

## Japanese Less Open Than Finns Toward a Same-Sex Friend

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### Abstract

This research compares responses by adult Finns ( $N=38$ ) and Japanese ( $N=105$ ) after they appraised 50 potential conversation topics and rated them in terms of degree of truthfulness toward a same-sex friend. Three topics show no significant difference. Finns rate four topics lower, which deal with money and one's closest relationships. Japanese report 42% less willingness to 'frankly and directly express their opinions to a same-sex friend' and a lower ability to both 'freely decide to make friends with a same-sex friend' (24%) and to 'freely cut off contact with a same-sex friend' (52.6%). These findings indicate that Japanese 1) disclose less personal information than do Finns, 2) are less likely to express their opinions, and 3) find it more difficult to freely establish and to stop contact with a same-sex friend.

### Self-Disclosure

The social penetration theory states that progress in interpersonal relationships takes place through mutual increases in the depth of self-disclosures (Altman & Taylor, 1973). When interlocutors mirror each other on their levels of self-disclosure, the likelihood of mutual liking is enhanced through this uncertainty reduction, which could later lead to a friendship. Self-disclosure studies typically measure the amount and content of self-disclosure to a 'targeted' person, originally with only American subjects. Cosby (1973) offers a comprehensive review of self-disclosure studies, including a section on measuring sex, race, and cultural factors related to self-disclosure. More relevant studies alter the targeted person and compare Asians with English-speaking persons such as, native American and Japanese university students toward six relationships (i.e., stranger, father, mother, same-sex friend, opposite-sex friend, and an untrusted person) (Barnlund, 1975), Singaporean-Chinese and British to a close friend (Goodwin & Lee, 1994), Chinese and American adults toward parents, strangers, acquaintances, and intimate friends (Chen, 1995) and

American, Chinese, Japanese, Thai, and Vietnamese university students toward a same-sex school friend (McHugh, 1997).

### **Finnish and Japanese in Communication**

Published popular literature suggests that Finns and Japanese may share some cultural traits. This part includes a review of such features and examination of Japanese social relationships (acquaintance, friend, *nakama*, and close friend) and where Japanese stand in rejecting or confirming friendship relationship rules.

The communicative act of *silence* is the first common feature to be brought up. Finns appear to appreciate and tolerate it (Lehtonen and Sajavaara, 1985). Japanese are also known for their application of silence when communicating. Barnlund states that "... there is the well-advertised Japanese attraction to silence" (1989, p. 129), with it fulfilling several functions, such as truthfulness, social discretion, embarrassment, and defiance (Lebra, 1987, p. 347), and silence is considered the ultimate form of communication (Taylor, 1983, p. 130). And, in general, Japanese are taught that speaking out is disadvantageous in getting along in society and they attempt to avoid it, especially in formal situations (Okuda, 1975, cited in Ishii, Klopff, & Cambra, 1981).

Finns hold the stereotypical images of being silent, timid, taciturn, shy and introverted (Lehtonen & Sajavaara, 1985). Hill points out that the Finns don't fit the Nordic mold and to foreigners "... the Finns seem an almost inscrutable people, taciturn to the point of silence" (Hill, 1997, p. 233). Japanese behavioral patterns, on the other hand, include being 1) so polite and cautious that you never know what they are thinking, 2) accustomed to using vague words and ambiguous expressions so we don't know where they stand, 3) conformists, lacking individual opinions, 4) always expressing thanks and appreciation, 5) always apologizing, even when not necessary, 6) weighing the action of everything they do, 7) notoriously slow at making decisions, 8) very ethnocentric, 9) imitative, faddish, and overly impressed by status, and 10) too formal, except when they are out drinking (Condon, 1984, pp. 38-39). Both Finns and Japanese accept silence when communicating together but when Finns think their contribution is suitable, "... they say it, it is likely to be direct, sometimes devastatingly so, but with the best intentions" (Hill, 1997). This differs from the Japanese style since direct and frank pronouncements are seldom a feature found among Japanese. It is believed that Japanese do not necessarily lack a proper quantity of speech but rather that they seem unwilling to be forthright when they do converse.

Kirra (1999) examined critical incidents recorded in journals by non-Finns, living in Finland, on experiences deemed to be embarrassing, irritating, funny, strange, and so on, in order to present real examples to illustrate the Finns' concepts of independence strategies, self-deprecation, conversation

management techniques, and nudity. These may aptly apply to contemporary Japanese culture, as well. Kirra (1999) mentions that Finns apply independence strategies of politeness, which may serve to leave the other alone, to respect the other's privacy and to increase [social] distance. One example refers to turning down the offered cup of coffee, even though one was actually desired. In comparison, the Japanese giver may even degrade the proffered item to encourage its acceptance by the guest. For example, "Oh, this is just store-bought cake," when in fact the cake could have been purchased from an exclusive, expensive gourmet bakery. The guest is expected to reject the initial offering but then grudgingly accept it the second or third time it was offered.

Self-deprecation is an expression of modesty, which is considered an acceptable form of self-presentation among Finns, so when talking about oneself or introducing another, they prefer to speak modestly of their own and of others' personal accomplishments. Similarly, Japanese also appear modest when talking about themselves so they must rely on a third party to speak highly of their accomplishments, especially in the work environment to enhance their chances of promotion. So, when speaking about themselves, Japanese rarely boast but don't mind elucidating the abilities of another.

Finns' lack of nonverbal back-channeling, a conversation management technique, perplexes visiting non-Finn lecturers, who expect to see head nods or vocifications to signal comprehension or agreement by the listeners, but are often met with a steady, direct eye contact by Finns (Salo-Lee, 1997, cited in Kirra, 1999). Non-Finns can also expect Finnish speakers to include long pauses, often signaling turn taking among native English speakers, or for Finnish listeners to be neither critical of the speaker nor to interrupt the speaker (Sajavaara & Lehtonen, 1997, cited in Kirra, 1999). These features are also mirrored in Japanese native discourse styles.

Another prominent feature is related to nudity within the Finnish culture. Modern Finnish homes are often fitted with normal bathrooms plus a sauna, which is large enough for the whole family when the children are young (Kirra, 1999). Finland's sauna custom is quite prevalent, with an estimated 2 million saunas built for its 5 million population (Norros, 2001), and sauna bathing is so distinct from most other cultures that two official government Internet web sites explain this practice in some depth (Laaksonen, 2001; Vuori, 2000). Japanese, in comparison, construct home bathing tubs for a full-body soaking, which are located in separated, small, tiled rooms, away from the toilet. Japanese have actually coined the term *sukinshipu* ("Imidas," 1997, p. 135), referring to building human closeness, primarily through the father or the mother touching their young children, often while bathing at home. Japan's bathing custom extends far beyond just family members, but is practiced mainly in same-sex relationships. To promote and maintain human relations with important clients, Japanese businessmen often socialize over food and drink or

on the golf course, followed by communal bathing, which is intended to bring about closer human relations and hopefully long and mutually profitable business dealings. In major metropolitan areas, businessmen may bathe together at a *sentō* (public bath) or at a sauna, or even travel outside the city to an *onsen* (hot spring resort).

The concept of high-context communication (HCC) and low-context communication (LCC) culture also arises in literature on the Finnish and Japanese cultures. When providing advice about doing business in Finland, one publication ranks Finnish communication patterns as similar to Japanese and Asian, since the Finns also consider themselves to be a HCC culture ("The Finnish Institute," 1997, p. 19). A contrary view, from a group focusing on improving intercultural understanding, labels the Finns as individualistic while employing low-context communication, the same as the Germans and Americans ("International Business Culture," 2001). Hall (1981) views Japan as a HCC culture, while the USA, which is considerably above German-Swiss, Germans, and the Scandinavians, is regarded as a LCC culture. Generally speaking, people in HCC cultures make greater distinctions between insiders and outsiders, assume that their interlocutors can infer the problem from the context without having to specifically state it, and that figures in authority are personally and truly responsible for all of their subordinates.

The above reviewed similarities between Finns and Japanese are not found in systematic empirical studies. Five studies, three related to immediacy and two to argumentativeness have reported that Finns are more similar to Americans than to Japanese in at least these three concepts. Finns compared to Americans on the nonverbal immediacy construct reportedly revealed no significant differences, although men and women within the two culture groups are significantly different (Thompson, Klopf, & Sallinen-Kuparinen, 1991). When Japanese subjects are included, the Japanese rated themselves significantly less immediate than both the Americans and Finns (Klopf, et al., 1991a). American and Japanese women perceive themselves as more verbally immediate than both Japanese and American men, with the results showing a significant difference between the Japanese and Americans on the immediacy scale (Boyer, Thompson, Klopf, & Ishii, 1990).

In the two studies on argumentativeness (cited in Klopf, et al., 1991b), Finns reported significantly higher trait argumentativeness than Americans but no difference on the approach tendencies, while on avoidance tendencies, Americans scored significantly stronger (Klopf, et al., 1991b). The authors believe the results suggest that the Finnish students perceive arguing as an enjoyable experience, one entered into with energy and enthusiasm (Klopf, et al., 1991b). With Japanese and Americans as subjects, the results on the tendency to approach arguments and on general argumentativeness indicate a significant difference, while no significant difference in result on the tendency to avoid

arguments exists (Prunty, Klopff, & Ishii, 1990). In the five studies, Finns appeared more assertive than even Americans in argumentativeness. Furthermore, Japanese are shown to be significantly different from Americans on two traits: the tendency to approach arguments and on general argumentativeness.

The pioneering work by Hofstede (1983) offers us another means of comparing the American, Finnish, and Japanese cultures. Hofstede's comparison of 50 cultures on four indices (i.e., individualism, power distance, masculinity, and uncertainty avoidance) did not generate an overall cultural grouping of index values (I) putting Finns with the Japanese. The Power Distance Index (i.e., the extent to which members of a society accept that power in institutions and organizations is distributed unequally) shows Finns (I=33) lower than both the Japanese (I=54) and the USA (I=40). With the Uncertainty Avoidance Index (i.e., the degree to which the members of a society feel uncomfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity, which leads them to beliefs promising certainty and to maintain institutions protecting conformity) the Finns (I=59) are listed between the Japanese (I=92) and the Americans (I=46). The Individualism Index (i.e., a preference for a loosely knit social framework in society in which individuals are supposed to take care of themselves and their immediate families only) has the Finns (I=63) between the Japanese (I=46), and the Americans (I=91). The Masculinity Index (i.e., which stands for a preference for achievement, heroism, assertiveness, and material success) finds Finns (I=26) below both the Japanese (I=95) and the Americans (I=62). The Finns may share some overt cultural characteristics with the Japanese, but the cultural concepts of power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity appear closer in values to the American sample.

In summary, Finns are considered similar to the Japanese since they are both viewed as being silent, timid, taciturn, shy and introverted. Other Finnish cultural behavioral patterns, such as applying independence strategies, self-deprecation, lack of back-channel signaling, and nude same-sex bathing, further support this view. However, studies about verbal immediacy, nonverbal immediacy, and argumentativeness, along with their dissimilarities on common cultural constructs such as power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism, and masculinity, cast doubt on their apparent, close cultural distance.

This paper focuses on self-disclosure and compares the extent to which Finns and Japanese would truthfully express the requested information on the 50 proposed conversation topics to a peer, a same-culture, and a same-sex friend. Although some overt cultural patterns appear similar, Finns are expected to report higher disclosures on the 50 proposed topics, since anecdotal evidence points to the Finnish propensity to frankly tell their own opinions, when appropriate. Attributes of some Japanese social relationships, such as acquaintance, friend, and close friend, are examined to clarify the attitudes that

Japanese hold toward these relationships. By learning about the disclosure patterns and the friendship formation practices in a targeted culture, sojourners enhance their possibilities of building constructive and satisfying human relations with members of that culture.

## Method

### Subjects

The Japanese sample includes 105 adult Japanese, 55 Males, 50 Females, and age averaged 34.09,  $SD = 13.02$ , who are the relatives and acquaintances of third-year, fourth-year, and graduate students at a university located in western Japan. These students collected the surveys and the stamped envelopes and later either mailed them back or hand delivered the completed surveys. The adult Finnish sample, 15 Males; 23 Females, is nearly five years older with a mean age of 38.84,  $SD = 12.59$ , mostly residing in the Helsinki area including relatives, acquaintances, and colleagues of an associate, who personally distributed to them and, later, collected the completed survey forms.

### Instruments and Procedure

Participants completed the survey instrument titled "Telling Information Across Four Same-Sex Social Relationships" (McHugh & Nieminen, 2000) back translated into their native languages (van de Vijver & Leung, 1997). For each of the four same-sex social relationships (acquaintance, friend, close friend, and best friend), participants rated 50 conversation topics on a five-point scale with a conceptual definition for each of the five (i.e., would definitely, probably, probably not, or definitely not truthfully say the requested information, or undecided). The four same-sex social relationships were defined on a relational scale:<sup>1</sup> 1) *an acquaintance* is a shallower relationship than with *a friend*, 2) *a friend* is between *an acquaintance* and *a close friend*, 3) *a close friend* is a deeper relationship than with *a friend*, and 4) *the best friend* is a deeper relationship than with *a close friend*.

Participants were requested to read the purpose, the introduction, the four same-sex social relationships and the conceptual definition for each of the five response categories. Then, they read the example and provided basic biographical data along with research, such as the contact frequency and conversational content with people within the four social relationships. They rated questions on a 5-point scale regarding the extent to which they would truthfully say the requested information: definitely (5), probably (4), undecided (3), probably not (2), and definitely not (1). Missing cases were excluded from the analysis.

## Results

The *t*-test result showed that Finns reported higher mean scores on all items except for the items numbered 32, 33, 44, and 45 (Table 1). Finns and

Japanese showed no significant difference on three items: 1, 32, and 45. Finns reported no variance on items 26, 27, 28, and 29, since they unanimously scored these topics as *would definitely truthfully say the requested information*. Finns reported little variation in their belief that they could frankly and directly express their opinions to each of the three relationships, ranging from about 89% to 94% (Table 2). Japanese, on the other hand show a wide range from about 25% with the acquaintance to about 98% with a close friend. Also results indicated that Finns believed that they had control to both make and cut off contacts with a same-sex friend, ranging from about 97% to 100% (Table 2). Only about 76% of the Japanese ( $N=100$ ) believed they could freely make a same-sex friend, while about 44% ( $N=101$ ) felt that they could freely cut off contacts with a same-sex friend.

## Discussion

**Table 1 Means (Standard Deviation) of Disclosure to a Same-Sex Friend**

	nns	Japanese	<i>t</i>
1 your full name	(.16)	4.78 (.75)	1.58ns
2 your father's full name	(.31)	4.31 (1.08)	3.33***
3 your mother's full name	(.27)	4.29 (1.08)	3.58***
4 your home mailing address	(.16)	4.32 (.94)	4.25***
5 your home telephone number	(.16)	4.19 (1.10)	4.30***
6 your cellular telephone number	(.16)	4.21 (1.16)	3.99***
7 your e-mail address	(.16)	4.14 (1.20)	4.29***
8 your nickname while you were at middle school	(.70)	3.93 (1.27)	3.95***
9 the origin of your family name	(.65)	3.79 (1.29)	5.05***
10 your birthdate (but not year)	(.16)	4.27 (1.05)	4.07***
11 your birthdate (including year)	(.66)	4.27 (1.05)	3.30***
12 your exact weight	(1.07)	3.43 (1.45)	4.26***
13 your exact height	(.74)	3.96 (1.30)	3.71***
14 your health condition	(1.20)	3.91 (1.22)	2.24*
15 your waist size	(1.15)	3.21 (1.45)	4.64***
16 your teeth condition	(.97)	3.61 (1.42)	4.11***
17 the kind of reading material you like to read	(.16)	4.11 (1.07)	4.96***
18 the kind of movies you like to watch	(.16)	4.25 (.95)	4.68***
19 the kind of movies you do not like to watch	(.36)	4.13 (1.04)	4.57***
20 the kind of television programs you like to watch	(.23)	4.29 (.89)	4.55***
21 the kind of television programs you do not like to	(.32)	4.14 (1.04)	4.67***
22 the kind of inside-the-house games you like to play	(.65)	4.14 (1.08)	4.01***
23 the kind of outside-the-house activities you like to do	(.49)	4.14 (1.01)	4.54***
24 the kind of work you do to earn an income	(.27)	4.14 (1.04)	4.59***
25 the title of the book you most recently read	(.16)	4.08 (1.19)	4.62***

26	the name of the magazine you most recently read	(.00)	4.16 (1.12)	4.61***
27	the title of the movie you most recently watched	(.00)	4.28 (1.02)	4.35***
28	the name of the hobby you most recently did	(.00)	4.29 (.95)	4.64***
29	the name of the television program you most	(.00)	4.32 (.93)	4.50***
30	the name of the inside-the-house game you most	(.65)	4.16 (1.13)	3.78***
31	the name of the outside-the-house activity you most	(.65)	4.04 (1.17)	4.28***
32	the details of the work you do to earn an income	(1.67)	3.66 (1.33)	-0.38ns
33	the exact amount of your income or allowance	(1.03)	2.62 (1.38)	-3.48***
34	the name of the high school you graduated from	(.32)	4.02 (1.15)	4.90***
35	the latest academic level you completed	(.16)	3.98 (1.16)	5.25***
36	the name of an academic subject you liked the most	(.16)	4.20 (1.03)	4.63***
37	the name of an academic subject you disliked the	(.23)	4.16 (1.03)	4.65***
38	the name of the subject you were the best at school	(.46)	4.20 (1.01)	4.08***
39	the name of the subject you were the worst at school	(.51)	4.12 (1.08)	4.23***
40	the name of a sport you were the best at school	(.45)	4.21 (.99)	4.12***
41	the name of a sport you were the worst at school	(.46)	4.11 (1.07)	4.39***
42	the name of your closest personal relationship	(1.23)	3.46 (1.31)	3.41***
43	the general activities you do with your closest	(1.20)	3.45 (1.29)	2.74***
44	the exact activities you do with your closest personal	(.99)	3.34 (1.28)	-6.79***
45	the feelings you have toward your closest personal	(1.37)	3.01 (1.36)	-0.77ns
46	religious matters you do in daily life (prayer, go to	(1.54)	2.69 (1.34)	2.76**
47	your overall religious opinions	(1.01)	2.77 (1.35)	7.10***
48	your opinions about specific religious sects	(1.03)	2.74 (1.36)	7.04***
49	your overall political opinions	(1.01)	2.85 (1.34)	6.80***
50	your opinions about specific political parties	(1.08)	2.78 (1.33)	6.83***

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

**Table 2. Frankly and Directly Expressing One's Opinion**

		Finns	Japanese
Acquaintance	Yes	89.19%	25.49%
	No	10.81%	74.51%
Friend	Yes	89.19%	49.00%
	No	10.81%	51.00%
Close friend	Yes	94.59%	89.22%
	No	5.41%	10.78%

**Table 3. Establishing and Terminating the Relationship**

		Finns	Japanese
Can you freely decide to make friends with a same-sex friend?	Yes	100.00%	76%
	No	0.00%	24%
Can you freely cut off contact with a same-sex friend?	Yes	97.30%	44.55%
	No	2.70%	55.45%

Finns were found to more closely resemble native English-speakers' tendencies in disclosure patterns than the Japanese subjects. Only four topics are rated lower by the Finns (items 32, 33, 44, and 45). The first two items relate to work and income, which Americans considered inappropriate social topics (e.g., Ford, 1980).

### **Relationship Types and Disclosure**

The other two items rated lower by the Finns concern the 'closest personal relationship.' Finns appeared more willing to tell the general activities with their closest personal relationship, item 43, but not the exact activities or their feelings with their closest personal relationship, items 44 and 45, respectively. Item 44 possibly implies sexual activities for the Finnish people, for which most Finns consider an opposite-sex person as their closest personal relationship. Along the same line, a difference surfaced between the Japanese and the Finnish samples regarding participants selecting one of 10 possible closest personal relationships, e.g., husband, father, or opposite-sex lover. As the research information stating the closest personal relationship proved too discomforting for the Finns to tell, it was eliminated, but Japanese expressed no complaints in disclosing this information.

Japanese do not always rate an intimate, opposite-sex person as their closest personal relationship. When married Japanese ( $N=49$ ) reported their closest personal relationship, about 33% selected someone other than their spouse, with about 8% choosing *mother* and *daughter* and then about 10% for *same-sex best friend*. With single Japanese ( $N=49$ ), about 35% selected *same-sex best friend* and *opposite-sex lover* followed by about 12% for *mother*.<sup>2</sup>

Three more major points are possible reasons that can account for diverse ratings found in Tables 1, 2, and 3. The first point has to do with the substance of Japanese social relationships, such as acquaintance, friend, and close friend. The second point compares the rated intimacy levels of relationship terms by Americans and Japanese. The third point investigates differences among Japanese, British, Hong Kong Chinese, and Italians on which relationship rules they consider suitable with a same-sex friend.

Midooka (1990) discusses two relationships and three factors, which limit self-disclosure among Japanese. First, he argues that the concept of same-company, co-worker (i.e., *nakama*) relationships is stronger than the more familiar (i.e., *najimi*) relationships.<sup>3</sup> Japanese hold the utmost regard for peaceful relations, so they refrain from expressing themselves strongly so as not to compel others into an embarrassing (i.e., face-losing) situation. This tendency appears especially clear in the *najimi* relationship, but not in the closer *nakama* relationship (Midooka, 1990, p. 488). Midooka cites three additional conditions further inhibiting self-disclosure: 1) when the relationship between speakers becomes less intimate, 2) if the speaking partner is one's superior, or 3) if the interaction takes place in public. Finns, contrary to Japanese, may be equally

willing to truthfully say the requested information found in these 50 items to a *same-sex friend* as to a *colleague*.

In Table 2, Finns show little difference across the three relationships but the percentage of Japanese stating that they are willing to express their own opinions frankly and directly plainly rise as the relationships become more intimate. Findings in this paper concur with two former studies on Japanese interpersonal relationships. Cargile's (1998) study employed the qualitative approach to examine friendships and relationships by asking 16 native Japanese to clarify the five terms (i.e., *mikata*, *nakama*, *tomodachi*, *shinyuu*, *tsukiai*), which emerged as the most powerful in defining Japanese relationships. Views by Japanese men and women toward the terms *nakama*, *tomodachi*, and *shinyuu* are related to the findings of this paper. Japanese men more frequently refer to *nakama* in their work group or among their colleagues and less frequently refer to *nakama* as a person in a social group such as a hobby club or a sports association. Women about equally consider the *nakama* groups as those people of an interest group or of a former school affiliation, not work related as the men do. In contrast, female Japanese look at *tomodachi* as a dyadic relationship, which is closer, more personalized, and more satisfactory than the *nakama* relationship. Women feel close to the *tomodachi*, and the *tomodachi* is someone to have fun with, which results in a gratifying relationship. Japanese men most frequently consider *tomodachi* a general expression that could include a wide variety of relationships and a relationship that can be agreeable but which is not considered so very close. Men, unlike women, gain more pleasure from their group-oriented *nakama* relationships than with the *tomodachi* relationships. The third relevant term is *shinyuu*, which is viewed as a close, intimate friendship, possibly lasting one's entire life and may even exceed the depth and commitment of what Americans understand as a 'best' friend. A *shinyuu* can be emotionally relied on, you can open yourself easily to the person, and you have total trust in the person. No sex difference is reported in the nuance of *shinyuu*.

Gudykunst and Nishida (1986) compared samples from the U.S. (US) and Japan (J) on their rating of 30 relationships. Four terms, related to this paper, show the English word and the Japanese translation or approximation. Only the term *companion* shows no significant difference. These four terms are: acquaintance [*chijin*]; companion [*tomodachi*]; cohort [*nakama*]; and close friend [*shinyuu*]. The intimacy levels increase for the Japanese between the acquaintance, companion, and close friend relationships but the crucial finding here is that the Japanese rate *nakama* slightly more intimately than *tomodachi*, while the Americans rate it closer to *chijin* than to *tomodachi*.

The final part of this paper shows how Japanese are similar to and different from three other culture groups in regard to selecting the appropriate relationship rules. The Argyle and Henderson (1984) study compared how much agreement British, Hong Kong Chinese, Japanese, and Italians showed when

judging 43 possible relationship rules that should or should not be followed in a same-sex friendship. The subjects from Japan only registered five highly endorsed rules, followed by while subjects from Italy, Hong Kong, and Britain endorsed from 19 to 21 rules. Four highly endorsed common rules are: should respect the other's privacy, should trust and confide in one another, should volunteer help in time of need, and should not be jealous or critical of the other's relationships.

Argyle and Henderson (1984) factor analyzed the 43 friendship rules and labeled the first five factors as: 1) verbal intimacy and opinion exchange, 2) supportiveness (i.e., provisions of help in need, emotional support, trusting and confiding), 3) negative behavior (i.e., nagging, public criticism, disclosing confidences, etc.), 4) keeping the other informed and showing positive regard, and 5) ritual obligations. Comparing factor scores with the other three culture groups, the factor scores by the Japanese sample shows: a) factor scores on factor 1 and factor 4 are the lowest, b) the factor score on factor 2 is the highest, c) the factor score on factor 3 is the second lowest, and d) the factor score on factor 5 is the second highest. So, based on these relative rankings, Japanese same-sex friendships may be characterized as: that verbal intimacy and opinion exchange is less important, that a friend should be more supportive, that a friend should avoid negative behaviors toward a friend, that it is not so important to keep the friend informed, and that certain ritualistic obligations are necessary to observe.

A deeper exploration of these four culture groups (Argyle, Henderson, Bond, Iizuka, & Contarello, 1986) shows that the other culture groups highly endorse 16 common relationship rules while the Japanese group only acknowledges the four mentioned above. This suggests that for Japanese to become more successful at developing a same-sex friendship with one of these other culture groups, the culture-specific relationship rules should be explicitly learned beforehand. Even though the Japanese only highly endorse five relationship rules, that does not suggest that Japanese only recognize these five rules. It most likely means that vital relationship rules observed in Japanese society were not included in the survey instrument that was originally designed only for British subjects.

Finally, the Japanese subjects' natural inclination to select the midpoint on the response scale accounts for some of the observed significant differences compared with the Finnish sample. Japanese were more likely than Chinese, from Taiwan, who were more likely than either of the American or Canadian groups of 11th grade students, to mark the midpoint on the response scale. Additionally, the American students were more likely to record an extreme value on the response scale than the other three culture groups (Chen, Lee, & Stevenson, 1995). If the Finnish sample follows the American or Canadian response strategies by more often selecting the extremes on the rating scale, then

this trend could account for at least some of the variations in results between these adult Finns and Japanese.

### **Communication Context and Disclosure**

The type of requested information and the HCC Japanese culture may explain why Japanese rate most of the 50 topics lower than the Finns. Japanese culture aptly illustrates the notion of a HCC culture but the Finns' relative ranking is questionable. Gudykunst's exploratory research (1983) concluded that the communication style of international students, studying in the United States but from HCC cultures, were more cautious in their initial interactions with strangers, made more assumptions based on the strangers' backgrounds, and asked more questions about the strangers' backgrounds than did members of LCC cultures (1983, p. 26). The 50 topics found in Table 1 generally deal with personal preferences, not the individuals' personal background information.

In Table 2 we see that the Japanese sample clearly distinguishes differences in to whom they can frankly and directly express their opinions. Most likely the strength of the *tomodachi* relationship in Japan is weaker than a *friend* relationship in either the United States or in Finland because of competing interpersonal obligations. Japanese were found to typically show a low to moderate need to maintain interpersonal relationships, which may be due to other in-group affiliations, such as same-company co-worker relationships, that require extensive time and care (Ishii, Klopf, & Cambra, 1981). As brought up earlier, Gareis (1999) concluded that Japanese men felt a preference for the work-oriented and group-oriented *nakama* relationships than for the *tomodachi* ones. Less contact with a *tomodachi* could mean trust has not been formed, resulting in lower levels of self-disclosure. As a rule, once men are hired as regular, salaried employees, they stick with the same company until they at least reach mandatory retirement (Christopher, 1983; Taylor, 1983). Future promotion could be decided on by who has the best human communication skills and who has built up the best network within the company, often engendered by regular, informal outings.

Table 3 results may possibly be explained, in part, by the personal liberty that Westerners have in friendship formation and dissolution (Bell, 1981, cited in Gareis, 1999). Japanese women, in contrast, prefer dyadic *tomodachi* friendships (Gareis, 1999), many of which probably take place in small social groups, such as at personal skill-building or life-enrichment classes and at a sports circle. The entrance into the group of *tomodachi* could have been arranged by one of the regular members whom you like or whom you are obligated to for some reason. By withdrawing from the group, this person's feelings could be hurt or his or her prestige could be tarnished. To suffer in silence among the *tomodachi* is less important than the potential damage to the go-between person.

## Conclusion

This paper introduces several points to benefit intercultural understanding and to improve intercultural communications. When people from a culture group similar to the Finns meet up with Japanese, they should expect the Japanese to be less willing to disclose personal information even on daily topics that appear uncontroversial and safe. Where Westerners may openly, and nearly equally, express their personal opinions to various levels of social relationships, Japanese probably reserve this privilege to only their life-long close friends, *shinyuu*.

That Japanese reported a lack of free choice in establishing and terminating a same-sex friendship, unlike Finns, suggests that cultures may maintain conflicting but acceptable rules, possibly related to religious, social, or economic issues, when entering into or exiting from various levels of same-sex friendship. These rules are probably not fewer in number but only different in content. Broadening our awareness beyond our native, innate cultural behavioral patterns will certainly aid in improving our communication skills and relationships with other peoples.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> The decision to design this relational scale was partially prompted by remarks of Gareis (1999) of a lack of or inconsistencies in established, definitions of 'friend' and that most studies focus on best and close friendships, who points out that the German *freund* sounds similar to the English *friend* but actually implies close friend in the German usage (p. 433). In the Japanese-language survey, the term *yuujin* is written rather than *tomodachi*, a more widely spoken term. A learner's dictionary states that *yuujin* is the literary form (*A new dictionary*, 1982, p. 193).

<sup>2</sup> Two colleagues, who work at women's colleges in Japan, mentioned that Japanese female students seemed to separate having sex and building intimacy. One comment was that some young women seem to go about having sex with their regular boy friend but they fail to build intimate emotional bonds with him, unlike a comparable American couple would probably do. The other comment concerned female students who worked as "companions" (i.e., nicely dressed waitresses and servers of beverages) at privately sponsored gatherings, such as buffet banquets. Without hesitation and without a sense of wrongdoing, some "companion" women said they would accompany a man they met at such a gathering to a hotel and later receive 30-50,000 Yen from him.

<sup>3</sup> For a person, *najimi* is translated as 'a friend' (*Obunsha's comprehensive*, 1986), which suggests intimacy and familiarity, but seems to be a weaker relationship than an 'acquaintance.' With an acquaintance one would have some background information of the person but not normally with the *najimi*. A *najimi* could be someone person one often met at a favorite drinking place or, a steady customer for a proprietor of a bar or restaurant.

