Intercultural Friendships: A Case Study
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Capstone Honors Thesis

Spring 1999

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Abstract

The study of intercultural friendships is still in the beginning stages in the communication discipline. A qualitative case study of this topic yields a fuller view of all the variables involved and provides suggestions for further areas of research. This study interviews a 22 year-old, Japanese female studying at the University of North Texas and analyzes her intercultural relationships. Results showed the informant to have an extensive bi-cultural network, to be comfortable with self-disclosure, and to not view cultural differences with friends as negative. When compared to expectations of the Japanese, she acted more individualistic, less needing of uncertainty reduction, and more feminine than was predicted. Suggestions for future research included the “state versus trait” idea of culture.
Intercultural Friendships: A Case Study

Friendship is, hmm—something that you cannot live without. Something, I don’t, it’s more important than like lover, or can be more than parents I think because, um, now I’m really far away from my parents and you know, since friends are the only people who can help me, who can, you know, try to understand me. So, what is friendship? Something really special, something really helpful, and, um, I have really good friends so...

—Sawa, Japanese student at UNT

Currently there are approximately 1400 international students studying at the University of North Texas, making up almost 6% of the total student population. On an international student’s list of priorities, forming relationships with students from other countries is high (Kzric, 1994), yet studies show that these students have a hard time finding American friends (Furnham & Alibhai, 1985; Gareis, 1995). One of the predominant complaints of international students is the lack of American friends (Gareis, 1995).

In order to help alleviate the problem of friendships for international students, intercultural friendships have to be studied in depth. As recommended by Gudykunst (1995) in his Anxiety/Uncertainty Management (AUM) theory, this study attempts to understand how and why we form relationships with members of other groups. Specifically, it explores a Japanese student’s success in making American friends, and then analyzes this information so that it can become useful for others trying to make intercultural friends.
A simple lack of contact with students from the host country is one cause for not being able to make friends with them. Furnham & Alibhai (1985) studied 165 foreign students at higher education institutions in London. Results showed that 56% of all the foreign students had no British friends. They theorized that this means the students had very limited intimate contacts with people from the host country, which may account for the fact that "many overseas students return home disgruntled with the society in which they studied" (Furnham & Alibhai, 1985, p. 719). Those who are unsuccessful at making friends in their host country, which is the majority, have reasons to feel as "disgruntled" as Furnham & Alibhai suggest. Negative consequences to not having friends from the host country include unhappiness, difficulty in adjusting and assimilating, and a lower level of satisfaction (Furnham & Alibhai, 1985; Locke, 1988, Maniwatana, 1982). International students benefit from host country friendships and desire them, but most students find it difficult to make such friends. Instead, they must turn to students from their own country for their primary friendships.

Bochner, McLeod, and Lin (1977) found that there are three social networks that international students will have. The primary one being the mono-cultural network in which only people from their home country are included. This network "provides a setting in which ethnic and cultural values can be rehearsed and expressed" (Bochner et al., 1977, p. 291). The secondary network is the bi-cultural network which includes people from the host country and "instrumentally facilitates the academic and professional aspirations of the sojourner" (Bochner et al., 1977, p. 291). The tertiary network is their multi-cultural network of friends and acquaintances which "provides companionship for recreational, non-culture and not-task oriented activities" (Bochner et
Although the study found the mono-cultural network to be the primary network and an important one for the student to adjust to the host country, it encouraged students to become more open to both the bi- and multi-cultural ones. Ten years later, the study was supported by Strom (1988) in which the primary network of international students at the University of Iowa was the mono-cultural one. It functioned as "a place to rehearse and express the home culture’s values and activities, and instrumentally, as a place to receive help with the English language and occasional help with university problems" (Strom, 1988, p. 3204A). Even though the mono-cultural network was well developed, the students were found to have a less developed bi-cultural, American network.

Opposing these findings, the students in Gareis's (1995) study were happy with the number and quality of their friendships with Americans. Her study showed that the contentment of the students was found to be based on individual personality, confidence level, their personal meaning of friendship, and the sojourn adjustment. In a study on the Tai community, Maniwatana (1982) found student's intercultural friendships relied on "opportunity for social contact, the position of the group to which the individual belongs, and his [sic] in this group than on cultural variable or social class variables" (p. 3218A). So, some students are successful, but the success depends on many variables and can therefore be hard to obtain.

Cultures: The United States and Japan

According to Barnlund (1989), the United States is a diverse nation with respect to race, religion, nationalities and language. The ideal American is someone who is "an independent, self-realizing person, faithful to his or her own inner truth" (Barnlund, 1989,
Competition between people, groups, and institutions is emphasized. This is seen in its laws which are to define and defend the rights of competing parties and in the idea that "truth is most likely to emerge from a competition of ideas" (Barnlund, 1989, p. 38).

Japan is seen as typically a homogenous population with respect to values, norms, language and religion (Barnlund, 1989). Some disagree in saying Japan is homogenous due to all Japanese not just speaking standard Japanese but also their own dialect or accent, and the antagonism that exists between eastern and western regions of Japan (Gudykunst & Nishida, 1994). Even so, the group is most important in Japan, not the individual, and competition exits between these groups. "Truth is seen as more attainable from combining individual viewpoints than from compromising them" (Barnlund, 1989, p. 39) and there is therefore less conflict between individuals than in America.

Hofstede's Variables

Hofstede (1984) divided intercultural communication into four areas: individualism-collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity-femininity, and power distance. According to Hofstede’s research, the United States and Japan received the following scores in each of these areas (in Gudykunst & Kim, 1992, pp. 94-95):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Individualism</th>
<th>Uncertainty Avoidance</th>
<th>Masculinity</th>
<th>Power Distance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All scores range from 0 to 100 with 0 being lowest and 100 highest for each variable studied. As shown, the two biggest differences between Japan and the United States are with respect to individualism-collectivism and uncertainty avoidance.
Intercultural Friendships

**Individualism-Collectivism**

Individualism is a society’s “preference for a loosely knit social framework in that society wherein individuals are supposed to take care of themselves and their immediate families only,” while collectivist cultures prefer “a tightly knit social framework in which individuals can expect their relatives, clan, or other in-group to look after them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty” (Hofstede, 1984, p. 91). Central to the definition of collectivism is the in-group, which influences an individual so that s/he will give up his/her personal goals for the group’s (Triandis, 1988). Other characteristics of individualistic versus collectivistic cultures include: self-realization versus fitting into the group, saying what you are thinking versus avoiding confrontations in the in-group, and direct, precise communication versus indirect, imprecise communication (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997). The United States scored 91 on individualism while Japan scored a 46, making Japan closer to collectivism than to individualism. Although Japan is not the most collectivistic country recorded by Hofstede, i.e. the one with the lowest score, the United States is the most individualistic one. The almost 50 points between Japan and America creates a large gap between the cultures with respect to how they deal with in-groups.

**Uncertainty Avoidance**

Uncertainty avoidance is the other major difference between Japan and the United States. This measures how comfortable people from that culture are with ambiguity and uncertainty (Hofstede, 1984). One significant aspect of uncertainty avoidance is the showing or hiding of emotions. Those cultures with high uncertainty avoidance would most likely hide emotions, while those with low uncertainty avoidance will express
emotions (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997). Japan has a higher score (92) than the United States (46) for this area, revealing that the Japanese culture would likely hide expressions of emotion whereas the American culture would show them.

**Masculinity-Femininity**

Masculine cultures will prefer the ideals of “achievement, heroism, and assertiveness, while feminine cultures will prefer “relationships, modesty, and quality of life” (Hofstede, 1984, p. 92). Masculinity-femininity demonstrates itself largely in the roles of the sexes within cultures. If a culture is rated as high masculine, they will tend to have little contact with the opposite-sex and relations with the same-sex are considered more intimate (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997). Japan has a higher masculine score (95) than the United States (62) meaning that the Japanese will prefer the masculine ideals to a greater extent than Americans and have less opportunity for relationships with the opposite-sex. This should yield results that those students studying from Japan should have few opposite-sex friendships.

**Power Distance**

Power distance is the “extent to which the members of a society accept that power in institutions and organizations is distributed unequally” (Hofstede, 1984, p. 91). Although the dichotomy between Japan and American is smaller with respect to power, the Japanese do have a larger power distance score (54) than the United States (40). This means that Japanese would be more likely to accept hierarchical differences than Americans would. Since this study is about intercultural friendships, power distance will not be investigated. Unless the informant reveals a sense of more or less power within a
relationship, there should be little use for knowing her ability to accept that people of authority have power over her.

Relational Differences

Individualism-collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity-femininity, and power distance demonstrate a culture's values. These values can lead to different ideas in these cultures about the definition of friendships and what they should involve. Jack Seward suggests that “Japanese friendships involve a lifelong responsibility for others” as opposed to the American idea of “the more friends, the better” (as quoted in Barnlund, 1989, p. 43). Therefore, Japanese may hesitate to make additional friendships, while Americans are constantly looking for and seeking them out. One Japanese university student in America was quoted in Barnlund’s (1989) book as stating that: “When Americans need a friend they simply go out and meet someone. In contrast, we Japanese are reluctant to do anything actively to find a friend” (pp. 39-40).

In respect to self-disclosure, Americans feel freer to express what they think or believe “because truth and inner convictions are valued more than harmony,” but Japanese will limit disclosure and avoid differences “so harmony can be promoted” (Barnlund, 1989, p. 42). The same Japanese student from Barnlund’s (1989) book also said, “With Japanese I talk about less personal, less serious topics when we meet” (p. 42). It can be expected, then, that Japanese may not be as willing to disclose with the same breadth or depth as Americans will. In an intercultural friendship, the American will probably be the one to begin the self-disclosure, but the Japanese partner may feel uncomfortable with revelations of personal information and may not reciprocate in this disclosure.
The lack of self-disclosure may reflect on the closeness of the relationship. Gudykunst & Nishida (1994) showed that self-disclosure increases with the level of relationship, but Barnlund (1989) showed that Japanese are less likely to self-disclose, yet Americans will do so willingly. Therefore, if Americans are doing more self-disclosure than Japanese are, then their relationships should be at closer levels than those of the Japanese. The assumption can then be made that Americans will have more close friends than the Japanese, while the Japanese will have more casual ones.

Attraction also affects the closeness of the relationship. If we are attracted to someone, we will want to get to know them better, and we tend to be attracted to those we perceive as similar to us (Gudykunst, 1995). In intercultural communication, how two people from different countries perceive each other as similar is not yet clearly understood. In low-level intercultural relationships, such as acquaintanceships, the differences are noticed and considered problematic, but in close relationships, they are not problems to the relationship because each person is seen as an individual and their personal communication style is accommodated for (Gudykunst & Nishida, 1994). Dziegielewska (1988) also asserts that cultural differences can have a positive role in the relationship and help, not hinder, understanding. Therefore, the intercultural aspect of similarities and differences should not present a problem for an international student, if s/he gets beyond an acquaintance level.

Method

The Case Study Research Design

This research seeks to answer the question of how and why one student has found American friends by analyzing the strategies of that student and finding out why she has
been successful. A case study was conducted because it can answer a “how” or “why” question for events which the researcher cannot control (Yin, 1989). Because a case study looks in depth at one person or one event, it will provide a fuller view of this topic by discovering and accounting for most of the variables involved. This will then “generate foundational information and lay the groundwork for more directed research” (Gareis, 1995, p. ix).

The qualitative research paradigm

Qualitative observations “provide a greater depth of information about how people perceive events in the context of the actual situations in which they occur” (Frey, Botan, Friedman, & Kreps, 1991, p. 99). Objectives of qualitative designs used in this study include (Merriam, 1988):

1. Qualitative researchers are concerned primarily with process, rather than outcomes or products.

2. Qualitative researchers are interested in meaning—how people make sense of their lives, experiences, and their structures of the world.

3. The qualitative researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. Data are mediated through this human instrument, rather than through inventories, questionnaires, or machines.

4. Qualitative research is descriptive in that the researcher is interested in process, meaning, and understanding gained through words or pictures.

5. The process of qualitative research is inductive in that the researcher builds abstractions, concepts, hypotheses, and theories from details (pp. 19-20).
The Researcher’s Role

Whereas qualitative research is interpretive research, the biases, values, and judgement of the researcher should be stated at the beginning of the study (Creswell, 1994). My travels and experiences have shaped my personal perceptions of intercultural friendship with international students. In June of 1997, I traveled overseas to China and gained my first experiences with people from other cultures. I did not even begin to enjoy my trip until I had begun to make friends with my host country’s students. Through that experience, I began to realize the importance of gaining friends from the host country when studying overseas. When I returned to America, I began seeking out friendships with international students studying at my university so that they would be able to have a friend from their host country, America. My relationships with international students through the past two years have moved from simply acquaintances to roommates. I have lived with a girl from Korea and a girl from Taiwan, and the Taiwanese girl became my best friend; I see her at least once a day, even though we no longer live together. I believe that the experience I have with international students assisted me in this research in that I brought an understanding of how intercultural friendships are maintained and an empathy for the difficulty that can sometimes be involved. In addition, my frequent conversations with international students helped me in the interview process because I was better able to understand some common errors that people speaking English as their second language may make in both pronunciation and usage.

My experience with intercultural friendships, particularly with my best friend, also created certain biases in this study. Although I strove to be objective, my relationships may have influenced how I both collected data and interpreted it. While I understand that
each relationship is different, I came into this study with a positive outlook on intercultural friendships. This and the fact that I am American may have influenced the informant to tone down any negative comments about friendships in general or with Americans. Since I have had classes with the informant before, this could have either create an atmosphere in which she felt more comfortable with sharing her feelings or one in which she did not want to be blunt because of our previous acquaintanceship.

Setting

The case study took place at the University of North Texas in Denton, Texas. The University of North Texas is a state university with 25,514 students and 1,121 foreign students in either the undergraduate or graduate programs. There are also 323 students who study at the Intensive English Language Institute (IELI), which is an English as a second language school. This makes the total international population 1,444 at the University of North Texas.

There are four different offices that help with international affairs. The International Welcome Center organizes orientations and activities for all students. The International Admission and Advising Center provides information about admissions and immigration matters. The Sponsored Student Programs Office provides assistance to those who are sponsored by their government or an organization through orientation, advising, counseling, and activities. The Study Abroad Center advises students on how to study abroad in over 38 countries; both American and international students are allowed to study overseas. Other services provided include airport pickup, health information, a computer lab, newsletter, welcome party, graduation ceremony (for those in IELI), and talent show. To help students with their English, there are some conversation partners
available upon request and an English Club led by graduate students who are studying how to teach English as a Foreign Language. The dormitories sponsor an International Talent and Fashion Show in the fall of every year, and in the spring, there is an International Week, which is campus-wide. Currently there are eleven organizations created by or for international students listed on the international home page. These include students from Africa, Malaysia, Korea, China (3), Taiwan, India, and Indian Pakistani. Two of the organizations are general ones for people from any country.

All of these things give the international students many opportunities for contact with students from their own country, from other countries, and the United States. This contact can be formal and informal in nature and may or may not result in intercultural conversations that could lead to relationships of more than an acquaintance nature. The University of North Texas proves to be a diverse campus with many opportunities for international students, and therefore, a good place to do an intercultural study of friendships.

Participant

The informant chosen was a single, undergraduate student who had been in the United States for more than one year. An unmarried student was chosen because only 2.6% (37) of the 1,444 students were reported to be married. The decision to use an undergraduate student was because approximately 70% of IELI students enter the university as undergraduates (so most of UNT’s international undergraduates have spent time in America before entering the university). The minimum time limit was set so that a student could be found that had ample time to adjust to the culture and to seek close relationships with American students. This would also maximize the opportunity this
student may have had for intercultural relationships in that s/he may have had more time to spend looking for relationships and place more importance on those relationships because of a longer planned stay.

Through networking, three single, undergraduate international students were identified to have intimate intercultural friendships. Each one of these students was contacted and asked some general questions about the nature of this friendship and the frequency of contact. The student used as the informant was chosen because she usually saw her American friends at least once a day and had been in the United States the longest, thus yielding the longest lasting relationships with Americans. Since almost 20% of the international undergraduate students are Japanese, her being Japanese allowed her to represent the largest group of international undergraduate students on this campus. She also seemed to have the best English of the three and to be the most articulate, which was an important consideration for an interview.

The informant was a 22 year-old, Japanese female who had been in the United States for three years and ten months. She has lived both in the dormitories at the University of North Texas and in apartments close by. When she first came to Denton, she was a student at IELI but following her graduation from the English program, she entered the University of North Texas as an undergraduate. Currently, she is a senior in Communication and plans on graduating either December 1999 or May 2000.

**Ethical Considerations**

The researcher has an obligation to the informant in a qualitative study to respect the rights, needs, values, and desires of that informant because to an extent the nature of the study will be obtrusive (Creswell, 1994). In order to protect the informant in this
study, the following things will be done: the informant will be (a) told the nature of the study and the topics that will be studied, (b) given the opportunity to proceed with or terminate the interview at any time, (c) allowed to read and discuss with the author both the transcript and the final paper, and (d) given the ability to decide if her name will be used in the study.

Data Collection and Analysis Strategies

A semi-structured, in-depth interview was conducted with the informant, in which the interviewer had a guide with questions but was free to explore any topics that seemed of particular interest to the study or the informant. The interview guide contained 55 questions compiled from the studies of Collier (1996), Gareis (1995), and Gudykunst (1985). It included questions about demographics of the informant, friendships in general, the informant’s perceptions of cultural variations in friendships, specific friendships for that informant, and specific conversations with friends (see Appendix A). The section asking the informant to describe specific conversations was recommended as a good alternative to self-report data by Petronio and Baithwaite (1993). The interview was conducted in the informant’s living room and at her convenience in order to make the informant feel more at ease when relating her story. The interview was recorded with the permission of the informant and transcribed.

It is suggested that a qualitative researcher simultaneously “collect data from the field, sort the information into categories, format the information into a story or picture, and actually write the qualitative text” (Creswell, 1994, p. 153). Throughout this study, the data has been collected, analyzed and interpreted concurrently. The researcher in a
Qualitative study must take the data and categorize, or code, it in such a way as to make sense of it (Frey et al., 1991). In order to create such a coding scheme, the coder will:

1. Get an idea for the whole transcript by reading it through and write down short notes,
2. Read it a second time while looking for the underlying meaning of each comment and write these thoughts down,
3. List all of the notes and then cluster them together topically,
4. Write all codes on the transcript next to appropriate comments and look for new categories,
5. Attempt to reduce the total number of categories and draw interrelationships between them,
6. Assemble all data for each category into one place and begin analyzing it,
7. Recode data as necessary. (Tesch, 1990)

When analyzing the data, patterns will be searched for by comparing the results to existing literature (Yin, 1989).

**Verification**

To insure internal validity, the following will be done during the research process:

1. Audit trail—all essential decisions will be checked through Dr. Carol Cawyer and validated that they were good decisions.
2. Member checks—the informant will be a check during the analysis process. Comments will be received from the informant on the categories drawn from the transcript.
(3) Peer examination—an undergraduate student familiar with the processes of research will serve as a peer examiner.

(4) Participatory modes of research—the informant will be involved in the study from the interview to the conclusions drawn from it.

There is limited external validity, or generalizability, in the very nature of a case study. The purpose of qualitative research, as suggested by Merriam (1988), is not to generalize findings but to gain unique interpretations of events. Reliability will be addressed by detailed descriptions of the setting and data collection, so that the study could possibly be replicated in the future and by using thick description in the results section to allow for a clear understanding of what was reported.

Results

The informant, Sawa, had been in the United States almost four years, and a few weeks after the interview, she informed me that she would be graduating May 2000 with a Bachelor of Arts in Communication Studies. Once she has finished her degree, she will (in ascending order of importance to her) either (a) go to work as a businesswoman in Japan, (b) work in America on a practical visa, or (c) go to culinary school in Chicago or San Francisco. During the interview, Sawa spoke with good English and only a slight nonstandard accent. She was very articulate and easily expressed in English what she thought and felt. Much of her ability to communicate so well may stem from her degree in Communication Studies, which focuses on human interactions.

Sawa’s friendships

The first thing that I noticed when interviewing Sawa was the number of American friends she had. She claimed to have three close American friends and three
close Japanese friends. Sawa said that she might spend only slightly more time with the Japanese than with the Americans, but this was only because her neighbor is Japanese. Studies have shown that international students will typically spend much more time with and have closer relationships with people from their own country (Bochner et al., 1977; Maniwatana, 1982; Strom, 1988), yet this is not the case with Sawa. She does not put more emphasis on or develop her Japanese relationships more than her American ones. During the interview, she said twice that Japanese students should not just “hang out” with people from their own country but make American friends. Although Sawa’s monocultural and bi-cultural networks were both extensive, she did not have any friends from other countries, except one from Spain that she did not spend much time with. This coincides with the studies’ results that the third and least developed relational network would be the multi-cultural one (Bochner et al., 1977; Strom, 1988).

The variable of “how” Sawa makes these friends was tested through asking where she gained American friends, resulting in nine total codes for this question. She answered: through people she already knew (n=4), in the dormitory (n=3), after class (n=1), and at a party (n=1). Although Furnham & Alibhai (1985) had found that over half of international students have little or no contact with people from the host country, Sawa had developed her extensive American network through her social contacts with them. Her friendships prove Maniwatana’s (1982) findings that opportunity for social contact will play a great part in whether or not an international student has intercultural friendships. Her first contacts and her closest friends came from people in her dormitory. This reveals that students who live in the dormitory have a better chance of getting the
contact that is so crucial to friendships, yet so hard to find for many international students.

Sawa was asked directly, but also revealed indirectly, her definition of friendships. She said that this was the most important relationship for her, especially in America because her family is not here. If such an importance is placed on friendships because, as Sawa said, they “are the only people who can help me,” then an American’s more casual approach of “the more friends, the better” (Barnlund, 1989, p. 43) can cause problems. Sawa spoke of America’s nonchalant attitude toward friendship as one of the worst experiences that she has had with American friends. An American may invite her to go somewhere but will forget to call her as promised when the day comes. She sees American invitations to be “lies” that do not come about. The other part of Barnlund’s (1989) discussion on Japanese friendships did not apply to Sawa in particular though, in that she did actively seek out friends. Her first close American friend was made because she spoke to him first.

Self-disclosure in friendships

According to Barnlund (1989), Americans will self-disclose more than the Japanese do and on a wider variety of topics. Sawa showed agreement with this statement when she talked about the biggest difference between her relationships in Japan and here in America. She said that in Japan, they were always talking about television, singers, or rumors, but in America, she talks about deeper subjects, like culture. In Japan, the topics were not too personal and revolved mainly around famous people, but in America, she talks about herself. Sawa did not believe that if she had stayed in Japan she would have moved to the deep subjects as she matured. If she was at a Japanese
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university, she would have continued down the same track of not self-disclosing, as in high school.

Self-disclosure played an important role in Sawa’s friendships. Both times that Sawa was asked how she knew that an American friendship had moved from the acquaintance level to that of a close friendship, her answer was self-disclosure. As both parties started to reveal personal information, she realized that this relationship was a close friendship; showing that self-disclosure increases with the level of relationship (Gudykunst & Nishida, 1994). When talking about her current best friend, Jenny, she mentioned that Jenny was the one who had to begin the disclosure before Sawa felt able to reciprocate, which confirms Barnlund’s (1989) idea that Americans disclose more.

As mentioned earlier, if Americans are self-disclosing more and self-disclosure increases with the level of the relationship, then Americans should have more close relationships than the Japanese. According to Sawa, it is the other way around. Three times in the interview, Sawa posed the idea that Americans have more casual friends and less close friends than the Japanese. She even claimed that many people in America do not have best friends. Her reason for this was that it is hard to know people on anything above an acquaintance level in America, although easy to gain access to the low-level relationship because people are so friendly. She thought it harder to find people to know in Japan but easier to become close friends because everyone is doing the same things culturally. This would mean then that although self-disclosure is a good indicator of closeness of a relationship, it may not be the biggest motivator to move closer; similarities would instead.
Similarities versus differences

Gudykunst (1995) proposed that those we are attracted to will be the ones that we will want to get to know better and that we will be attracted to those that we perceive as similar to us, with attraction coming before self-disclosure. In intercultural friendships, it may be hard to see much as similar because the cultural differences are so obvious. This is especially true in the low-level intercultural relationships, such as acquaintanceships (Gudykunst & Nishida, 1994). If what Sawa theorizes is true, that Americans have more acquaintanceships than close friendships, then this could be a problem for international students, who will start with all low-level relationships and in each one the cultural differences come out. When Sawa first came to the United States, she saw all of the cultural differences between her and Americans, and she thought that only the Japanese could understand her well. It was not until later that she began to see how similar she was to some Americans.

In discussing her close relationships, Sawa demonstrated the importance of finding similarities. Close intercultural relationships show a greater ability to see individuality and differences as positive and accommodate for that (Dziegielewska, 1988; Gudykunst & Nishida, 1994). In her first close intercultural relationship, there were few similarities. Although Sawa strove to be similar to her friend, the relationship eventually ended, but not because of cultural differences, though; it ended because of individual, personality differences. Her current close relationship with Jenny had lasted about three years and became much closer in the past year. In this relationship, they realized how much they had in common (similar experiences in relationships, hobbies, and interests). Although there were some differences in how they handled things emotionally, the
women worked through those and accommodated for each other's individual styles of communication.

Hofstede's Variables

One of the most interesting results of this study was how Sawa did not fit into the levels set out by Hofstede (1984). Although not conforming to the Japanese scores on each item, neither did she exactly meet the American's scores. Instead, she created a "third culture" that met somewhere in the middle (Useem and Donoghue, 1963). Three of the areas (individualism-collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity-femininity) were looked at in this study. Power distance was not addressed because nothing about power or authority came up in the interview about friendships.

Individualism-collectivism

One aspect that varies between America and Japan is that of individual goals, with individualistic societies pursuing them and collectivistic moving them aside for the goals of the group (Triandis, 1988). Sawa did not demonstrate the collectivistic desire to look after the group's goals. When discussing her future, she mentioned only her personal goals and the last possible option in her mind would be to return to Japan. The fact that her number one goal was to become a chef seems more like an "American Dream" than that of a Japanese who would put family, who are residing in Japan, first.

Sawa did not see Japan's collectivism as being positive in society. Three times she mentioned that the Japanese are all doing the same thing and going down the same "set road, or set street." Twice she spoke about how this is different from America, where "everybody's doing different things." In one discussion about these differences, she talked about how she thinks the Japanese way of going down the "set road" is not
what she wants. Instead she would like to have her life be more like an American's: "I'd rather, like, start something new, like, think about what I want to do really than go that way."

Another aspect of a collectivistic culture is an indirect, non-confrontational communication style, whereas individualistic cultures would feel free to say what they think and believe directly even if it may cause conflict (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997). Because she is from a collectivistic society, Sawa should not feel free to say what she feels or believes if it may cause conflict with someone else and should shy away from those who might cause conflicts with her. Yet, in the interview, she called the Americans "selfish" and was therefore not too worried about speaking freely or causing a little conflict, even though the interviewer was an American and could have been offended. She also stated twice that different views, including "selfishness," can cause conflict but that this can be positive as it may be "enhancing her mind or understanding" and be "more interesting." Ironically, though, the reason she called Americans selfish was because they do not have enough respect for people and are "more individualistic." So, Sawa seemed to be straddling the line between individualism and collectivism. While no longer embracing the "Japanese way," she did not find herself running after the American one either.

One further issue of individualism-collectivism is the in-group. This is the group that an individual is most concerned with, is willing to cooperate with, and would have some discomfort or pain if separated from (Triandis, 1988). Those in a collectivistic culture will have strong ties to in-groups that are considered traditionally to be a part of this person's group, such as family (Barnlund, 1989). In individualistic cultures, in-
groups are defined by the individual and what s/he chooses to be a part of, such as clubs (Triandis, 1988). Twice Sawa mentioned that she did not think the Japanese international students should stay in their traditional in-group of only Japanese, but should try to get involved with other ones. Although she admitted that there is a benefit to being with Japanese (because they can help each other adjust to living in a different culture), she said they should not to spend all of their time together.

Her own definition of the in-group changed from only Japanese to include Americans when she realized that both could understand her and she stopped worrying about her English. A major problem when she first came to America was that she was too afraid to speak up because her English would be bad. At this time, she was still demonstrating her collectivistic ideas about the in-group; though she was trying to expand her in-group to Americans, she was afraid that talking would show that she did not really belong to the in-group that she wanted to be a part of. In essence, Sawa had again taken both cultures and melded them together into one in which she portrays both individualistic and collectivistic characteristics. This was best illustrated in her statement giving advice to Japanese students in America: “Go out and um, get crazy. That’s what Americans like.” Be an individual because that is what the group wants.

Uncertainty Avoidance

Sawa talked about the issues of uncertainty avoidance six times within the interview. Twice her comments addressed avoiding uncertainty because of unfamiliarity with Americans and their rules, and the other four times about expressing emotions. All six times, though, were the opposite of what was predicted would be the outcome for a person from Japan, based on Hofstede’s (1984) findings. Since Japan is high on
uncertainty avoidance, Sawa should have avoided situations where she was unsure what would be happening, but instead she claimed they were “more interesting.” Also, according to research on her culture, she should have avoided expressing her emotions, yet she did so openly when speaking about a friend. She and her friend expressed emotions of love, actually the mutual lack thereof, and she expressed her anger to him at a different time when he broke something that was not his and did not care about it. She told him that it was rude, that he should apologize, and that he should pay for it. The Japanese had a high score on uncertainty avoidance and should therefore be avoiding all of the situations in which Sawa seemed comfortable.

Masculinity-Femininity

Since Japan is considered a more masculine culture than America, Sawa’s relationships should have mainly focused on females. Instead, two of the three friends that Sawa concentrated on during her interview were males. Questions were only asked about her American friends, and so, she may have had more female Japanese friends than male ones, but as for the Americans, she had more male friends than female. Also, since the focus was on close friendships, this would mean that her close friends were mainly male which is in direct opposition with Gudykunst and Kim’s (1997) claim that high masculine cultures will have more intimate relations with the same-sex.

Discussion

Sawa’s comments did not follow the expected ones for someone from Japan, according to Hofstede (1984). During a meeting on intercultural issues at the Central States Communication Association/Southern States Communication Association Conference (1999), the idea of Hofstede’s variables being a “state versus a trait” was
discussed. The topic was brought up following the presentation of a paper that also found the Japanese to not follow his scores, but this time the students were in Japan, not exchange students (Blue, Konsky, Kapoor, Eguchi, 1999). Sawa also demonstrates that collectivism could be a state and not a trait. Instead of putting a label on countries and saying this person is from Japan so s/he must act like this, we should realize that these variables are on a continuum and that it is different for each person. An American collectivist could just as easily be found as a Japanese individualist.

One reason for this change in Sawa may have been her major area of study. Being a Communication Studies major encourages her to do self-reflection about herself, her culture, and how that affects her communication. This could have greatly changed her identity within the American culture. Although interviewing a communication major was an asset to the study, in that she was much more articulate and thoughtful about how intercultural problems might affect her, it could have made her uniquely more able to deal with those problems than most international students. Her classes, for instance, on interpersonal relationships must have prepared her better for cultural and relational problems than an international student studying business or computers.

Limitations to this study were the lack of generalizability and the informant’s major area of study. Although a case study is not generalizable, another study had found similar results of Japanese not fitting Hofstede’s variables (Blue et al., 1999). All detailed information about the researcher’s role, setting, participant, and method were given in an effort to increase external validity by making the study more reliable and able to be replicated. The questionnaire was included as a means to this also (see Appendix A). The study addressed internal validity by mentioning all possible biases on the part of the
researcher and under the section "Verification," in which audit trailing, member checks, peer examination, and participatory modes of research were done. Sawa's studies in communication also limited the research since the majority of international students at the University of North Texas do not study similar subjects. Because she has studied interpersonal relationships from an American perspective, she has a distinct advantage in making friends.

Since the purpose of this study was to give a foundation for intercultural friendships and to generate more studies, suggestions for further research are listed here:

1. Will students with majors that involve their talking with others (Communication, Journalism, Radio/Television/Film) help them to gain more friends, as they would be more practiced in the process of communication?

2. Do students in the dormitories really have more opportunities for social contact with the people from the host country than those who live in apartments? Do those students who live in apartments better follow Bochner, McLeod, and Lin's (1977) and Strom's (1988) findings of mono-cultural, bi-cultural and multicultural networks?

3. Will an international student have better success at making friends with someone who self-discloses first or second?

4. What makes some Americans feel comfortable with international students and friendlier to them than others?

5. Do the Japanese have more close friends and less casual ones than Americans do? If this is true, what are the causes of this?

6. How do successful intercultural relationships get beyond the "cultural differences" to seeing the person as an individual?
7. Will those international students who are striving to be similar to American ways be more or less successful in gaining friends? What if they begin going past what they feel comfortable with or against their personalities? Can these relationships last?

8. Do most international students move between their own culture's and the host culture's variables of individualism-collectivism? In a longitudinal study, will they return to their own culture's values when they return home? How will they be affected if they never return?

9. Would different views on uncertainty avoidance keep international students from making friends? Would different views on masculinity keep them from making friends with the opposite sex?
References


Appendix A

Interview Guide

1. How long have you been in the US?

2. What is your major and what is your status (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior)?

3. How much longer will your studies take?

4. After finishing, what do you plan to do?

5. In an average week, approximately how many hours of your free time do you spend with Americans? People from Japan? People from other countries?

6. In what situations do you have the most contact with Americans?

7. How did you seek out American friends when you first came to America?

8. How important is it for you to have friends in the US?

9. How many Japanese friends do you have in the US? How many close friends?

10. How many American friends do you have in the US? How many close friends?

11. Define friendship.

12. Has your definition of friendship changed since arriving in the US?

13. How many close and casual friends does the average person in your culture have?

14. What do you think is the typical American definition of friendship?

15. How many close and casual friends does, in your estimation, the average person in the US have?

16. In what ways are your friendships at home different from your friendships with Americans? (qualities, activities, verbal and nonverbal communication, conversation topics, etc.)

17. If you have a personal problem, who do you tell
18. What are the positive and negative consequences of making friends with Americans?

19. How is a fellow Japanese regarded who has a lot of American friends?

20. Who was your first American friend?

21. How long had you known this person?

22. How long have you been friends?

23. How and where did this friendship begin?

24. Describe how it continued and developed.

25. How did you know that this was a close friendship?

26. In what areas are you similar to this person? (attitude/vales, morality, background, appearance) How important are these similarities to you? When do the similarities seem to come out more?

27. In what areas are you different? (attitude/vales, morality, background, appearance) How important are these differences to you? When do the differences come out?

28. Did this friendship change your attitude toward Americans or friendships in any way?

29. Who was your best American friend presently?

30. How long had you known this person?

31. How long have you been friends?

32. How and where did this friendship begin?

33. Describe how it continued and developed.

34. How did you know that this was a close friendship?

35. In what areas are you similar to this person? (attitude/vales, morality, background, appearance) How important are these similarities to you? When do the similarities seem to come out more?
36. In what areas are you different? (attitude/vales, morality, background, appearance)

   How important are these differences to you? When do the differences come out?

37. Did this friendship change your attitude toward Americans or friendships in any way?

38. Have you had any bad experiences with Americans? How did this affect your ideas about friendships in America?

39. Do you think that is easy or hard to make American friends? Why or why not?

40. Do you think that most Japanese would agree with you on this? Why or why not?

41. If you were asked to give advice to a fellow Japanese about how to make a friend in the US, what would your advice be?

Recall a recent conversation with the close friend in which the friend behaved appropriately: "conduct that is acceptable and expected—what a close friend should do or say."

42. When did this conversation take place?

43. Where did it take place?

44. What was the main topic discussed?

45. What did the other person say and do that was appropriate?

46. As a result of the conversation, how did you feel about yourself?

47. How did you feel about the other person?

48. How did you feel about the friendship?
Recall a recent conversation with the close friend in which the friend behaved inappropriately.

49. When did this conversation take place?

50. Where did it take place?

51. What was the main topic discussed?

52. What did the other person say and do that was inappropriate?

53. As a result of the conversation, how did you feel about yourself?

54. How did you feel about the other person?

55. How did you feel about the friendship?