Friendship and Gender in Cultural-Psychological Perspective: Implications for Research, Practice, and Consultation

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Previous research documented differences in friendship such that people in various North American settings reported more friends, emphasized emotional support, and de-emphasized instrumental support relative to people in various West African settings. We used an experimental manipulation to test the hypothesis that these patterns reflect affordances for abstracted independence and embedded interdependence. Participants from universities in Ghana (n = 67; 53% women) and the U.S.A. (n = 71; 47% women) completed individual (“I am . . .”) or collective (“We are . . .”) versions of the Twenty Statements Test. They then completed measures of friendship experience. Results replicated cross-national differences and provided some evidence for hypothesized effects of the manipulation. Participants in the abstracted-independence condition reported “more friends than others” and (in the Ghanaian setting) emphasized emotional support over instrumental support to a greater extent than did participants in the embedded-interdependence condition. Discussion focuses on implications of international perspectives in psychology for research, practice, and consultation about relational belonging.

Keywords: African, friendship, gender, intersectionality, social support

A West African colleague described an incident from an orientation session for exchange students traveling to the U.S.A. The session facilitator, who had completed her first year in the U.S.A., advised students to exercise caution regarding friendship with Americans. She noted that Americans made friends easily with many different people, but she warned that people who called on these relationships for support might find themselves disappointed. Just because Americans call you a friend, she concluded, does not mean that they really are your friend.

Although no doubt overstated, the difference in approaches to friendship implicit in the facilitator’s comments—an open construction of friendship in North American settings versus a guarded construction of friendship in West African settings—resonates with previous research. In one study, participants across diverse U.S.A. settings typically claimed many friends and generally responded as if a large friendship network is self-evidently positive, whereas participants across diverse Ghanaian settings typically claimed a small number of friends and frequently expressed caution about a large friendship network (Adams & Plaut, 2003).

Cultural–Psychological Foundations of Relationality

How is one to interpret these differences? Drawing on international perspectives on psychology, informed by extensive participant-observation field research in West African settings, and supplemented by intellectual training in African Studies, our account of these differences emphasizes broader cultural-psychological foundations of relationality. Specifically,

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this perspective suggests that the relatively open approach to friendship implicit in responses of people in U.S.A. settings is not merely natural, but instead reflects cultural ecologies of abstracted independence associated with forces of neoliberal individualism (Triandis, 1995). These cultural ecologies promote an experience of self as an atomistic entity insulated from context and an associated experience of relationship as a relatively frictionless “free market” populated by unfettered “free agents” who feel at liberty (but ironically compelled) to choose their own relationships (Adams & Plaut, 2003; Anderson, Adams, & Plaut, 2008; Fiske, 1991). In contrast, this perspective suggests that the relatively cautious approach to friendship implicit in responses of participants in West African settings reflects cultural ecologies of embedded interdependence that promote an experience of self in terms of inherent connection to context (e.g., Riesman, 1986; Tengan, 1991). Rather than a personal choice, these cultural ecologies promote an experience of relationship as an environmental affordance: that is, something provided for in the structure of everyday life. Instead of a frictionless, free market of relationship, these worlds promote more adhesive constructions in which obligations run deep and people feel less freedom (or desire) to construct and “artificially” maintain a large number of connections (Fiske, 1991).

Implications for Network Size

Different cultural ecologies and associated constructions of relationship have implications for the size of a person’s friendship network through influence on the experience of agency and motivation. As a paradigmatic voluntary relationship (see Carrier, 1999; Wiseman, 1986), friendship resonates with frictionless constructions of relationship, associated with cultural ecologies of abstracted independence, that afford people freedom to interact with as many friends as they have skills or resources to make (e.g., Goodwin, 1999; Wheeler, Reis, & Bond, 1989). This sense of freedom is partly a function of increased opportunity and experience of agency (Palisi & Ransford, 1987; see also Yuki and his collaborators on “relational mobility”; Yuki et al., 2007; Schug, Yuki, & Maddux, 2010), but it also reflects a sense of inherent insulation from strained relationships (Adams, 2005). People have a sense of freedom not only to make a large number of friends, but also to discontinue friendships that impose too much “drag” on pursuit of happiness. The incentives for creating connections in cultural ecologies that do not readily afford them, combined with possibilities to escape excessive obligations or strained connections, foster a growth or promotion orientation toward friendship (Higgins, 1996, 1997): a motivation to cultivate a large and varied network to serve needs for companionship.

In contrast, cultural ecologies of embedded interdependence grant people less opportunity for relationship formation and entail more adhesive forms of friendship characterized by extensive obligations. Combined with reduced incentives for relationship creation in cultural ecologies that readily afford connection, this stickiness of relationship fosters a maintenance or prevention orientation toward friendship: a motivation to limit friends to a dependable few to decrease potential for interpersonal friction (Higgins, 1996; see also Elliot, Chirkov, Kim, & Sheldon, 2001; Hamamura, Meijer, Heine, Kamaya, & Hori, 2009; Hashimoto & Yamagishi, 2013).

Care and Support

Similarly, different cultural ecologies and associated constructions of relationship have implications for constructions of care and support. Again, constructions of relationship associated with worlds of abstracted independence afford a promotion orientation (i.e., toward self-expression and pursuit of emotional satisfaction) that suggests a construction of support as provision of a secure emotional base for exploration (Morelli & Rothbaum, 2007). In these cultural ecologies, the idea of “sharing emotion” refers to tendencies of intimate disclosure for purposes of expansive growth and social penetration (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Mesquita, 2001; Parks & Floyd, 1996; Wright, 1978), tendencies that are keys to healthy friendship given the need to actively create and sustain connection.

In contrast, constructions of relationship associated with worlds of embedded interdependence afford a prevention orientation (toward self-restraint and dutiful obedience; e.g., Fiske, 1991; Higgins, 1996; Miller, 1994) that sug-
gests an emphasis on the “materiality of care” (Coe, 2011): that is, demonstration of concern via dutiful performance of reciprocal obligations for practical support and tangible assistance (Bolten, 2012). To the extent that people engage in “sharing emotion,” it is less about disclosure of personal experience and more about helping to bear the everyday concerns associated with the emotional experience (see Adams & Plaut, 2003; Mesquita, 2001; Morelli & Rothbaum, 2007).

Gender and Friendship: An Alternative Perspective on Interdependent Relationality

Our framework for understanding cultural-psychological foundations of relationship has its distal roots in a framework for understanding cultural-psychological foundations of self: specifically, the distinction between independent and interdependent selfways (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Markus, Mullaly, & Kitayama, 1997). Other investigators have also applied this distinction to make sense of gender differences in relationship (see Cross & Madson, 1997). Building on the idea that men’s experience reflects independent selfways and women’s experience reflects interdependent selfways, they propose that this gender difference in selfways may promote gender differences in relationship that researchers have observed in Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic (i.e., WEIRD; Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010) settings. These differences include the tendency for men to be less expressive and less adept at providing emotional support (Bank & Hansford, 2000; Burleson, 2003), to engage in less intimate self-disclosure with friends (Dindia & Allen, 1992), to regard common activities rather than intimate talk as the essence of same-sex friendship (Caldwell & Peplau, 1982), and to rate their same-sex friendships as less pleasurable than do women (Reis, Senchak, & Solomon, 1985).

This presents a puzzle. On one hand, the theoretical framework associated with research on gender differences links the concept of interdependent selfways to greater openness and emphasis on emotional intimacy in friendship among women than men. On the other hand, research in West African settings links the concept of interdependent selfways (more precisely, cultural ecologies of embedded interdependence) to relatively less openness and emotional intimacy in friendship than are typical in WEIRD settings. So, do interdependent selfways promote stronger or weaker tendencies of openness and emotional intimacy? The present study addresses this question.

The Present Study

Interview research has provided an initial outline of different approaches to friendship in West African and North American worlds. However, evidence linking friendship approaches to cultural ecologies of embedded interdependence and abstracted independence has come from a relatively indirect source—coders’ analyses of participants’ responses—rather than directly from participants themselves (Adams & Plaut, 2003). The present study tests this link via a more direct procedure that we borrowed from traditions of experimental social psychology. Specifically, we attempted to manipulate experience of interdependence (and independence) and then measured the effects of this manipulation on reports of friendship experience.

The inclusion of an experimental manipulation permits a direct test of competing hypotheses. The theoretical account associated with research on the cultural-psychological foundations of relationality suggests a primary hypothesis that the emphasis on emotional support (rather than instrumental support) will be greater among participants exposed to an independence treatment than among participants exposed to an interdependence treatment. In contrast, the theoretical framework associated with research on gender differences suggests the alternative hypothesis that the emphasis on emotional support (rather than instrumental support) will be smaller among participants exposed to an independence treatment than among participants exposed to an interdependence treatment.

Method

Participants

Participants included students from psychology courses at a university in Ghana (n = 67;
53% women) and a university in the Midwest U.S.A. (n = 71; 47% women).1

Procedure

Researchers invited students to participate in a study about relationships.2 Students who agreed to participate completed a questionnaire (printed in English, the language of instruction at both universities) individually or in small-group settings. At the U.S.A. university, a U.S.A. researcher recruited participants through a research participation pool and invited them to come to the laboratory to complete measures for partial course credit. At the Ghanaian university, a Ghanaian researcher recruited and invited participants to complete the measure in public spaces.

Manipulation of relationship constructions.

The first page of the questionnaire served as a manipulation of relationship constructions. The experimenter assigned participants at random to complete either individual (“I am . . .”) or collective (“We are . . .”) versions of the Twenty Statements Test (TST; Kuhn & McPartland, 1954). The purpose of this manipulation was to promote the respective experience of either abstracted independence or embedded interdependence. We modified this procedure from previous research in which investigators exposed participants to either “I” versus “We” versions of the TST and examined the effect of this manipulation on spontaneous self-descriptions (Hong, Ip, Chiu, Morris, & Menon, 2001). Results of that research indicated that participants mentioned personal characteristics more frequently in the “I” condition than the “we” condition (cf. Gardner, Gabriel, & Lee, 1999).

Measures of network size. After completing either version of the TST, participants completed two questions that directly assessed size of friendship network. The first question was “How many friends do you have? (You can define friend however you wish.).” The second question was, “Think of the typical person in your community. How many friends does this person have?” Participants then completed an indirect measure of friendship network size implicit in language use (Wierzbicka, 1997). Participants read a series of phrase pairs—“She is [a friend of mine] my friend”, “He is my best friend [one of my best friends]”, and “Let me introduce you to [one of my close friends] my close friend”—and selected which phrase they preferred from each pair. Because each of the bracketed options refers to one member of a class of partners, it implies a larger network of friends than the nonbracketed options, which refer to a specific partner. We counted the number of times participants chose the bracketed option across all three items to create an implicit measure of network size (range = 0–3) for each participant.

1 Because our focus was on broad cultural–ecological affordances for relationship, we did not collect demographic information (besides gender). In the absence of such information, we can only assume that our participants constitute a more-or-less representative sample of students at each respective university. People of European descent constitute more than 75% of students at the U.S.A. university. Students at the Ghanaian university are from a variety of African ethnic and linguistic groups (e.g., Akan, Dagomba, Ewe, Fanti, and Ga). Across numerous studies in these settings, we have observed that students at the U.S.A. university tend to be more affluent, younger, and more likely to live independently (vs. in dormitories or with family) than students at the Ghanaian university. The relative affluence, youth, and residential separation of U.S.A. students are important components of the cultural ecologies of abstracted independence that constitute U.S.A. university settings. We regard these features not so much as competing explanations, but as synergistic forces that may contribute to observed results. Even so, (in)attention to the particular influence of these ecological forces and differences in ethnic identity within national settings remains a limitation of the present study that constitutes an important direction for future research.

2 Although conventions of psychological science require that authors provide information about participant identities, they do not (yet) require disclosure of researcher identities. Indeed, conventional practice implies that researcher identity is unremarkable in “normal” circumstances and only becomes noteworthy in “abnormal” circumstances where either participant or researcher identity deviates from the putative WEIRD standard. In contrast to this racialized imagination of the research process, an international perspective on psychology prescribes greater attention to issues associated with the “geography of knowledge,” including researcher identity and its impact on the resulting science. This prescription of reflexive disclosure is especially relevant when researchers leave their home setting in global centers of power to conduct research in marginalized global peripheries (Denzin & Lincoln, 2012). In keeping with this prescription, we note that Glenn Adams is a White American man whose educational background included experience in predominantly White institutions and more than five years living and working (teaching and research) in West African settings. Tuğçe Kurtis is a woman from Turkey who has studied and worked at different universities in the U.S.A. for approximately 12 years. She received her PhD in Psychology and a graduate certificate in African Studies from a university in the Midwestern U.S.A.
Social support. Participants indicated the relative importance of both emotional and instrumental support in friendship using a scale of 0 (not important) to 10 (extremely important). Participants rated the importance of emotional support via a single item (“Friends are there to listen to problems and offer sympathy”). Participants rated the importance of instrumental support via two items assessing material (“Friends provide resources [money, materials] to solve problems”) and practical support (“Friends give advice and help find solutions to problems”).

Results

The design of the study included three dimensions of variation in relationship construction that served as between-subjects factors: cultural setting, gender, and experimental condition. For indicators of friendship network size the primary hypothesis was that indicators would reveal evidence for greater numbers of friends in factor levels associated with abstracted independence (U.S.A. setting, men, and “I” condition) than factor levels associated with embedded interdependence (Ghanaian setting, women, and “we” condition). For the outcome of social support, the inclusion of an experimental manipulation permits a direct test of competing hypotheses. The theoretical account associated with research on the cultural-psychological foundations of relationality suggests that the emphasis on emotional support (rather than instrumental support) will be greater not only in U.S.A. settings than Ghanaian settings, but also among participants exposed to an independence treatment than among participants exposed to an interdependence treatment. In contrast, the theoretical framework associated with research on gender differences suggests the competing hypothesis that the emphasis on emotional support (rather than instrumental support) will be greater not only among women than among men, but also among participants exposed to an interdependence treatment than among participants exposed to an independence treatment. Variation in number of subjects across analyses indicates cases of missing values or incorrect responses.

Friendship Network Size

A histogram of responses to the item about number of friends appears in Figure 1. Because some participants gave nonnumerical responses (e.g., “a lot” or “numerous”), we divided cases into two groups: participants who reported fewer than 10 friends and participants who reported 10 or more friends (including nonnumerical responses indicating many friends). We then conducted a loglinear analysis with setting, gender, and condition as categorical predictors of this dichotomous outcome. Consistent with previous research on cultural variation in relationality, the percentage of people reporting 10 or more friends was greater among participants in the U.S.A. setting (90%) than the Ghanaian setting (55%), $\chi^2(1, N = 137) = 24.11, p < .001$. Consistent with previous research on gender differences in relationality, the percentage of people reporting 10 or more friends was greater among men (81%) than among women (65%), $\chi^2(1, N = 137) = 6.50, p = .011$. The manipulation had no effect on this outcome, $\chi^2(1, N = 137) = 0.236, p = .627$, and none of the interaction effects reached conventional levels of statistical significance.

For the measures comparing responses about own and others’ friends, we divided cases into three groups: participants who reported more, the same, and fewer friends than the typical other. A loglinear analysis of this trichotomous outcome revealed a main effect of Setting, $\chi^2(2, N = 137) = 17.57, p < .001$, indicating that participants in the Ghanaian setting (52%), were more likely than participants in the U.S.A. setting (23%) to claim fewer friends than the typical other. However, a Setting × Gender interaction qualified this effect, $\chi^2(2, N = 137) = 6.53, p = .038$, indicating that women in the Ghanaian setting were particularly likely to claim fewer friends (see Figure 2). There was also a marginally significant effect of Condition in the hypothesized direction, $\chi^2(2, N = 137) = 5.14, p = .076$. Participants in the independence (“I”) condition (38%) were more likely than participants in the interdependence (“we”) condition (23%) to report having more friends than the typical other. The one degree-of-freedom contrast associated with this difference—comparing participants in the “more” category...
with participants in “same” and “fewer” categories—was significant, $\chi^2(1, N = 137) = 4.25, p = .040$.

We conducted a 2 (Setting: U.S.A. or Ghanaian) x 2 (Gender: Male or Female) x 2 (Condition: “I” or “we”) ANOVA on the indirect measure of friendship network size. This analysis revealed a main effect of Setting, $F(1, 130) = 9.06, p = .003, \eta^2_p = .07$, qualified by a Setting x Gender interaction, $F(1, 130) = 5.24, p = .024, \eta^2_p = .04$. Simple effects tests indicated that women in the U.S.A. setting ($M = 1.76, SD = 0.95$) scored higher on this measure than did women in the Ghanaian setting ($M = 0.91, SD = 0.89$), $F(1, 130) = 14.45, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .10$; men did not differ across settings in their scores on this measure of friendship network size, $F < 1 (Ms = 1.36 and 1.25, SDs = 1.06 and 0.81$, respectively). The manipulation had no effect on this outcome, and no other interaction effects reached conventional levels of statistical significance.

Rather than essentialized gender differences that merely vary in magnitude across settings, this pattern is consistent with a gender intersectionality hypothesis (Crenshaw, 1989; see also Shields, 2008), which proposes that the character of gender difference varies across other identity categories. Scores on the measure of friendship network size tended to be higher for women than men in the U.S.A. setting, but lower for women than men in the Ghanaian setting. We consider this pattern further in the Discussion section.

Figure 1. Distribution of responses to the item about number of friends. Besides these responses, an additional $f = 18$ participants in U.S.A. settings and $f = 23$ participants in Ghanaian settings gave non-numerical responses claiming “a lot” or “many” friends. Rather than transform these responses into a specific value, we interpreted them to refer to a number above the median. Debriefing interviews and informal discussions suggest that people translate “many friends” into a numerical value that is greater in U.S.A. settings (e.g., 50) than in Ghanaian settings (e.g., 20). Accordingly, our practice of treating “many” as a similar response across settings is a conservative practice that, if anything, underestimates differences in experience of friendship.

Figure 2. Social comparison of friendship network size. Participants’ responses imply a belief that they have a number of friends greater than (GT), equal to (EQ), or less than (LT) others in their community.
Varieties of Social Support

We conducted a 2 × 2 × 2 × 2 mixed-model ANOVA with Support (Emotional or Instrumental) as the within-participants factor and Setting (U.S.A. or Ghana), Gender (Male or Female), and Condition (“I” or “we”) as between-participants factors. This analysis revealed Setting × Support, $F(1, 130) = 22.10, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .15$; Gender × Support, $F(1, 130) = 3.91, p = .05, \eta_p^2 = .03$; and Condition × Support interactions, $F(1, 130) = 7.91, p = .006, \eta_p^2 = .06$; qualified by two higher order interactions.

The first was an interaction of Setting × Condition × Support, $F(1, 130) = 6.67, p = .011, \eta_p^2 = .05$. To interpret this interaction, we examined the Condition × Support interaction separately within each cultural setting. Results revealed the hypothesized Condition × Support interaction among students in the Ghanaian setting, $F(1, 66) = 10.92, p = .002, \eta_p^2 = .04$, but not among students in the U.S.A. setting, $F(1, 68) < 1$ (see Figure 3). Resonating with patterns that a cultural-psychological framework associates with embedded interdependence, Ghanaian students in the “we” condition showed a nonsignificant tendency to rate instrumental support more important than they rated emotional support, $t(30) = -0.49, p = .31$. In contrast, but resonating with patterns that a cultural psychological framework associates with abstracted independence, Ghanaian students in the “I” condition resembled U.S.A. students in their tendency to rate emotional support more important than instrumental support, $t(36) = 4.88, p < .001$.

The second was an interaction of Setting × Gender × Support, $F(1, 130) = 7.95, p = .006, \eta_p^2 = .06$ (see Figure 4). To interpret this interaction, we examined the Gender × Setting interaction separately for each type of Support. The Gender × Setting interaction was not evident for the measure of instrumental support, $F(1, 134) < 1$; instead, the analysis revealed only a main effect of Setting, $F(1, 134) = 29.83, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .18$, such that Ghanaian participants ($M = 7.29, SD = 1.71$) indicated much greater importance of instrumental support in friendship than did U.S.A. participants ($M = 5.86, SD = 1.37$). The Gender × Setting interaction was significant for the measure of emotional support, $F(1, 134) = 9.56, p = .002, \eta_p^2 = .07$. To decompose this interaction, we used simple effects tests to assess the gender difference within each cultural setting. This procedure revealed a significant gender difference, but only among participants in the U.S.A. setting, $F(1, 134) = 15.10, p < .001$; specifically, women in the U.S.A. setting ($M = 9.46, SD = 0.77$) indicated greater importance of emotional support in friendship than did men in the U.S.A. setting ($M = 7.61, SD = 1.75$). This gender difference was not present among participants in the Ghanaian setting, $F(1, 134) < 1$.

Discussion

Mainstream psychological science proposes an open approach to friendship—characterized by a large friend network and an emphasis on emotional over instrumental forms of social support—as something akin to a natural pathway for satisfying universal needs to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). In contrast, research on the cultural-psychological foundations of relationality questions whether the open approach to friendship that masquerades as a natural standard in mainstream psychological science is necessarily a context-general pathway to healthy relationship. Instead, it may reflect the experience of abstracted independence.

3 Alternatively, if one decomposes the interaction by investigating effects of cultural setting within gender, the procedure reveals no difference between U.S.A. and Ghanaian men, $F(1, 134) < 1$. Instead, the procedure reveals a significant difference among women, $F(1, 134) = 8.60, p = .004$, such that U.S.A. women ($M = 9.46, SD = 0.77$) indicated greater importance of emotional support than did Ghanaian women ($M = 8.10, SD = 2.90$).
associated with the particular, WEIRD worlds that inform scientific imagination.

**Cultural Setting**

To investigate this idea, we compared friendship responses of participants in a U.S.A. setting associated with cultural ecologies of abstracted independence and responses of participants from a Ghanaian setting associated with cultural ecologies of a more embedded interdependent sort. Consistent with the guiding theoretical framework, responses of participants in the U.S.A. setting often indicated a larger friendship network than did responses of participants in the Ghanaian setting. With respect to social support, participants across national settings rated emotional support as more defining and important for friendship than they rated instrumental support. However, participants in the U.S.A. setting emphasized the importance of emotional support and denied the importance of instrumental support to a much greater extent than did participants in the Ghanaian setting, who tended to see emotional and instrumental support as relatively equal in importance. This pattern replicates results of interview research (Adams & Plaut, 2003), resonates with discussions about "materiality of care" (Coe, 2011), and suggests differences in functions of friendship. Given the lack of environmentally afforded connection associated with worlds of abstracted independence, friendship and other forms of voluntary association (e.g., dating and mating) often serve as a primary source of companionship and emotional support. In contrast, the default sense of connection associated with worlds of embedded interdependence renders friendship less important as a source of companionship and emotional support. Instead, people may take as friends those relatively fewer companions who demonstrate devotion by fulfilling obligations of instrumental support.

**Effects of the Experimental Manipulation**

Besides comparison across cultural setting, we extended previous research by including a manipulation of affordances for experience of abstracted independence and embedded interdependence. Results revealed significant effects on two outcomes. In both cases, effects of the experimental manipulation not only resemble differences across cultural settings that previous research has documented, but also provide support for the hypothesized link between affordances for abstracted independence (or embedded interdependence) and experience of promotion-oriented relationality (or experience of prevention-oriented relationality). Participants in the abstracted independence ("I") condition were more likely than those in the embedded interdependence ("we") condition to report more friends than the typical other. Similarly, participants in the abstracted independence ("I") condition reported greater emphasis on emotional support and less emphasis on instrumental support than did participants in the embedded interdependence ("we") condition.

The latter effect of the manipulation on social support emphases was more precisely true only among participants in the Ghanaian setting. The manipulation did not have a similar effect in the U.S.A. setting. Instead, participants in the U.S.A. setting indicated greater emphasis on emotional over material support, regardless of condition. We consider this pattern in a subsequent section.

How do results of the experimental treatment inform the puzzle that we mentioned in the introduction (i.e., that research on gender differences links interdependence to valorization of emotional intimacy, but research on cultural psychological foundations of relationality links interdependence to caution about emotional intimacy; Adams & Plaut, 2003; Adams, 2005)? Although we did not observe extensive effects of the experimental treatment, effects that we did observe were consistent with the hypothesis from work on the cultural-psychological foun-
ations of relationality, which associates interdependence with decreased emphasis on emotional intimacy relative to materiality of care (Adams & Plaut, 2003; Coe, 2011; Kurtiș & Adams, 2015). In contrast, results of the experimental treatment provide no evidence of the alternative hypothesis, from mainstream work on gender differences in relationship (conducted mostly in WEIRD spaces), which associates interdependence with increased emphasis on emotional intimacy.

Gender Differences

Besides differences across cultural settings and effects of experimental manipulation, the present study also considered gender differences. Conventional accounts of gender difference imply uniform effects that operate similarly across settings. Support for this account came from results for absolute size of friendship network, for which the proportion of participants who claimed many friends was greater among men than women. In contrast, intersectionality perspectives (e.g., Crenshaw, 1989; see also Cole, 2009; Mohanty, 2013) suggest that gender differences (in friendship and otherwise) will vary depending on constructions of gender that inform different settings. Evidence for this account came from three outcomes for which we observed hypothesized differences across cultural settings only among women, but not among men. Two outcomes were measures of friendship network size. Women in the Ghanaian setting tended to report fewer friends relative to others and scored lower on the measure of implicit network size than did women in the U.S.A. setting. The other outcome was ratings of emotional support, for which women in the Ghanaian setting rated emotional support to be more important for friendship than did women in the Ghanaian setting (see Figure 3). Men did not differ across cultural settings in responses to either measure of network size.

Limitations and Future Directions

As an initial attempt to apply an experimental procedure to understand variation in friendship across cultural settings, the present study has limitations that suggest directions for future research. Rather than catalog all potential limitations, we use the space of this article to consider an issue with important theoretical implications for experimental research across national boundaries. The effect of the experimental manipulation on ratings of social support was limited to participants in the Ghanaian setting; it had no effect on ratings of participants in the U.S.A. setting. Although one might interpret the failure of the manipulation among participants in the U.S.A. setting as a limitation of the procedure, we have observed similar patterns in other research with different treatments (e.g., Anderson et al., 2008). Moreover, there are theory-based reasons to expect such differential effectiveness of the experimental manipulation.

One such rationale concerns the defining feature of interdependent selfways: sensitivity to context (Kanagawa, Cross, & Markus, 2001). To the extent that participants in Ghanaian settings inhabit cultural ecologies that promote interdependent selfways, they may demonstrate greater habitual sensitivity to contextual variation—including greater responsiveness to experimental manipulations of social context—than do participants in U.S.A. settings.

Another possibility concerns the experience of “bicultural” identity associated with globalization (Arnett, 2002). The effect of the manipulation may be greater among participants in Ghanaian settings than participants in U.S.A. settings because the former inhabit worlds where competing constructions of relationship are prominent. That is, they inhabit cultural ecologies associated with “local” or “traditional” practices that promote experience of embedded interdependence, but they also inhabit “modern” ecologies (e.g., university settings) that promote experience of abstract independence (see Aguilar, 1999). The resulting familiarity with competing constructions of relationship may explain why these participants show greater responsiveness to experimental manipulation (see Arnett, 2002; Hong et al., 2001; Oyserman & Lee, 2007). In contrast, because

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4 Although a thorough discussion is beyond the scope of the present work, patterns are consistent with intersectional perspectives of transnational feminism that critique homogenizing tendencies of mainstream feminisms, explore variation in gender formations across cultural settings, and reveal the particular, sociocultural and historical foundations of the gender formations that inform mainstream feminist work. For a relevant discussion of transnational feminist perspectives, see Mohanty’s (2013) contribution to a special issue about intersectionality in the journal Signs (see also Kurtiș & Adams, 2015; Mohanty, 2003).
constructions of relationship associated with university culture typically do not diverge much from those associated with their prior socialization, students in mainstream U.S.A. settings have neither familiarity with competing constructions of relationship nor associated repertoires of habitual response upon which the manipulation might act. This may explain why participants in U.S.A. settings show little responsiveness to the experimental manipulation.

The final possibility is related to the distinction between etic (i.e., context-general) and emic (i.e., context-specific) constructions of interdependence (Pike, 1954). The expectation of “main effects” assumes that the experimental manipulation of selfways activates the same, etic construction of interdependence across settings. However, the “we” version of the TST may have activated context-particular, emic constructions of relationship associated with cultural ecologies of embedded interdependence (in the Ghanaian setting), and cultural ecologies of abstracted independence (in the U.S.A. setting). To the extent that constructions of interdependence diverge, it is not surprising that activating the general concept of interdependence (rather than particular affordances for interdependence) can produce divergent consequences.

A definitive test of these different possibilities awaits future research. We elaborate them here to emphasize an important implication for research from international perspectives of psychology. Orthodox perspectives of experimental psychology typically imply a construction of experimental methods as manipulation of context-independent concepts that have more-or-less identical meaning across settings. In contrast, international perspectives on experimental research require appreciation for the extent to which one can expect experimental treatments to produce different effects across cultural settings. This may be especially true to the extent that treatments rely on manipulation of semantic associations rather than manipulation of bodily experience.

Implications for Research, Practice, and Consultation

Given limitations of the study, it would be premature to offer definitive conclusions about gender and friendship in sociocultural context. Instead, we take up the challenge of this journal and consider more general implications of international perspectives for research, practice, and consultation. Briefly stated, we think that the primary contribution of international perspectives in psychology—especially perspectives informed by work in African settings—is to provide strategies for decolonizing psychological science (Adams, 2014; Adams, Kurti, Salter, & Anderson, 2012).

**Normalizing caution.** Applied to the present case, a first decolonizing strategy is to normalize prevention orientations to friendship, characterized by caution about intimacy or emotional expression, that mainstream scientific accounts portray as abnormal. Rather than straightforward evidence of pathology, these patterns may constitute healthy adaptations to the local realities of embedded interdependence that promote attention to obligation and materiality of care as a time-tested pathway to health (see, e.g., Kitayama, Karasawa, Curhan, Ryff, & Markus, 2010). This strategy does not deny that local patterns of relationship might reflect oppressive circumstances (see Bolten, 2012), but it does propose that researchers or practitioners invest in local understanding and adopt an attitude of critical humility before diagnosing problems and imposing remedies in settings with which they are largely unfamiliar.

**Denaturalizing openness.** However, the problem with conventional scientific wisdom is not just ignorance concerning “majority-world” settings (Kagitçibasi, 1995), but also insufficient appreciation for the sociocultural and historical processes that inform conventional scientific wisdom itself. Applied to the present case, the second decolonizing strategy of a cultural psychology analysis is to denaturalize conventional scientific wisdom regarding the natural superiority of open approaches to friendship. Rather than a universal prescription, we have drawn on an international perspective on psychology, informed by field research in West African settings, to propose that the emphasis on intimate emotional expression has its roots in cultural ecologies associated with neoliberal or “free-market” individualism.

By making explicit the link between political economy (i.e., neoliberal individualism) and ways of relating (i.e., emphasis on openness and emotionality vs. obligation and material care), our analysis helps to illuminate potential draw-
backs of mainstream prescriptions about intimacy (Kurtiš & Adams, 2013; see also Mohanty, 2013). Although mainstream prescriptions may be productive of individual satisfaction, the corresponding cost may be a de-emphasis on material support and a retreat from a morality of care as people abandon obligation-heavy connections in favor of more voluntaristic arrangements that they create for purposes of self-expansion and emotional fulfillment (see Miller, 1994). By adopting intimate emotional expression as a prescriptive form, practitioners may unwittingly impose constructions of relationality that afford a broad base of pleasurable connections without a deep foundation of material support.

From this perspective, the most important contribution of international perspectives in psychology is not to foster accurate local understanding so as to facilitate intervention into majority world settings by foreign researchers, practitioners, or consultants. Instead, the point is akin to what Jean and John Comaroff (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2011) have recently referred to as “Theory from the South” (cf. Shweder, 1991 on “thinking through culture”): that is, to stand with people in majority-world settings and rethink conventional scientific wisdom from the epistemological position that this accompaniment affords (Tomlinson & Lipsitz, 2013). In this way, international perspectives in psychology can illuminate a more human(e) psychological science that better serves not only people in majority world settings, but also people in the WEIRD settings that more typically inform scientific imagination.

References


