

## **Business and Close Friendship Expectations in U.S., Russia and Croatia**

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*Expectations about friendship and how friends should act can vary across cultures complicating business interactions and leading to misunderstanding. This study investigated expectations about communication behaviors for close and business friends in Russia, Croatia and the United States. Significant differences in close friends and business friends were found between the U.S. and both Croatia and Russia. While few differences between Russian and Croatia were found for close friends, there were significant differences on the category of business friends. Implications for business relationships between these countries and classroom use of the findings are discussed.*

The recent 2014 Olympics in Sochi, Russia shone a spotlight on the importance of intercultural communication as people from around the world came together to work and play. The customs, values, and beliefs of Russia found a place among the worldwide discourse about sports, business, and statistics. Bloggers took to the page to discuss aspects of Russian culture that were found to be different or curious. Responses to some of these posts came from Russians who tried to clear up some of the areas of mystery around various cultural practices. One question asked ‘why don’t Russians smile?’ A Russian responded, “...if in Russia somebody smiles at you it means he likes you, if somebody asks how you are it means he is really interested. If somebody calls you friend it means you are real friend not just a stranger.” For the authors of the following study this response highlights the purpose for their research. In the United States smiling is a common nonverbal practice often not given much thought. Asking someone “how are you?” does not necessarily mean that you need or expect an answer. So when it comes to friends, the questions often arises “what kind of friend do you mean?” This question is especially important in preparing students to interact with other cultures in personal and business areas because these misunderstandings can directly affect the success of business and relationship development.

The term friend is a common expression that is found in most languages and cultures. Argyle & Henderson (1985) state, “friends are people who are liked, whose company is enjoyed, who share interests and activities, who are helpful and understanding, who can be trusted, with whom one feels comfortable, and who will be emotionally supportive.” (p. 64) Friendship is the most prevalent kind of personal relationship among individuals (Blieszner & Adams, 1992). The term friend can refer to many different types or categories of relationship such as *good friend*, *business friend*, etc. Just as the meaning or categories for these types of relationships varies by culture so do the rules of expected behavior.

This study specifically examined the expectations and rules for close and business friendships in Russia, Croatia, and the United States. Are there differences and similarities in expectations between

these cultures for these types of friends, and if so, what are the implications of these differences in personal and work relationships? In assessing these issues this study reviews the literature on cultural perspectives of friendships, the role of expectations and rules about communication behavior, and friendship in Russia, U.S. and Croatia.

## **PERSPECTIVES ON FRIENDSHIP**

There are two general cultural theories often used to explain relationship differences: Hofstede's individualism/collectivism theory (1998) and Lim's analytical/holistic theory (2009). Individualistic cultures value strong personal goals, autonomy, more loosely knit social frameworks and looking after one's own interests (Goodwin, 1999, Oyserman, Coon & Kimmelmeier, 2002). Collectivistic cultures have a preference for group achievement over individual achievement, (Goodwin, 1999), and hold the group more tightly. Using this lens, one would expect that people from individualistic cultures will have varying expectations for friends and a wider variety of relationships (types of friendships) than those from collectivistic cultures.

Lim's (2009) analytic/holistic theory contends cultures with an analytic world view perceive the world as independent objects and compartmentalize relationships such as friendship. The U.S., which is more analytic, would tend to label friendships determined by different contexts (Lustig & Koester, 1999, Uecker, Schmidt & Lau, 2014) such as close friends, business friends or friends at work, school friends, etc. The interaction with each type of friend will depend on the context in which the individual is at the time.

Cultures with a holistic world view would focus on how everything is interconnected across contexts evaluating the whole rather than the individual parts. This view sees the individual as a friend superseding all contexts and does not compartmentalize friendships as close, or business friendship. A friend will be a friend across all contexts and behaviors will not vary depending on the type of friend. (Choi, Koo & Cjoi, 2007; Nisbett, Peng, Choi & Norenzyan, 2001).

## **EXPECTATIONS AND RULES FOR FRIENDSHIP AND COMMUNICATION BEHAVIOR**

Friendship expectations are the behaviors that people do, and do not, prefer in relationships (Hall, 2011). They form the basis for rules/standards by which present and future friendships are judged (Fehr, 1996; Hall, Larson, & Watts, 2011; Furhman, Flannagan & Matamoros, 2009) and "show the importance of certain behaviors such as – giving emotional support, offering help when needed, and repaying debts and favors" (LaGaipa, 1987, p.135).

Rules can influence not only the formation of friendships, but also the maintenance and dissolution of them (Argyle, Furnham & Graham, 1981; Argyle & Henderson, 1985; Oswald, Clark, & Kelly, 2004; Clark & Ayers, 1993). They provide a framework that gives a relationship a sense of stability as they regulate potential sources of conflict that can disrupt the relationship. Rules may vary for work and home. For work relationships goals and rules are often task oriented, whereas in close relationships intimacy and mutual supportiveness rules may be more salient (Henderson & Argyle, 1986). Because these expectations/rules are based on cultural values, it is important in preparing students to interact and/or work with people from other cultures they know what to expect about different cultural rules for friendship behaviors in order for more effective communication.

## **FRIENDSHIP IN THE UNITED STATES, RUSSIA, AND CROATIA**

Friendship has been widely studied in the U.S. and is often characterized by two individuals of equal status who are similar in attitudes, values and activities for enjoyment (Sheets & Lugar, 2005). Altman and Taylor (1973) contend that as the friendship relationship continues, disclosures increase in number and kind. It is common in the U.S. to describe friendships in terms of categories or types such as close,

casual, business, etc., friends. This is consistent with previous research which identifies the U.S. as individualistic and analytic (Lim, 2009).

Research on the development of friendships in Russia is contradictory. Russia has traditionally been characterized as a collectivistic society that emphasizes group harmony and allegiance to working for the whole or unit to which one belongs over self (Sheets & Lugar, 2005). This suggests that there would be fewer differences in types of friendships among Russians. Other research however, indicates that Russia is becoming a more individualistic society. Preferences such as personal goals, autonomy, a loosely knit social framework, and looking after one's own immediate interests are becoming more evident (Naumov & Puffer, 2000; Goodwin, 1999). These characteristics are part of a more analytic view which would favor varying expectations for different types of friendships.

Little known research exists for Croatia, though it may be possible to link relational tendencies from similar societies. Croatia, similar to Russia, has a communist past and is currently moving towards a more democratic form of government in the past ten years. It is likely that both individualistic and collectivistic elements are present in this society, with more emphasis on the latter since the transition to a more open society is more recent than Russia.

There is little research comparing friendship between cultures. Sheets and Lugar (2005) studied friendship expectations between Russia and the U. S. by examining what happens when friends do not follow rules and meet expectations. They used six vignettes involving friends violating rules. Overall, Russians were more sensitive to violations of friendship rules than U.S. students, but also were less likely to confront a friend about the issue. The number one reason for Russians to end a friendship was betrayal of confidence and sharing a personal embarrassment with others which was third reason for U.S. men and fifth reason for U.S. women. The number one reason for U.S. students (both men and women) to end a relationship was a friend keeping secrets from them.

A 2014 study by Uecker, Schmidt, & Lau examined motivations for having friends in Russia, Croatia, and the U.S. and found that there were significant differences for several affective motivations between both close and business friends. U.S. participants valued disclosure more in both close and business friendships than either participants from Russia and Croatia. U.S. and Croatia valued trust and respect more for both close and business friendships than Russia. There were no real differences for companionship or the instrumental category of material support. For business friends, the U.S. participants favored the instrumental category of advice more than Russians and self-development help more than Croatians. Russians valued emotional support in business friendships more than either participants from the U.S. or Croatia. While these findings are very helpful in identifying possible misunderstandings in cross cultural close and business friendships, they do not identify the specific communication behaviors, other than advice giving and self-development, that comprise these motivations. For example, what are communication behaviors (rules) that comprise the categories of disclosure or emotional support? Are these behaviors the same for Russia, U.S. and Croatia? To identify what these behaviors (rules) are the following research question is advanced:

*R1: What are the differences in the expectations (rules) for specific communication behaviors in close and business friendships in Russia, Croatia, and the United States?*

## **METHODOLOGY**

For this study 123 United States, 81 Russian and 61 Croatian students completed a friendship survey about their expectations concerning communication behaviors for close and business friends. The survey was distributed to students in two universities (urban settings) in the U.S., three universities in Russia (two private urban and one public urban), and one private urban university in Croatia. The U.S. students were recruited during a campus research night at one institution and as part of an interpersonal communication class at the other. The Russian students were studying English, and the Croatians were studying English and business. Although all surveys were completed in English, the Russian and Croatian professors felt their students were proficient in reading and understanding the surveys.

The survey used behaviors adapted from Fehr (1996) to test the various rules for communication behaviors in affective and instrumental categories. The affective rules tested were: disclosure (expect friend to listen and being able to share displeasure about a friend with friend); trust and respect (expect friend to share and keep secrets, give unconditional acceptance); emotional support (expect friend to provide encouragement, forgiveness, resolve conflicts, have positive affect- be happy for you when things good happen); companionship (expect friend to relieve loneliness, do activities with them, invite to your home). The behaviors for the instrumental category were: material support (expect friend to give money, food, possessions). People were asked if they expected the behavior from close and business friends. If they expected the behavior they choose 1, if not 2. T- tests were run between countries to identify significant differences in expectations of behavior.

## **RESULTS**

For close friends significant differences were found for several communication behaviors on affective areas and none on the instrumental behaviors. (Table 1 - Appendix) In disclosure U.S. students expected that a close friend would listen more than Russian students and that they would be able to share their feelings of displeasure about the friend's actions more than either Russians or Croatians. For trust and respect significant differences were found in that U.S. students expected to be able to share secrets and receive unconditional acceptance from close friends more than either Russian and Croatian students. In emotional support U.S. students also expected more emotional support behavior such as encouragement, forgiveness and working out conflict with close friends than Croatians and more forgiveness from a friend than Russians. Emotional support was the only area in which a significant difference between Russians and Croatians was found. This difference was that Russians expected a close friend to provide more encouragement than Croatians. For companionship the only significant difference was that Russians expected a friend to relieve loneliness more than U.S. students.

For business friends there were also several significant differences on affective behaviors and only one for instrumental behaviors. (Table 2 - Appendix). In disclosure there were significant differences in that U.S. students expected business friends to listen more than Croatians and Russians. U.S. students also expected to be able to share their displeasure with a business friend's actions more than Croatians. There was only one significant difference in the trust and respect behaviors in that Russian students expected to be able to share secrets with business friends more than Croatians. There were several significant differences on emotional support behaviors. U.S. students expected a business friend to provide encouragement more than either Russians or Croatians and they also expected forgiveness from a business friend more than Russians. Russian students expected to be able to work out conflicts with business friends more than either Croatians or U.S. students. Positive affect (expecting a friend to be happy for you when good things happen to you) was significant in that U.S. students expected it more in business friendships than either Russians or Croatians, but Russians expected it more than Croatians. There were also several significant differences on companionship. Russians expected business friends to relieve loneliness more than Croatians or the U.S. students, although the U.S. students expected it more than Croatians. The U.S. and Russians both expected business friends to participate in activities (such as going out) more than Croatians. For the instrumental behaviors, only one significant difference was found. Russians expected business friends to provide more possessions (food, clothing, etc.) than Croatians.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Close Friends**

These findings identify areas of possible misunderstanding between cultures in friendships. For close friends U.S. expects more affective behavior than either Russia or Croatia. U.S. participants expect to be able to share secrets and their displeasure with a friend's actions; receive unconditional acceptance and forgiveness more than either Russians or Croatians. The U.S. willingness to express displeasure with a

friend's actions and the Russians' reluctance is consistent with previous studies. (Matsumoto, Takeuchi, Andayani, Kouznestova & Krupp 1998; Sheets & Lugar 2005). Sheets & Lugar (2005) contend the difference "may originate in collectivism, where direct confrontation with others is discouraged in order to maintain intragroup harmony" (p. 137). U.S. students also expect close friends to listen more than Russians, and to be willing to work out conflict settings more than Croatians. Overall, the U.S. students had higher expectations of close friends' behavior than did the Russians and Croatians. The Russians and Croatians were similar on all communication behaviors expectations except for encouragement, with Russians expecting more encouragement from a friend than Croatians.

These differences in affective expectations can create misunderstanding. For example, U.S. participants may be disappointed by what they had thought to be close Russian and Croatian friends when these friends do not conform to the level of response on these affective behaviors. Conversely, U.S. participants may also assume that behaviors such as sharing secrets, expressing their displeasure or expecting quick forgiveness are acceptable with their Russian and Croatian friends when they are not. U.S. behavior in these instances may irritate Russian and Croatian friends and make the U.S. friends appear demanding.

### **Business Friends**

There were more differences between cultures for business friends than close friends, particularly between Russia and Croatia. While there was only one significant difference between Russia and Croatia on their expectations of close friends there were seven differences in their expectations for business friends. This suggests that the business relationships are more complicated and varied. Even the concept of a business friend might be different between these two cultures.

For business friends similar to close friends most of the changes were in the affective categories (disclosure, emotional support and companionship) rather than instrumental categories. However, unlike with close friends where the U.S. consistently had higher expectations, there was more variation. For example, while the U.S. student expected to be able to show displeasure and work out conflicts more than Russians and Croatians for close friends, for business friends these behaviors were expected more from Russians than either the U.S. or Croatian participants. Similarly while there were few differences in companionship between the cultures with close friends, Russians expected business friends to alleviate loneliness and participate in activities more than either Croatians or U.S. U.S. students did expect business friends to relieve loneliness more than Croatians. Other shifts in behavior expectations occurred in encouragement (positive regard) and listening. While there were relatively few differences in regard to positive regard between the cultures with close friends, U.S. participants did expect more positive affect with business friends than either Russia or Croatia. In listening although the U.S. participants and Croatians were similar in close relationships, they differed for business relationships with the U.S. expecting business friends to listen more.

Knowing there are these distinctions between cultures indicates a need for changing behavior expectations when working in a business relationship as opposed to a close relationship in order to avoid misunderstanding. For example, U.S. participants might assume that the lack of encouragement and positive affect from their Russian and Croatian friends means that these business friends are uninvolved or disengaged from the transaction. Russians may not understand U.S. and Croatians hesitations to share secrets in business settings. The Croatians failure to invite Russian and U.S. business friends to participate in activities could be perceived as distant. Similarly the Russians and U.S. business friend's insistence on arranging outside activities can be seen as intrusive by Croatians. When people do not respond in the way that is expected misunderstandings occur which can create stress and possible distrust in business relationships.

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND THE CLASSROOM**

Close and business friendships are critical for effective intercultural communication. While cultural values may seem similar (disclosure, emotional support, etc.), the communication (behavior) rules for

these values may vary by culture. This study identifies some distinctions in these behaviors (rules) for affective and instrumental categories of friendship for Russia, U.S., and Croatia.

This study also demonstrates the importance of identifying specific behaviors (rules) rather than using general categories such as disclosure, emotional support. For example while Uecker, Schmidt, and Lau (2014) found disclosure was important for both the U.S. and Russia in close and business relationships these findings show that disclosure may be behaviorally interpreted differently as in the rules on sharing displeasure with a friend in this study. Previous studies also showed emotional support more of a motivation for Russians than the U.S however, when specific communication behaviors were examined in three of the four behaviors U.S. students had higher expectations than Russians. (Uecker, et.al, 2014). Future studies should examine more of these specific behaviors.

Given the variations between Croatia and Russia on the category of business friends, more research needs to be done to clarify this type of relationship. What does a business friend mean in various cultures? Additionally, this study only identified differences in expectations not the importance of these behaviors. More research should be done to identify the relative importance of these behaviors similar to approach used by Sheets and Lugar (2005). This research would aid in intercultural understanding and improving relationships.

Finally, this study provides some specific examples for use in the classroom. The surveys given in the study can be given to the class so that students can develop their own profile for analysis and discussion. Their expectations can then be discussed in terms of what they think is appropriate in business friendships and how these expectations might differ for different cultures. The authors of this article have used these findings to set up cases or role play situations for their classes for various cultures.

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APPENDIX

**TABLE 1**  
**CLOSE FRIENDS DIFFERENCES**

<i>Category</i>	<i>U.S</i>	<i>Croatia</i>	<i>Russia</i>	<i>U.S/Croatia</i>	<i>Croatia/Russia</i>	<i>U.S./Russia</i>
<i>Disclosure</i>	mean	mean	Mean	p-value	p-value	p-value
Q1: If I need to talk, this person will always listen.	1.01	1.02	1.07	.74	.12	.02*
Q6: If this person upsets me, I am able to let him/her know.	1.03	1.16	1.11	.00*	.28	.03*
<i>Trust &amp; Respect</i>						
Q7: No matter what I do, this person will accept me.	1.01	1.15	1.07	.00*	.08	.04*
Q12: I can share secrets with this person.	1.01	1.07	1.07	.05*	.83	.02*
<i>Emotional Support</i>						
Q3: If I set a goal, this person will support and encourage me.	1.01	1.15	1.05	.00*	.02*	.10
Q5: If I do something wrong, this person will forgive me.	1.01	1.10	1.07	.01*	.44	.04*
Q8: If we have a fight or argument, we will work it out.	1.02	1.13	1.07	.01*	.22	.07
Q10: If something good happens, this person will be happy for me.	1.02	1.00	1.03	.26	.15	.57
<i>Companionship</i>						
Q4: If I am lonely, this person will provide companionship.	1.02	1.05	1.09	.32	.32	.03*
Q13: I could go to a movie, play, concert, or sporting event with this person.	1.01	1.05	1.06	.13	.81	.06
Q14: This person would invite me to dinner at their home.	1.02	1.05	1.02	.32	.39	.83
<i>Material Support</i>						
Q2: If I needed financial help, this person would give it to me.	1.28	1.13	1.09	.31	.41	.07
Q9: If I need food or clothing, this person will provide it.	1.05	1.02	1.12	.27	.37	.45



**TABLE 2**  
**BUSINESS FRIENDS DIFFERENCES**

<b>Category</b>	<b>U.S</b>	<b>Croatia</b>	<b>Russia</b>	<b>U.S./Croatia</b>	<b>Croatia/Russia</b>	<b>U.S./Russia</b>
<i>Disclosure</i>	mean	mean	Mean	p-value	p-value	p-value
Q1: If I need to talk, this person will always listen.	1.83	1.93	1.89	.05*	.36	.16
Q6: If this person upsets me, I am able to let him/her know.	1.63	1.72	1.45	.25	.00*	.01*
<i>Trust &amp; Respect</i>						
Q7: No matter what I do, this person will accept me.	1.92	1.92	1.88	.99	.49	.41
Q12: I can share secrets with this person.	1.91	1.95	1.83	.33	.02*	.08
<i>Emotional Support</i>						
Q3: If I set a goal, this person will support and encourage me.	1.43	1.77	1.75	.00*	.79	.00*
Q5: If I do something wrong, this person will forgive me.	1.58	1.87	1.91	.00*	.87	.10
Q8: If we have a fight or argument, we will work it out.	1.60	1.61	1.41	.96	.01*	.01*
Q10: If something good happens to me, this person will be happy for me.	1.31	1.80	1.60	.00*	.01*	.00*
<i>Companionship</i>						
Q4: If I am lonely, this person will provide companionship.	1.83	1.93	1.70	.05*	.00*	.03*
Q13: I could go to a movie, play, concert, or sporting event with this person.	1.45	1.64	1.39	.02*	.00*	.37
Q14: This person would invite me to dinner at their home.	1.53	1.57	1.45	.60	.13	.27
<i>Material Support</i>						
Q2: If I needed financial help, this person would give it to me.	1.59	1.61	1.50	.86	.16	.16
Q9: If I need food or clothing, this person will provide it.	1.84	1.93	1.78	.07	.01*	.27