). Because of a clerical oversight, the exact number of the Polish students and that of the mine employees are not available, but the two sample sizes were approximately equal. All Polish participants were born and raised in Poland. In the U.S. sample, we collected data in a classroom, and some participants received course credit for their participation. In Poland, the university students filled out questionnaires in a classroom, and the mine workers filled it out during their lunch break at their workplace.

We did not pretend that the group of Polish participants was in any way an equivalent control group for the U.S. college students. There was a greater age range in the Polish sample than in the U.S. one, and only about half of the Polish participants were students. Because we had to do our best with the restricted set of populations that were available to us, our samples had inherent limitations. Nevertheless, we assessed perceptions of friendship in two culturally distinct groups, and these groups would certainly provide a useful contrast that would inform our judgment on the issue of the stability of peoples' standards for judgment.

ing friendship in different cultural settings. Because most researchers of such issues have shown that conceptions of friendship do not change much after early adolescence (e.g., Candy et al., 1981; Wall et al., 1984; Weiss & Lowenthal, 1975), we believed that the greater age spread in the Polish sample should not pose a serious problem.

Materials and Procedure

All participants filled out two questionnaires. The first questionnaire consisted of nine hypothetical situations, and each of the present experiment's participants rated the level of intimacy between the two people in each situation. Participants rated the level on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*acquaintance*) to 3 (*friend*), and to 7 (*best friend*). Table 1 shows the situations. There were four versions of the questionnaire: one for U.S. men in which the main character was John, one for U.S. women in which the main character was Jane, one for Polish men in which the main character was Marcin, and one for Polish women in which the main character was Agata.

The second questionnaire was a modified version of Arunkumar and Dharmanganadan's (2001) Friendship Intensity Measurement Scale (FIMS). They demonstrated acceptable internal consistency of this scale with an Indian sample (Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$). The FIMS is a 40-item scale that assesses four different dimensions of friendship: viability, support, intimacy, and harmony. Viability reflects the degree of acceptance, respect, and trust in a relationship; support reflects the amount of emotional support and mutual assistance in a relationship; intimacy reflects the degree of understanding, confiding, and shared experience in the relationship; and harmony reflects the degree of enjoyment, spontaneity, and stability in a relationship. For the present study, we modified the FIMS into a 22-item scale that included six questions dealing with viability, eight questions measuring support, and four questions each for intimacy and harmony. We reduced the FIMS to 22 items to shorten the questionnaire, because each participant had to fill it out three times. We eliminated questions on the basis of redundancy with other questions and their relevance to the purposes of the present study. We slightly reworded some of the retained questions to make them more consistent with U.S. English than with their original British English. A higher score on the FIMS reflects greater perceived intensity or intimacy in the relationship. Avoiding response bias, some statements are negative statements about the relationship, and researchers reverse-score these items. We translated the English questionnaire into Polish. Three different native Polish speakers living in the United States cross-checked the Polish version for accuracy.

Each participant filled out the 22-item FIMS a total of three times. The first time, we asked the participants to respond to the questionnaire while thinking about a best friend (Americans) or przyjaciel (Poles). The second time, we asked them to respond to the same questionnaire while thinking of an acquaintance

TABLE 1. Hypothetical Relationship Scenarios Presented to the Male American Participants

Situation	Scenario text
1	John was introduced to you by your mutual classmate. He is a very nice guy, and you like being in his company. You sit next to him in class, and whenever you bump into him anywhere outside of class you always find a minute to chat and talk about the weather.
2	You love hanging out with John. Whether you talk about class, girls, or are just joking around, John is the guy to be with. You make time for John in your schedule.
3	You can count on John, anytime of night or day. He is the person that you go to with all your troubles and confide your secrets to. You know that he will not judge you for your actions, but instead will advise you and give you a hand whenever you need it.
4	You meet John at a party or social gathering. You are left alone in a room and end up talking for a couple of hours about your life, school, work, and family.
5	You like John since he is a great guy. Both of you confide in each other. However, sometimes you feel that you can't tell him everything that is on your mind because you do not want to be judged by John.
6	You and John talk about four times a year. You always enjoy the conversation and are glad to hear what is happening in his life, and you know that John is also honestly interested in the episodes of your life.
7	You meet John at a party or social gathering. You end up talking for a couple of hours that night. Feeling comfortable with John, you tell him something that has been bothering you lately. John is an attentive listener; you end up exchanging phone numbers and he offers you support for your troubling situation. In a few days, he delivers just that.
8	Whenever you're in need, or just feel the urge to talk with somebody, you know that John will be there for you. You would not hesitate calling or visiting him at any time, and you know he can expect the same from you.
9	You have known John for four years. You never pass him on the street or the hallway without stopping and having a chat. During your chats, you acknowledge his accomplishments (for example, "Hey, I've heard you're dating so and so" or "I read your article in the paper, congratulations."), as far as you can remember, you've never had any disagreements or any mutual bonding experiences.

(Americans) or znajomy (Poles). The third time, we asked them to respond to the same questionnaire while thinking of a friend (Americans) or kolega (Poles). The written instructions at the top of the FIMS follow:

Think about a specific person whom you consider to be your [Best Friend, Acquaintance, Friend] and imagine that the following statements apply to that person. Rate your level of agreement with each statement on the following scale. Please write the number corresponding to your response in the space provided.

1 - Strongly Disagree
2 - Disagree
3 - Neutral
4 - Agree
5 - Strongly Agree

The instructions differed in each of the three administrations only by which term (*best friend*, *acquaintance*, *friend* [or the Polish translation]) in the first sentence described the person whom the participant was to think about. Immediately after the instructions were the 22 statements, which Table 2 shows.

The FIMS provided a quantitative measure of the perceived intensity and closeness that participants experienced in relationships with three different people with whom they judged themselves to be at different intimacy levels.

Results

For the nine situational questions, we conducted a 2 (country) \times 2 (sex) multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) to analyze the participants' responses on the 7-point scale that assessed the perceived intimacy of each of the nine situations. There was a significant MANOVA main effect for country, $F(9, 95) = 7.30, p < .0001$, and there were significant univariate main effects for country in five of the nine situations. For Situation 1 (making small talk with an acquaintance from class), $F(1, 103) = 6.12, p < .02, R^2 = .06$, and Situation 5 (confiding in another, but only on some issues), $F(1, 103) = 8.83, p < .004, R^2 = .08$. Polish participants scored significantly higher than did U.S. ones, indicating that the former perceived these relationships to be more intimate than did the latter. For Situation 2 (enjoying spending spare time in a lighthearted way), $F(1, 103) = 13.68, p < .001, R^2 = .12$; Situation 4 (having a prolonged, one-time intimate conversation), $F(1, 103) = 4.70, p < .03, R^2 = .04$; and Situation 6 (having regular conversations four times per year), $F(1, 103) = 5.13, p < .03, R^2 = .05$. Americans scored higher than did Poles, indicating that the Americans perceived these relationships to be more intimate than did the Poles. There were no significant main effects for country on the other four situations, $p > .05$, and there were no significant main effects for gender on any of the situations, $p > .05$.

In the analyses of the nine situations, there was only one significant univariate interaction between country and sex of the participant, and that was for Situation 9, in which participants rated the intimacy of regularly chatting with someone who

TABLE 2. Statements From the Friendship Intensity Measurement Scale (FIMS)

Number	Statement
1	I have complete faith in _____.
2	I don't keep any secrets from _____.
3	I am prepared to do anything for _____.
4	I always enjoy _____'s presence.
5	Whenever I feel lonely, I long for _____.
6	Just by looking at _____, I can understand his/her feelings.
7	I do not like _____ pointing out my weaknesses.
8	I would not trust _____.
9	_____ and I don't allow any differences of opinion to affect our relationship.
10	I am not always able to understand _____.
11	I am satisfied with my relationship with _____.
12	I don't tell all my secrets to _____.
13	I don't accept _____ for who he/she is.
14	I don't always sympathize with _____.
15	I'm sure that _____ will stand up for me, even if I'm not present.
16	I share my sorrows and my happiness with _____.
17	I don't feel free to be myself in the presence of _____.
18	I can't tolerate some mistakes that _____ does.
19	_____ is not a very reliable person.
20	I feel completely relaxed after confiding in _____.
21	I'm not really concerned about the well-being of _____.
22	_____ is the most suitable one to share my dreams and grievances with.

Note. From "The Friendship Intensity Measurement Scale (FIMS)," by T. S. Arunkumar and B. Dharmangadan, 2001, *Psychological Studies*, 46, pp. 59-62. Copyright 2001 by the National Academy of Psychology, Delhi, India. Reprinted with permission of the authors and the publisher.

one has known for 4 years, but not having any major disagreements or bonding experiences during that time. Polish men rated this situation as portraying a less intimate relationship than did U.S. men, but Polish women rated the situation as being more intimate than did U.S. women, $F(1, 103) = 8.74, p < .004, R^2 = .08$. Figure 1 shows this interaction. However, the MANOVA of the interactions across the nine situations failed to reach significance, $F(9, 95) = 1.57, p < .14$, so that the reliability of this interaction must be viewed with some skepticism.

We summed the responses to the 22 items from the FIMS, and the total score constituted the dependent variable. We found the internal consistency or reliability of the scale to be satisfactory for both the Polish sample and the U.S. sample

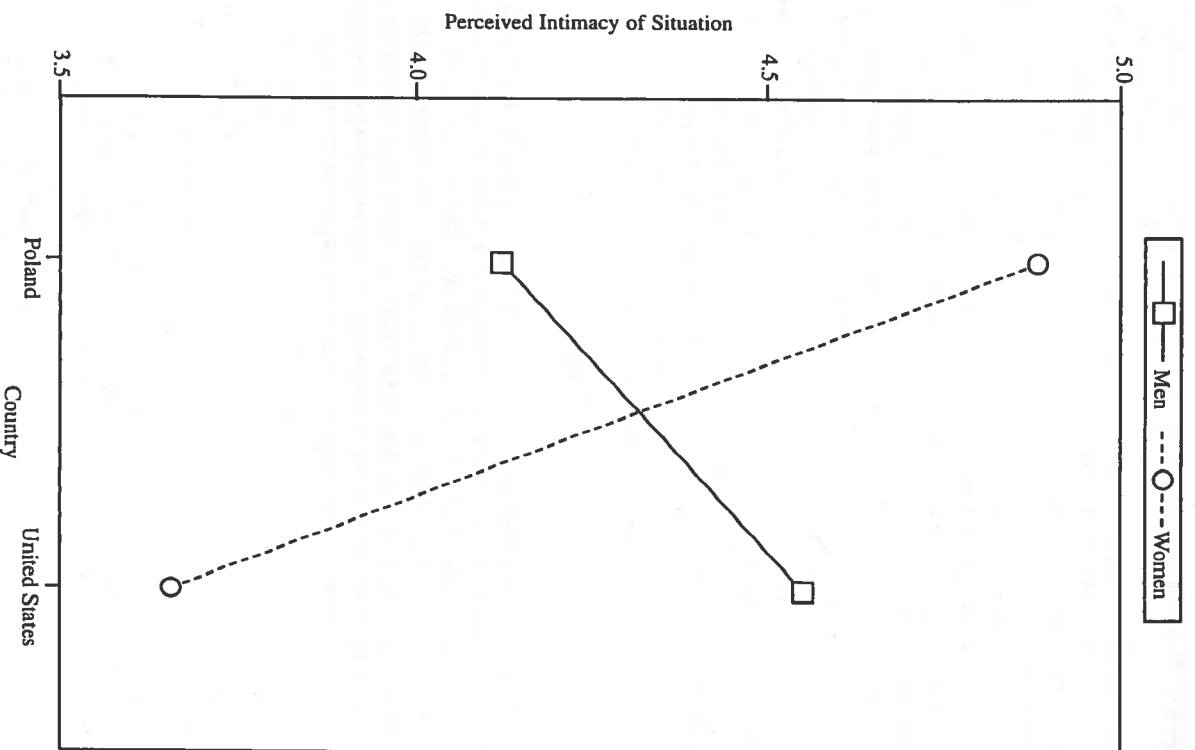


FIGURE 1. Significant interaction between Sex and Country on the ratings of intimacy for Situation 9.

and for the data on the participant's intimacy with best friends, friends, and acquaintances. For the Polish sample, Cronbach's alphas were .72 (przyjaciel/best friend), .74 (kolega/friend), and .74 (znajomy/acquaintance). For the Americans, the alphas were .81 (best friend), .82 (friend), and .81 (acquaintance). A repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) and a Tukey HSD test confirmed (a) that overall, relationships with best friends (przyjaciel) were perceived as significantly more intense and intimate than relationships with friends (kolega) and (b) that overall, the latter were seen as more intense and intimate than relationships with acquaintances (znajomy), $F(2, 212) = 352.80, p < .00001, R^2 = .77$ ($M_{\text{best friends}} = 92.41, SD_{\text{best friends}} = 10.14$, vs. $M_{\text{friends}} = 76.82, SD_{\text{friends}} = 13.32$, vs. $M_{\text{acquaintances}} = 57.45, SD_{\text{acquaintances}} = 9.86$), $HSD = 3.06$. The same relationship occurred for all of the subgroups too: Polish men, $F(2, 44) = 89.89, p < .0001, R^2 = .80, HSD = 5.81$; U.S. women, $F(2, 62) = 155.93, p < .0001, R^2 = .83, HSD = 4.97$; U.S. men, $F(2, 48) = 136.68, p < .0001, R^2 = .85, HSD = 5.71$. Table 3 shows the means and standard deviations for all groups.

We used 2×2 ANOVAs to analyze the ratings of intensity (as indicated by the FIMS) of the three relationships that participants described as "best friend" ("przyjaciel"), "friend" ("kolega"), and "acquaintance" ("znajomy"). Because the 22-item scale that we used was a greatly shortened adaptation of the original FIMS, we could not preserve the FIMS's four-subscale structure. Consequently, we analyzed responses on this measure as a single measure of intensity or intimacy. We found significant main effects for country on all three relationships, with Americans rating all three relationships as more intense or intimate than did Poles. Americans perceived their relationships with best friends as more intense or intimate than did Poles, $F(1, 103) = 26.46, p < .001, R^2 = .20$ ($M_{\text{Americans}} = 96.67, SD_{\text{Americans}} = 8.60$, vs. $M_{\text{Poles}} = 87.56, SD_{\text{Poles}} = 9.64$). Americans also perceived more intense or intimate relationships with friends, $F(1, 103) = 93.83, p < .001, R^2 = .48$ ($M_{\text{Americans}} = 85.35, SD_{\text{Americans}} = 10.57$, vs. $M_{\text{Poles}} = 67.10, SD_{\text{Poles}} = 8.66$),

TABLE 3. Means and Standard Deviations for Intimacy and Intensity as a Function of Gender, Country, and Type of Relationship

Participant group	Best friend or przyjaciel		Friend or kolega		Acquaintance or znajomy	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Polish women	88.26	9.89	68.52	8.18	56.33	12.25
Polish men	86.74	9.48	65.43	9.09	53.65	10.01
American women	96.50	9.54	85.09	10.42	60.44	7.19
American men	96.88	7.40	85.68	10.90	58.32	8.95

and acquaintances, $F(1, 103) = 5.42, p < .02, R^2 = .05$ ($M_{\text{Americans}} = 59.51, SD_{\text{Americans}} = 8.00$, vs. $M_{\text{Poles}} = 55.10, SD_{\text{Poles}} = 11.25$). There were no significant gender main effects and no interactions between country and gender on the responses to the FIMS ($p > .05$).

Discussion

Researchers should be careful in drawing conclusions about an entire population from relatively small convenience samples of participants responding to hypothetical situations such as those in the present study. However, with this caveat in mind, researchers might draw a number of conclusions from the present data tentatively. Contrary to some earlier researchers' (e.g., Abrahams, 1999; Fehr, 1996; Rubin, 1985) predictions, Poles were not more discerning about the intensity of different relationships than Americans, and women were not more discerning than men. All participants, regardless of sex and nationality, made clear distinctions between best friends, friends, and acquaintances, and the magnitudes of the differences between these categories as indicated by the FIMS were about the same for each group. The strongest finding of the present study was the consistent tendency of Americans to rate each kind of relationship—best friends, friends, and acquaintances—as more intense and intimate than did Poles. Although these results may be inconsistent with those of some earlier studies in Eastern Europe, they are in line with those of studies in a variety of cultural settings in which friendships were more intense or intimate and more important to North American individuals than most other relationships, including relationships with relatives (Berscheid et al., 1989; Claas, 1998; Fischer, 1982; You & Malley-Morrison, 2000).

In the present study, there were also several interesting cross-cultural differences regarding the nine situations that participants rated for intimacy. However, at first glance, the pattern of these differences is not readily explicable. Perhaps many of the situations that we presented to the participants differed in the relative frequency of occurrence in the two countries, leading individuals to evaluate the less commonplace occurrences as more intense because they were more unusual. In this case, researchers might speculate that Poles are less likely than Americans to transfer casual relationships, such as that of being in class with someone, into other contexts. Also, it may be true that Poles are less likely than Americans to have relationships in which they feel free to confide selected bits of intimate information while withholding other intimate information. On the other side of the coin, if this hypothesis were accurate, it would imply that Americans would be less likely than Poles to spend time with mere acquaintances in a light-hearted and playful way, less likely to have one-time intense and intimate conversations with others, and less likely to have relationships that involve infrequent yet regular conversations with someone else over time. The present data do not allow anything more than speculation on this hypothesis, but they indicate a direction for future researchers.

The present study did little to resolve the inconsistencies of earlier research on gender differences in friendships, because a null finding (i.e., a lack of significant effects) leaves many possible interpretations on the table. The total lack of gender differences in either country was somewhat surprising, especially because of the long history of male-female differences in perceptions of relationships in previous research. Researchers may find this anomaly especially surprising in Poland, because Polish society seems to have maintained more traditional gender roles than those of the United States. For this anomaly, we have no ready explanation. Perhaps men and women do in fact tend to have the same types of feelings about friends and acquaintances and that earlier researchers may have inadvertently introduced other variables that had different effects on men and women. Consequently, the present study takes its place among the relatively few studies (e.g., Oxley et al., 2002) that failed to indicate sex differences in feelings of closeness to friends.

Future researchers might most fruitfully pursue these issues by studying the language that people use to describe their relationships, because it may be that the study of friendship has been confounded by the different shades of meaning of the friendship terms in different cultures. Perhaps the strongest messages of the present study are that one's culture appears to have a more powerful influence on the nature of one's relationships than does one's sex and that the stereotype of Americans as people who too freely use labels such as "friend" regarding relationships with low intensities of feelings may not be accurate.

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