Amae in Japan and the United States: An Exploration of a “Culturally Unique” Emotion

By: Yu Niiya

Department of Psychology, University of Michigan

Phoebe C. Ellsworth

Department of Psychology, University of Michigan

Susumu Yamaguchi

Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Tokyo, Tokyo, Japan

Acknowledgement: This research was supported in part by Fulbright fellowship to Yu Niiya and in part by a University of Michigan Collegiate Professor grant to Phoebe Ellsworth. We thank Barbara L. Fredrickson and Etsuko Hoshino Browne for their comments on an earlier version of this article. We also thank Yuri Miyamoto, Tamina Sanada, and Miori Ueda for their assistance in translations, Stefan E. Richter for his assistance in data collection in the U.S., and Dr. Muneo Mitsuboshi for his assistance in data collection in Japan.

Charles Darwin (1872/1998) proposed that basic emotions and their expressions are innate and universal in the human species. Although this idea was rejected for many decades (cf. Bruner & Tagiuri, 1954), in the late 1960s, Ekman (Ekman & Friesen, 1971) and Izard (1971) provided strong evidence that the recognition of emotional facial expressions is similar across cultures (see Mesquita, Frijda, & Scherer, 1997; Keltner, Ekman, & Gonzaga, 2003). Later research demonstrated cross-cultural similarities in vocal expression (e.g., Van Bezooijen, Otto, & Heenan, 1983) and autonomic nervous system activity
Levenson, Ekman, Heider, & Friesen, 1992), and it now seems clear that the recognition, expression, and experience of certain emotions are general across cultures.

That some emotions are universal, however, does not imply that all are. Some emotional experiences have been singled out as culturally unique, for example Amae in Japan (Doi, 1971), Fago in Ifaluk (Lutz, 1985), and lajya in India (Menon & Shweder, 1994). Do some emotions really only exist in particular cultures? Are there emotions that are untranslatable and that cannot be experienced in cultures that lack a name for them? Or is it that members of the human species are capable of experiencing the whole range of human emotions, but that certain emotions are singled out, easily recognized, and commonly experienced in some cultures, and unacknowledged, unlabeled, and relatively inaccessible in others?

Levy (1984) suggested that particular emotions might be “hypercognized” or “hypocognized” in some cultures. For example, Levy (1973) reported that in the Tahitian culture, people have a highly elaborate conceptualization of anger (hypercognition), but have no term to describe sadness (hypocognition), even though he observed bodily reactions and circumstances that appeared to fit the Western conception of sadness and loneliness. Levy’s view of hypercognized and hypocognized emotions suggests that emotional lives vary across cultures because of differences in emphasis, not fundamental differences in capacity, and that the emotions of one culture may not be completely incomprehensible to members of another culture (see also Mesquita & Ellsworth, 2001). Proponents of the existence of basic emotions have argued that any complex emotion can be decomposed into basic emotion units, which should allow people to understand emotions of distant cultures even without equivalent words (Johnson-Laird & Oatley, 1989, 1992).

Indigenous or culturally specific emotions have rarely been the subject of cross-cultural comparison. Critics have chastised emotion researchers for using English emotion terms like fear, anger, and sadness as the only starting point for scientific inquiry and have considered it a mark of Western cultural blindness that “the question does not arise as to whether Americans experience the New Guinea Hageners’ emotion of popokl’… or whether they are deficient in the ability to experience the Ifaluk emotion of fago…” (Lutz, 1985, p. 39). To further our understanding of the generality or cultural specificity of emotional experience, it is important to examine emotions that are supposedly culturally specific. Following Lutz' suggestion, our research started with an emotion characteristic of a non-Western culture and examined how Americans react to situations that elicit the unnamed and, presumably, unknown emotion. We specifically focused on the Japanese concept of Amae, which has been singled out as culturally unique (Doi, 1973), and explored the similarities and differences in Americans' and Japanese experience of Amae.

According to Wallbott and Scherer (1988), two emotions are similar if they are highly comparable in (a) the nature of the emotion-eliciting situation; (b) the reactions shown by a person when confronted with the emotion eliciting situation (in particular, physiological symptoms); (c) the nonverbal reactions like facial or vocal expression; (d) the subjective experience or feeling state of the person; and (e) the regulation attempts used to control or manage the situation and the emotional reactions (pp. 31–32). The likelihood that two emotions are identical would be highest if they were similar in all five dimensions. Yet, with a complex emotion like Amae, it would be difficult if not impossible to examine some of these criteria (e.g., physiological reactions or facial expressions), as there is no specific physiological or facial pattern.
associated with Amae. In our study, we controlled for the emotion-eliciting situation by presenting participants with vignettes that Japanese reported to be Amae-eliciting. We assumed that Americans experienced Amae if their appraisals of the situation and their subjective feeling states following the vignettes were similar to the Japanese.

Definition of Amae
Doi defined Amae as the ability “to depend and presume upon another’s love or bask in another’s indulgence” (1992, p. 8) and called Amae “a key concept for the understanding not only of the psychological makeup of the individual Japanese but of the structure of Japanese society as a whole” (1973, p. 28). Although Amae is a common word in the Japanese language, it has no exact equivalent in English. Some translations are “whining,” “sulking,” “coaxing,” “pouting,” “wheedling,” “being spoiled or pampered” (Johnson, 1993) and “cherishment” (Young-Bruehl & Bethelard, 2000), but none of these translations fully conveys the meaning of the complex phenomenon of Amae. For one thing, almost all of these terms have negative connotations in English, but Amae does not ordinarily elicit disapproval in Japan. Doi took the lack of an English translation of the word Amae and the complexity of the concept as evidence that Amae is unique and central to Japanese culture, but he provided no empirical data to support this claim. The lack of English translation and the difficulty in defining the concept may be an indication that Amae is more salient and more frequently experienced in Japan, but they do not rule out the possibility that it exists in non-Japanese cultures.

Amae is best understood by Westerners in the mother-child relationship. A 6-year-old child climbing on the knees of her mother and asking her to read a storybook while the mother is working on the computer would be a typical example of Amae. The child experiences a sweet sensation of being taken care of, while the mother feels needed and trusted. Although the prototype of Amae occurs in the mother-child relationship, in Japan Amae also commonly occurs between adults (e.g., in friendships, romantic relationships, etc.). For example, a wife might beg her husband to buy her a necklace displayed in a store window, as a means of confirming his love (and obtaining the necklace; for more examples, see Morsbach & Tyler, 1986).

A Behavioral Definition of Amae
In contrast to Doi who defined Amae in terms of the sweet feelings that occur in a relationship, Yamaguchi (1999) defines Amae in terms of the behaviors that are likely to elicit feelings of Amae. The distinction between the behavioral and the feeling aspects of Amae allowed us to test whether the same Amae behavior would elicit similar feelings in two different cultures. Yamaguchi (1999) and Niiya, Yamaguchi, Murakami, and Harihara (2000) provided empirical evidence that Japanese people perceive Amae when they see that (a) a person’s behavior or request is inappropriate and that (b) the person expects that the inappropriate behavior or request will be accommodated because of the close relationship with the other person. The behavior or request is defined as “inappropriate” if it is considered unsuitable for the person’s age or social status. For example, if two roommates Andy and Bob have made an arrangement to clean their room together every Sunday, but Andy asks Bob to do it alone one day with the expectation that Bob will say yes because of their close friendship, then Andy’s behavior toward Bob can be labeled as Amae: Asking Bob to do the house cleaning by himself is an inappropriate behavior in the sense that Andy, as a grown up individual, should follow the rules and keep his promise. However, if Andy had broken his arm the day before and could not do the house cleaning, then asking Bob to do it...
alone would not be considered Amae, because in this situation, the request would no longer be inappropriate.

A behavior that would ordinarily be inappropriate based on the person's age and status can become "appropriate" within a close relationship. For example, a college student may ask his mother to pick him up at the airport instead of taking the shuttle bus when he goes back home for vacation. The request is inappropriate because as an independent adult, the student could easily take the bus and get home without the help of his mother. However, given the close relationship between the mother and the student, the request may appear appropriate to the mother, to the student, and even to an observer. The student’s behavior would be considered inappropriate for his age and status when taken outside the relationship (it would be quite inappropriate if the student asked someone whom he is not close to, such as a job interviewer, to pick him up at the airport); therefore, Japanese will see Amae in the request.

Who Is More Likely to Feel Amae?
The requester feels Amae if he or she believes the request is inappropriate, but still expects the other person to grant the favor. The person being asked for a favor also feels Amae if he or she sees that the requester is making an inappropriate request, expecting the request to be granted. Although the person asking for a favor and the person being asked for a favor may both feel Amae, the latter is more likely to recognize Amae in the situation because he or she is more likely to see the request as inappropriate. The requester is aware of all the factors that make it difficult to achieve the goal without help, while the person who is asked the favor is aware of all the competing demands on his or her time that make it difficult to grant the request. Thus, when the 20-year old son calls his mother to pick him up at the airport, the son may not feel Amae because he knows that the bus employees have gone on strike, but the mother may perceive the request as inappropriate and may feel Amae.

Amae as an Emotion
Amae is a concept that is difficult to define for Westerners, for it can refer to an emotion that a person holds toward another person, an interpersonal relationship, a behavior, or even a belief. It would be an oversimplification to conceptualize Amae only as an emotion, because, as we have already mentioned, it also involves beliefs and understandings, behaviors, and a certain kind of interpersonal relationship. There are specific feelings that are associated with Amae, such as feelings of trust and acceptance, but an act can be considered Amae even if the person is not experiencing those feelings, just as an act can be considered an act of love (sacrificing one's own goals for the sake of one's child), even though the person may be feeling sad or even resentful at the time. Most current theories assume that all emotions involve beliefs and understandings (appraisals), physiological responses, expressions, action tendencies, and subjective experience or feeling. By this comprehensive and somewhat flexible definition, Amae is like an emotion. Certainly it often entails recognizable subjective feelings, and it is these feelings—the emotional components of Amae—that are the topic of this paper. When we refer to Amae as an emotion, it is shorthand for the emotional experience typically associated with Amae.

Ambivalence in Amae
Masamura (1998) has argued that the initiator of Amae (i.e., requester) can have two motivations: seeking affection from the other party ("passive love" as stated by Doi, 1971) and "seeking to do as one pleases" (kimama-ni-suru) on the assumption that there is an affectionate and therefore tolerant
relationship between the two parties. These two motivations parallel those proposed by Yamaguchi (1999), who stated that Amae reflects a need for unconditional love and/or a need for getting what one wants. One implication of the dual motivations of Amae is that it can entail both positive and negative emotions depending on the extent to which the request is seen as a desire for intimacy or as an attempt at manipulation. Indeed, Amae arouses positive and negative feelings among Japanese (Niiya, Yamaguchi, Murakami, & Harihara, 2001). A person who is asked an inappropriate favor can feel manipulated or taken advantage of. However, when the Amae requester emphasizes the need for intimacy, the person who receives the request usually feels needed, valued, and respected (Maruta, 1992). Emphasizing the need for affection and closeness promotes harmonious relationships because the Amae requester’s needs are met and the provider of help feels good about granting the favor, either by feeling close to the requester or by gaining a sense of power. Thus, Amae can elicit positive emotions to the person being asked for a favor, even if the request is inappropriate and troublesome.

Is Positive Amae a Japanese Phenomenon?
A number of studies have pointed out cultural differences in emotional experience between the U.S. and Japan. Markus and Kitayama (1994) argued that the U.S. culture views the self as an independent autonomous entity, with a corresponding emphasis on the expression of internal attributes such as needs, goals, desires, and abilities. In Japan, however, the self is viewed as interdependent, with a corresponding emphasis on the expression of relational, social emotions. For example, Kitayama, Markus, Kurokawa, and Negishī's study (as cited in Markus & Kitayama, 1994) found that, in Japan, people felt good in situations where interpersonal connections were salient, whereas in the U.S. this association was weak. Because of the strong emphasis on independence and autonomy in the U.S. and the emphasis on interdependence in Japan, Amae is seen as quintessentially Japanese. In a cross-cultural study with Japanese and American 4–5-year-olds and their mothers, Mizuta, Zahn-Waxler, Cole, and Hiruma (1996) found that Japanese children showed significantly more Amae behavior (defined as the desire for bodily closeness and immature reactions) than American children. In a survey, Japanese college students reported experiencing Amae-related emotions (translated as “babied”, “relying”, and “leaning”) more frequently in their daily life than did American students (Kitayama, Markus, & Kurokawa, 2000). These studies suggest that Amae is unusual in the U.S.

Positive Amae is likely to be especially foreign to Americans, and even more so in a relationship between mature adults. Consistently, most of the cross-cultural studies on Amae report that it is perceived negatively in the U.S. and positively in Japan. Mizuta, et al. (1996) observed that Japanese mothers accepted and even encouraged their children to show Amae whereas American mothers whose children sought Amae were less receptive and perceived their children as more immature and maladjusted. Rothbaum, Weisz, and Pott (2000) discussed how this close bond between mother and child fosters healthy development for the Japanese, although it seems like an insecure attachment to the Americans. Similarly in therapy, the patient’s dependence on the therapist was considered a positive step toward healing in Japan, whereas it was considered problematic in the U.S. (Saito, 1980, as cited in Mizuta et al., 1996). Moreover, the subjective experience of Amae has been reported to be unpleasant for American young adults. In a survey of college students, Amae-related emotions (i.e., “babied”, “relying”, and “leaning”) were correlated with negative emotions in the U.S., whereas in Japan, Amae was correlated with both negative and positive emotions (Kitayama, Markus, & Kurokawa, 2000). In sum, these studies suggest that Amae between mature healthy adults is discouraged and likely to be a negative experience
in a culture that fosters self-sufficiency, such as the U.S.

Thus what is most culturally unique about Amae, and most foreign to Americans, is the positive emotional response of the person faced with an inappropriate request, as indicated by the generally negative English translation of the concept and the negative reactions of Americans to behavior they see as dependent. Past studies suggest that Americans would feel annoyed if their friends made inappropriate requests and would perceive their friends as immature and demanding. Our research was designed to explore American reactions to Amae requests that elicit positive emotions in Japanese. If Americans also feel positively, the implication is that an emotion can be experienced even when it is hypocognized in the culture and nameless in the language.

Overview of the Studies
In this paper, we focused on a particular Amae situation, namely interactions in which a close friend asks for a favor. Although Amae does not always involve overt behavior, we manipulated the behavioral aspect of Amae because behaviors are more concrete and easily described than expectations, and their inappropriateness is easier to evaluate. Asking favors also implies that the requester expects the request to be granted (the second component of Amae), which makes it a prototype of Amae. We focused on the reactions of the person who is asked, because (a) this person is more likely to interpret the request as inappropriate (see discussion above), and (b) this person has nothing tangible to gain, so any positive emotions are more unambiguously interpreted as Amae emotions.

We expected that Amae would be a positive experience for Americans if they perceived the Amae request as a sign of a close relationship rather than as an attempt to manipulate them. However, we also explored the idea that Americans may feel positively for different reasons than the Japanese do. For the Japanese, an Amae request may be positive because it conveys that the relationship is a close one; whereas for the Americans, it may be positive because in addition to showing the closeness of the relationship, it shows that one has control over the situation.

Two experiments tested Japanese and American reactions to Amae situations using vignettes. Using self-report measures following a description of a hypothetical situation has been criticized for lack of impact and for the possible discrepancy between imagined and spontaneous reactions. We chose to use vignettes in our initial studies because they maximize cross-cultural equivalence of the emotion-eliciting stimuli. Vignettes are commonly used as a first step in identifying the existence of a phenomenon or relationship, as they allow precise specification and comparability of the stimuli and response measures, and are a relatively inexpensive way of finding out whether a line of research is worth pursuing further. Moreover, self-reports are the most direct measure of people’s cognitive appraisal of the situation and their subjective experience in the situation.

Study 1 examined Japanese reactions to Amae situations, in order to provide empirical evidence that Amae can be a positive experience for the Japanese, and to create a baseline to which Americans could be compared. Specifically, we tested whether Japanese participants felt happier when they were told that a friend asked them for a favor (Amae situation) than when they were told that the friend did not ask for help from anyone, or that the friend went to another friend for help. In Study 2, we tested Americans’ reactions to these Amae situations. We asked both American and Japanese participants to read scenarios
in which a friend asked them, no one, or someone else for a favor and measured their emotions and appraisals. We also asked American participants to generate their own examples of situations, similar to those they had read, in which they asked a friend for a favor or a friend asked them for a favor, and examined whether the Japanese recognized Amae in those situations.

**Study 1**

The purpose of Study 1 was to provide empirical evidence that Japanese experience more positive emotion and less negative emotion when a friend makes an inappropriate request (Amae) than when a friend does not make any inappropriate request (No Amae) or makes an inappropriate request to another friend (Other Amae). We hypothesized that being asked for an inappropriate favor from a friend would be a positive experience for the Japanese. We also hypothesized that Japanese would infer a closer relationship when asked for the favor. We did not expect any differences between the condition in which the friend did not ask anyone for help and the condition in which the friend asked another friend for help, as neither implies a close relationship.

**Method**

**Participants**

A total of 119 undergraduate students (39 females and 79 males, 1 gender unknown) were recruited from an introductory social psychology course at Kanagawa University, in a suburb of Tokyo. The mean age of the students was 20.1 year.

**Materials**

**Scenarios**

We created three scenarios in which a close friend requested help. In the Computer scenario, a roommate asked for help fixing a computer in the middle of the night; in the Dog scenario, an old friend asked for care of a dog while the friend was away on a trip; in the Hotel scenario, a best friend from middle and high school asked to stay at the participant's apartment for three nights when visiting town (see Appendix A for the scenarios). All three scenarios described requests that would be inappropriate if made outside of a close relationship: for example, it would be inappropriate for a person to ask a mere acquaintance for help fixing a computer in the middle of the night.

The last sentence of each scenario served as the manipulation of Amae. In the Amae condition, participants read that the friend requested help from them; in the No Amae condition, participants read that the friend asked no one for help (e.g., “the friend does not ask anyone to fix the computer”) or asked a professional agency for paid services (e.g., “the friend decides to leave the dog at a pet service”); and in the Other Amae condition, participants read that the friend requested help from another friend. The word *Amae* did not appear in any of the scenarios. Participants were randomly assigned to one condition and read all three scenarios from the same condition. The order of the scenarios was counterbalanced within conditions.

**Dependent measures**
After each scenario, participants indicated how happy (ureshi), sad (kanashi), irritated (haradatashi), and disappointed (rakutan) they felt about the friend's behavior (i.e., either asking for help, not asking for help, or asking another friend for help), on 7-point scales ranging from 1 = not at all to 7 = very much. They also rated the extent to which they would be likely to become friends with someone like X (“If you actually met X, how close a friend do you think X could become?,” 1 = not at all close, 7 = very close) and the extent to which X felt close to them (“How close does X feel toward you?,” 1 = not at all close, 7 = very close). Finally, as a manipulation check, participants were asked whether the friend was expressing Amae in the scenario (“Do you think X is making an Amae request from you? [X san ha anatani amaete iruto omoimasuka]” 1 = not at all, 7 = very much), how inappropriate the request is (“If someone you are not very close to asked you to do X, how inappropriate do you think it would be?,” 1 = very inappropriate, 7 = very appropriate; reverse scored so that the higher the score the more inappropriate) and the requester's expectation that the request would be accepted (“Did X expect the request to be accepted?,” 1 = not at all, 7 = very much).

Procedure

Participants were recruited in a classroom at the end of an introductory psychology lecture. They were asked to remain in the classroom if they were interested in participating in a questionnaire study on “people’s interpersonal feelings in different situations.” The three versions of the questionnaire were randomly distributed to the participants. The experimenter collected the questionnaire when everyone was done and explained the results of the study a week later.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

As intended by the manipulation, for all three scenarios participants who were in the Amae condition were more likely to perceive the friend as requesting Amae from them than participants in the No Amae and Other Amae conditions (see Table 1 for the means and standard deviations). Planned contrasts indicated that the Amae score was higher in the Amae condition than in the other two conditions in all three scenarios, ts(115) > 6.00, ps < .001. Consistent with our definition of Amae, participants in the Amae condition also rated the friend as having a higher expectation that the request would be granted than those in the No Amae and Other Amae conditions, ts(115) > 2.40, ps < .05. Moreover, the request was rated as inappropriate in all three scenarios: all means were significantly greater than the midpoint 4, ts(118) > 8.00, ps < .001.
Table 1
Study 1: Means and Standard Deviations of Amae, Emotions, and Closeness Ratings, by Condition and by Scenarios

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<th>No Amae</th>
<th>Other Amae</th>
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**Emotions**

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**Closeness**

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<td>0.89</td>
<td>4.40</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>4.45</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>&lt;.01*</td>
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<td>1.44</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>1.46</td>
<td>4.73</td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td>ns *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dog</td>
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<tr>
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<td>4.60</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>&lt;.05*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Closeness</td>
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<td>0.76</td>
<td>4.48</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>&lt;.01*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential friends</td>
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<td>1.25</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>&lt;.01*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. The scales ranged from 1 = not at all to 7 = very much.*

* Indicates that the planned contrast comparing the Amae condition against the no Amae and other Amae conditions is significant.

* Indicates that the mean differs from midpoint 4 at p < .01.

Study 1: Means and Standard Deviations of Amae, Emotions, and Closeness Ratings, by Condition and by Scenarios

Our definition of Amae also implied that participants would perceive more Amae in the situation, the higher the inappropriateness of the request and the higher the requester’s expectation of acceptance. Consistent with our prediction, in the Dog scenario, perception of Amae was positively correlated with the inappropriateness of the request, $r(118) = .18$, $p < .05$, and the expectation of acceptance, $r(118) = .46$, $p < .001$. Similarly in the Hotel scenario, the perception of Amae correlated positively with the inappropriateness, $r(119) = .26$, $p < .01$, and the expectation ratings, $r(119) = .18$, $p < .05$. In the Computer scenario, the correlations were positive, $r_s = .13$ and .15, but not significant, $p = .15$ and .11,
suggesting that as an example of Amae, the Computer scenario was somewhat less successful than the other two.

There was no significant Gender × Condition interaction for any of the variables, except for the perception of Amae in the Hotel scenario, $F(2, 109) = 5.26, p = .01$. Consistent with the manipulation, both men and women perceived more Amae in the Amae condition than in the No Amae and the Other Amae conditions, but women in the Amae condition perceived more Amae ($M = 5.38; SD = 1.04$) than men in the Amae condition ($M = 4.04; SD = 1.20$). Because this was the only significant Gender × Condition interaction and because the direction of the means was consistent with our manipulation, gender was not included in the remaining analyses.

**Happy, Sad, Irritated, and Disappointed Feelings**

Consistent with our hypothesis, participants who read that their friend requested a favor from them (Amae condition) reported more positive emotion (happy) and less negative emotion (sad, disappointed, irritated) than those who read that their friend did not request a favor from them (No Amae and Other Amae conditions; see Table 1). Repeated-measure MANOVAs with the four emotions as repeated dependent variables and condition as an independent variable showed a significant main effect of emotions, $F$s (3, 342) > 4.80, $p$s < .01, and a significant Emotion × Condition interaction, $F$s(6, 342) > 12.0, $p$s < .001, for all three scenarios. Planned contrasts comparing the Amae condition against the No Amae and Other Amae conditions showed that across all three scenarios, happiness was higher whereas sadness and disappointment were lower in the Amae condition than in the No Amae and Other Amae conditions, all $t$s(115) > 3.0, $p$s < .001. In the Dog and Hotel scenarios, irritation was lower in the Amae condition than in the No Amae and Other Amae conditions, $t$s(114) > 2.5, $p$s < .05, but in the Computer scenarios, irritation was slightly higher in the Amae condition than in the No Amae and Other Amae conditions, $F(2, 114) = 1.4, p = .25, ns$. In sum, except for the unexpected high irritation in the Amae condition of the Computer scenario, the data consistently showed that Japanese felt more positive and less negative when they were asked for a favor than when they were not asked for a favor.

**Perception of Relationship Closeness**

A MANOVA with condition as an independent variable and perceived closeness of the relationship and the likelihood of becoming friends as dependent variables showed a main effect of condition for all three scenarios, $F$s(4, 230) > 8.0, $p$s < .001. Consistent with our hypothesis, for all three scenarios, participants in the Amae condition thought that the requester felt closer to them than those in the No Amae and Other Amae conditions, all contrast $t$s(116) > 4.86, $p$s < .001. Japanese participants saw the inappropriate request as an indication of how close the requester felt toward them. Similarly, participants in the Amae condition were more likely than those in the other two conditions to say that they would be likely to become friends with a person who asked them that sort of favor. For the Hotel scenario, participants thought that they had a higher chance of becoming friends with a person who asked to stay at their apartment than someone who did not make such a request or someone who asked another friend, $t(116) = 4.26, p < .001$. For the Dog scenario, the planned contrast comparing the Amae condition against the other two conditions was significant, $t(116) = 2.09, p < .05$, but a closer analysis indicated that participants thought they were more likely to become friends with a person who asked them to take care of the dog.
than with a person who asked another person, \( t(75) = 2.81, p < .01 \), but equally likely to become friends with a person who took the dog to a professional pet-care service, \( t(77) = 0.74, p = .46, ns \). Data from the Computer scenario showed a slightly different pattern of results: participants did not differ in their likelihood of becoming friends with the person who asked them to help fix the computer, the person who did not ask any help, and the person who asked another friend for help, \( F(2, 116) = 0.06, p = .94, ns \). In sum, inappropriate requests (Amae) were consistently taken as an indication of how close the requester felt toward them but less consistently created a desire to become closer to the requester.

**Discussion**

Overall, Amae situations that involved an inappropriate request from a friend induced more positive emotion and less negative emotion than situations where no such request was made. Moreover, Japanese indicated that the inappropriate request (Amae) implied a closer relationship than the absence of such a request. The data support our hypothesis that Amae can be a pleasant experience for the provider of help, despite the fact that it involves an inappropriate request (e.g., waking someone up in the middle of the night), presumably because Amae implies that the relationship is a close one.

It is interesting to note that in the Computer scenario, participants reported more happiness but also more irritation when they were asked for help than when they were not asked for help. Considering the fact that participants’ perception of Amae did not significantly correlate with inappropriateness and expectation ratings, the Computer scenario was somewhat less successful than the other two as an example of positive Amae. We speculate that the Computer scenario represented a more ambivalent Amae. This finding is consistent with past studies (Niiya & Yamaguchi, 2001) indicating that people can experience both positive and negative feelings in an Amae situation. People feel positive emotions because the request implies a close relationship, but also negative emotions because of the inappropriateness of the request, the burden that is put on them, and the thought that they may be manipulated by the requester. In the Computer scenario, participants may have believed that the requester was not simply feeling close to them, but was desperate to get help from anyone who understood computers. This ambivalent feeling may explain why in the Computer scenario, participants thought the requester felt closer to them, but nonetheless did not particularly think they would actually become friends if they met in real life.

In the Amae condition of the Hotel scenario, participants felt more positive emotion and less negative emotion than in the other two scenarios. This was also the only scenario in which participants indicated high willingness to become friends with someone who would make such a request. In the Hotel scenario, the friend asked to spend time with the participants, expressing a desire to connect with them; whereas in the Computer and the Dog scenarios, the requester was merely asking the participant to perform a task. Although speculative, the difference in the perceived closeness might explain why Amae was more pleasant in the Hotel scenario than the other scenarios.

In the Dog scenario, participants were as willing to become friends with someone who showed No Amae as with someone who showed Amae, although they felt less happy, more sad, more disappointed, and more irritated and perceived less closeness in the relationship. Amae implies a close relationship, but the absence of a request may not necessarily imply a distant one.

Study 1 showed that Amae can indeed be a positive experience for the Japanese and provided baseline
data for the cross-cultural comparison that was our central concern: To what extent is this finding unique to the Japanese culture, which places high value on relationships and to what extent is it replicable in America, a country that has no word for Amae and that places a high value on independence and self-sufficiency?

**Study 2**

Study 2 had three purposes. First, we wanted to replicate Study 1 in the U.S. and in Japan, to see how Americans who have no knowledge of the concept of Amae would react to Amae situations. Because we made some changes in the scenarios, we ran a new group of Japanese as well. We hypothesized that both Americans and Japanese would experience more positive and less negative emotion when asked for help by a friend than when not asked for help. We also hypothesized that both Americans and Japanese would infer that the relationship was closer when a friend asked for help than when the friend did not ask for help.

Second, in addition to replicating Study 1, we wanted to examine whether there were cultural differences in the appraisals of control in Amae. More specifically, we explored how much control participants felt in the situation and how much control they perceived the requester had in the situation. Control appraisals are interesting for two reasons. First, obtaining what one wants is another motivation underlying Amae besides the confirmation of a close relationship (Masamura, 1998; Yamaguchi, 1999, 2001). Masamura (1998) proposed that Amae induces positive feelings if the requester communicates closeness of the relationship rather than the desire to control/manipulate others. We expected that in our scenarios, participants would perceive that the requester is conveying more closeness of relationships, but less control of the situation in the Amae condition than in the No Amae or Other Amae conditions. Second, we anticipated that the appraisal of one's own control would play a bigger role in the U.S. than in Japan because of the emphasis on autonomy and independence in American culture (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Rozin, Lowery, Imada, & Haidt, 1999). Although exploratory, we theorized that Americans might feel they are more in control of the situation when the friend asks for help than when the friend does not ask for help. We explored the possibility that positive emotion in Amae might be associated with the perception of both closeness and control in the U.S, but only to the perception of closeness in Japan.

Finally, we sought to find out whether Americans have experience with situations that Japanese would call Amae. We asked American participants who had read and thought about the Amae situations to generate their own examples of a situation in which they asked someone for a favor and a situation in which someone asked them for a favor, and examined whether Japanese recognize Amae in those situations. Although the use of standardized scenarios is useful for making direct comparisons between cultures, the question remains as to whether Amae actually occurs in American daily life. If Japanese recognize Amae in the examples provided by the American participants, the results will give us more confidence that Amae is not a uniquely Japanese phenomenon.

**Method**

**Participants**

**American sample**

A total of 58 American undergraduate students at the University of Michigan (39 females and 19 males)
were recruited by means of flyers posted around the campus and paid $20 for their participation. All participants were born and raised in the U.S. and spoke English as their first language. The majority of the participants (46 out of 58 or 79.3%) identified their ethnicity as White, 10 (17.2%) as African American, 1 as Asian American, and 1 as Other. **Their mean age was 20.5 years.**

**Japanese sample**

A total of 66 Japanese undergraduate students (11 females and 55 males) were recruited from an introductory psychology course at Kanagawa University, in a suburb of Tokyo. Their mean age was 19.3 years.

**Materials**

**Scenarios**

We translated the three scenarios used in Study 1 into English with a few changes. Some Japanese participants in Study 1 pointed out that in the Dog scenario, they would not be able to keep their friend's dog even if they wanted to because of external constraints, such as apartment rules or allergies. We therefore changed the request from taking care of a dog to watering a garden so that all participants would feel that they could comply with the request (see Appendix B for the Plant scenario). We also changed the number of days the friend asked to stay at the apartment in the Hotel scenario. Accommodating a friend is more of an inconvenience for Japanese than for Americans because of the limited space in their apartments. We therefore changed the number of days from 3 days to 1 week for both American and Japanese samples, so that the request would be an imposition to the American participants as well. All the other details remained the same as in Study 1. The scenarios were back-translated to ensure equivalence of meaning.

All participants read all three scenarios in the same order: the Computer, the Plant, and finally the Hotel scenario. **Each participant read one scenario under the Amae condition, one scenario under the No Amae condition, and one scenario under the Other Amae condition. The order of the conditions was counterbalanced within each participant so that one third of participants began with the Amae condition, another third with the No Amae condition, and the other third with the Other Amae condition (see Table 2).** For example, one third of the participants read the Amae condition of the Computer scenario, then the No Amae condition of the Plant scenario, and finally the Other Amae condition of the Hotel scenario, whereas another third began with the No Amae condition of the Computer scenario, then the Other Amae condition of the Plant scenario, and finally the Amae condition of the Hotel scenario. Thus, each participant went through all three conditions, with a different scenario for each condition. Therefore, for each scenario, we treated condition as a between-groups factor.
Study 2: Order of Conditions and Scenarios

Dependent measures

After each scenario, participants were asked to rate how they felt about the friend’s behavior for each of four positive (happy, proud, loved, respected) and four negative (disappointed, sad, irritated, angry) emotions, on 7-point scales ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much). Participants were then asked to rate their appraisals of the situation in terms of how much they were in control of the situation and how much the friend was in control of the situation, on 7-point scales (1 = not at all, 7 = extremely). Next, participants indicated the extent to which the requester felt close to them (“How close does X feel toward you?,” 1 = not at all, 7 = very much) and the extent to which they would be likely to become friends with someone like X (“Do you think you could become friends with someone like X?,” 1 = not at all, 7 = very much). Finally, participants rated the inappropriateness of the request (“If someone you are not very close to asked you to do X, how inappropriate do you think it would be?,” 1 = very inappropriate, 7 = very appropriate; reverse scored so that the higher the score the more inappropriate) and the requester’s expectation that the request would be accepted (“Did X expect the request to be accepted?,” 1 = not at all, 7 = very much) to see whether Americans and Japanese actually perceived the scenarios in the Amae situation as high in inappropriateness and high in expectation.

The questionnaire was first developed in English, then translated into Japanese, and back-translated. The Japanese questionnaire was the same as the English questionnaire except that it also included a question asking about the extent to which the requester was expressing Amae (“Do you think X is requesting Amae from you?” [X san ha anatani amaete iruto omoimasuka]) after each of the scenarios. This additional question in the Japanese questionnaire served as a manipulation check to see whether Japanese actually perceived the scenarios in the Amae situation as depicting Amae.

In addition, the English questionnaire had a second part that asked the American participants to go back to the scenario that depicted Amae (referred to with a number) and to describe two experiences of their own that were similar to that scenario: one in which their friends asked them a favor (Friend’s Amae) and one in which they asked their friends for a favor (Own Amae). Specifically, they were given half a page to describe “a situation in (their) life when someone (they) knew asked (them) for a fairly big favor and (they) agreed to do it” and another half page to describe “a situation in (their) life when (they) asked someone else for a fairly big favor.” Although the scenarios used in Studies 1 and 2 described relatively small favors, we asked participants to generate examples of large favors to increase the chance that they would write about inappropriate requests.

The Japanese questionnaire also had a second part in which participants were asked to read six of the essays written by Americans (see Appendix C) and to rate the extent to which the requester is expressing Amae on a 7-point scale (1 = not at all Amae, 7 = very much Amae), the extent to which the requester expects the request to be accepted (1 = no expectation at all, 7 = high expectation), and how inappropriate it would be for a stranger to make such a request (1 = very inappropriate, 7 = very appropriate; reverse scored).

Procedure
The American participants came to the lab in groups of up to three for a study of “people’s feelings in different situations.” They randomly received one of the three questionnaires and independently rated the scenarios. They then wrote down examples of situations in which they asked a friend for a favor or a friend asked them for a favor. When they were done with the questionnaire, they were asked about their familiarity with Japanese culture and were told about the purpose of the study. None of the participants expressed familiarity with Japanese culture. In Japan, participants were asked to remain in the classroom after an introductory psychology lecture if they were interested in participating to a questionnaire study on “people’s feelings in different situations.” Participation in the study was voluntary. After the completion of the questionnaire, Japanese participants were given a brief explanation of the study by the experimenter.

Results
Expectation, Inappropriateness, and Amae

As shown in Table 3, Japanese participants indicated that the requester expressed more Amae in the Amae situation than in the No Amae or the Other Amae situations. A planned contrast comparing the Amae situation against the other two situations was significant for both scenarios, $t_{s}(62) > 7.0$, $p < .001$.

![Table 3](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Amae</th>
<th>No Amae</th>
<th>Other Amae</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amae</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>1.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectation</td>
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<td>4.13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inappropriateness</td>
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<td>1.43</td>
<td>5.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amae</td>
<td>4.39</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>2.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectation</td>
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<td>5.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inappropriateness</td>
<td>6.36</td>
<td>6.24</td>
<td>6.29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The scales ranged from 1 = *not at all* to 7 = *very much.*

* Indicates that the planned contrast comparing the Amae condition against the no Amae and other Amae conditions is significant.

* Indicates that the means differ from midpoint 4 at $p < .01$.

Study 2: Means and Standard Deviations of Amae, Expectation, and Inappropriateness Ratings by Scenario and Condition in Japan

Consistent with the definition of Amae, Japanese participants also rated the requester as having a higher expectation that the request would be granted in the Amae situation than in the other two conditions in both scenarios, $t_{s}(62) > 3.2$, $p < .01$. Likewise, American participants perceived high expectation in the Amae condition for both the Plant ($M = 5.84$, $SD = 1.01$) and the Hotel scenarios ($M = 6.35$, $SD = .59$). The American expectations in the Amae condition did not differ from the Japanese ratings, $t_{s}(38) < 1.3$, ns.

The definition of Amae also requires that the behavior is seen as inappropriate. In line with our prediction, both Japanese and American participants perceived that the requests would be inappropriate outside the context of the relationship. The inappropriateness rating of the Hotel scenario was significantly greater than the midpoint 4 for the Japanese, $t_{s}(64) = 14.5$, $p < .001$, and the Americans, $t_{s}(57) = 8.6$, $p < .001$.  

http://web.b.ebscohost.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/ehost/delivery?sid=7e64d4ba-5cc3-4ee6-8262-c443bafac82e%40sessionmgr113&vid=2&hid=106&ReturnUrl=15/32
The inappropriateness rating of the Plant scenario was significantly greater than the midpoint 4 for the Japanese, \( t(64) = 8.4, p < .001 \), but only marginally significant for Americans, \( t(57) = 1.8, p = .086 \).

In sum, Japanese and American participants thought the scenarios in the Amae condition conveyed that the request was inappropriate and that the requestor had a high expectation that the request would be granted, fulfilling the two components of Amae. Together with the fact that Japanese perceived more Amae in the Amae condition than in the other two conditions, we can conclude that the manipulation worked as intended.

**Positive and Negative Emotions**

The four positive emotions (happy, proud, loved, respected) were highly correlated in both American and Japanese samples, so we averaged them to create a composite positive emotion score. The reliability coefficients \( \alpha \) in the American sample were .91 and .92, respectively for the Plant and the Hotel scenarios, and .73 and .75, respectively for the Plant and the Hotel scenarios in the Japanese sample. Similarly, the four negative emotions (disappointed, sad, irritated, and angry) were also highly correlated in both American and Japanese samples, so we averaged them to create a negative emotion score. The reliability coefficients \( \alpha \) in the American sample were .91 and .92, respectively for the Plant and the Hotel scenarios, and .90 and .84, respectively for the Plant and Hotel scenarios in the Japanese sample. The positive and negative emotions were negatively correlated in the U.S. (−.65 for Plant scenario and −.81 for Hotel scenario) and only moderately correlated in Japan (−.29 for Plant and −.23 for Hotel scenario).

**Effect of gender**

We first conducted a repeated-measure MANOVA with positive and negative emotions as repeated dependent variables and culture, gender, and Amae condition as independent variables, separately for each scenario. For neither of the scenarios did gender have a main effect or any interaction with the emotion, culture and condition, \( F_s(2, 110) < 1.2, ns \). Gender was therefore dropped from the subsequent analyses.

**Effect of culture and Amae condition**

Participants in the Amae condition had higher positive and lower negative emotions than those in the other two conditions in both scenarios and in both cultures (see Figure 1). Table 4 summarizes the results of the repeated-measure MANOVA with positive and negative emotions as a repeated-measure variable and culture and condition as independent variables. As expected, we found a main effect of emotion and a significant Emotion × Condition interaction for both scenarios. Culture showed a significant main effect for both scenarios, \( F_s(2, 109) > 9.0, ps < .001 \), but did not interact with emotion. More important, culture did not moderate the Emotion × Condition interaction: the Emotion × Condition × Culture interaction did not reach significance in either scenario, indicating that the Japanese and Americans did not differ in their reaction to the Amae situation.
Figure 1. Means and standard errors of positive and negative emotions (1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much) by cultures, Amae conditions, and scenarios in Study 2 (A = Amae condition, N = No Amae condition, and O = Other Amae condition)

Table 4

Study 2: Multivariate and Univariate Analyses of Variance F ratios for Positive and Negative Emotions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotion</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Plant</th>
<th>Hotel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotion × Condition</td>
<td>(2, 116)</td>
<td>15.39***</td>
<td>13.27***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion × Culture</td>
<td>(1, 116)</td>
<td>13.18***</td>
<td>53.12***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion × Condition × Culture</td>
<td>(2, 116)</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>1.40</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotion</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Plant</th>
<th>Hotel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Condition</td>
<td>(2, 116)</td>
<td>18.05***</td>
<td>25.08***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>(1, 116)</td>
<td>13.62***</td>
<td>17.59***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condition × Culture</td>
<td>(2, 116)</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>3.95*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05.  *** p < .001.

Study 2: Multivariate and Univariate Analyses of Variance F ratios for Positive and Negative Emotions

To examine how emotions vary by condition, we then conducted separate univariate ANOVAs for the positive and negative emotions. As displayed in the lower half of Table 4, the analysis showed a significant main effect of condition for both the positive and negative emotions in both scenarios, with positive emotion being highest and negative emotion lowest in the Amae conditions. Again, the absence of a significant Condition × Culture interaction indicated that the effect of condition does not differ in the two cultures.

We further conducted a series of planned contrasts to test whether people feel more positive and less negative emotion in the Amae condition than in the No Amae and Other Amae conditions, separately for each culture and for each scenario. Consistent with the results from Study 1, the planned contrasts were significant for both scenarios in the Japanese sample, ts(62) > 2.50, ps < .01. The results for the
American sample closely paralleled the Japanese results. As predicted, positive emotions were higher in the Amae condition than in the other two conditions for both scenarios, $t(55) > 4.0$, $p < .001$. Likewise, negative emotions were lower in the Amae condition than in the other two conditions for the Hotel scenario, $t(55) = 6.57$, $p < .001$, and marginally so for the Plant scenario, $t(55) = 1.97$, $p = .054$.

Moreover, both Japanese and Americans felt more positive emotions than negative emotions in both Amae scenarios, $t(19) > 5.0$, $p < .001$, whereas positive and negative emotions did not differ in the No Amae and Other Amae situations. In sum, in line with our hypothesis and the results of Study 1, both Americans and Japanese felt better when they were asked for an inappropriate favor than when they were not asked. Thus, the results suggest that Americans' reaction to Amae is similar to Japanese.

### Perceived Closeness of the Relationship

As can be seen in Figure 2, participants reported more closeness and higher likelihood of becoming friends in the Amae condition than in the other two conditions. A MANOVA with culture and condition as independent variables and perceived closeness of the relationship and the likelihood of becoming friends as dependent variables showed a main effect of condition, $F(4, 222) > 8.0$, $p < .001$. Culture did not show any main effect, $F(2, 111) < 2.0$, $p > .15$, or any interaction with condition, $F(4, 222) < 1.0$, $p > .40$, for either of the scenarios.

![Figure 2](http://web.b.ebscohost.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/ehost/delivery?sid=7e64db4a-5cc3-4ee6-8262-c443bafac82e%40sessionmgr113&vid=2&hid=106&ReturnU...)  

**Figure 2.** Means and standard errors of closeness (1 = Not close at all, 7 = Very close) and likelihood of becoming friends (1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much) by cultures, Amae conditions, and scenarios in Study 2  
(A = Amae condition, N = No Amae condition, and O = Other Amae condition)

For both scenarios, American and Japanese participants perceived that the requester felt closer to them in the Amae situation than in the No Amae and Other Amae situations. Planned contrasts comparing the Amae condition with the two other conditions were significant for both scenarios in both cultures: In the U.S., $t(55) > 4.0$, $p < .001$, and in Japan, $t(62) > 5.0$, $p < .001$. American and Japanese participants also estimated that they would be more likely to become friends with the requester in the Amae condition than in the other two conditions in the Hotel scenario: $t(55) = 4.3$, $p < .001$, in the U.S; and $t(62) = 5.0$, $p < .001$, in Japan. For the Plant scenario, American participants had a higher expectation of becoming friends in the Amae condition than in the other two conditions, $t(55) = 2.1$, $p < .05$, but Japanese expectation for friendship did not differ across conditions.
In sum, the Amae situation implied that the relationship was a close one for both Americans and Japanese, but the Amae situation did not consistently lead Japanese participants to want closer relationships. Japanese may be more cautious than Americans about entering into close relationships, because the obligations are greater.

**Appraisals of Control**

Participants’ degree to which they felt in control of the situation (own control) and the degree to which they felt the requester was in control of the situation (friend’s control) showed some interesting cultural differences (see **Figure 3**). Repeated-measure MANOVAs with friend’s and own control as repeated dependent variables, and culture and condition as independent variables showed a main effect of control, $F_s(1, 117) > 25.5, ps < .001$; a Control × Culture interaction, $F_s(1, 117) > 13.5, ps < .001$; a Control × Condition interaction, $F_s(2, 117) > 9.5, ps < .001$; and a Control × Culture × Condition interaction, $F_s(2, 117) > 4.0, ps < .05$. To further investigate the interaction effects, separate univariate analyses were conducted for participants' appraisal of their own control and their friend's control.

![Figure 3. Means and standard errors of control appraisals for the provider and requester of help (1 = Not at all, 7 = Extremely) by cultures, Amae conditions, and scenarios in Study 2 (A = Amae condition, N = No Amae condition, and O = Other Amae condition)](image)

**Participants' appraisal of the friend's control**

In general, American participants tended to perceive that the friend had more control than the Japanese participants did, as indicated by the main effect of culture, $F_s(1, 111) > 15.0, ps < .001$. Moreover, consistent with our prediction, the friend who requested help was perceived to be less in control of the situation than the friend who did not request help, as can be seen in the main effect of condition, $F_s(2, 111) > 3.0, ps < .05$. The Culture × Condition interaction was not significant, $F_s(2, 111) < 1.0, ns$, but we still examined the effect of condition in each culture. The American participants rated the friend who asked them for help to be less in control of the situation than the friend who did not ask them for help in both scenarios, $t(55) > 2.3, ps < .05$. The Japanese participants showed the same pattern of results in the Plant scenario, $t(62) = 2.9, p = .01$, but not in the Hotel scenario, $t(62) = 0.23, p = .82, ns$.

**Participants' appraisal of their own control**
Overall, participants in the Amae condition reported that they were more in control of the situation than those in the No Amae and Other Amae conditions: the main effect of condition was significant in both scenarios, $F_s(2, 111) > 3.0, ps < .05$. Culture did not show a main effect, but significantly interacted with condition, $F_s(2, 111) > 3.0, ps < .05$. In both scenarios, American participants felt they were more in control of the situation in the Amae condition than in the other two conditions, $t_s(55) > 4.0, ps < .001$. Similarly, Japanese participants who read the Hotel scenario felt they were slightly more in control in the Amae situation than in the other two conditions, $t(62) = 1.65, p = .10$, but the pattern disappeared in the Plant scenario, $t(62) = 0.51, p = .61, ns$. Despite some similarities between the American and the Japanese results, the data suggest that the role of control for the Japanese participants is less robust, and possibly less important, than for the Americans.

**Comparison between the appraisals of participants’ own control and friend’s control**

We find it interesting that in the Amae condition both the Americans and the Japanese perceived that the friend who asks for help has as much control as themselves. The difference between the two control appraisals was not significant for the Americans, $t_s(18) > 0.50, ps > .60, ns$, nor for the Japanese, $t_s(22) > 0.40, ps > .70, ns$. This is in sharp contrast with the No Amae and Other Amae conditions, in which the friend was perceived as having more control than the participants, $t_s(18) > 3.5, ps < .001$, for the Americans, $t_s(20) > 2.0, ps < .05$, for the Japanese Plant scenario, but $t_s(20) = 1.0, ns$, for the Japanese Hotel scenario.

**Japanese Ratings of the American Essays**

To examine whether Amae occurs in American daily life, Japanese participants rated six essays in which American participants described their own experience of a situation in which they asked someone for a fairly big favor and a situation in which someone asked them for a favor. Japanese participants rated all six essays to be highly descriptive of Amae: for all six essays, the mode was 7 on a scale from 1 to 7. The means and standard deviations are shown in Table 5. For all the essays, over 70% of the participants gave a score of 5 or higher, with medians of 6 and higher. We also asked participants to rate how much the requester expected the request to be granted. Again, for all six essays, over 70% of the participants gave a rating of 5 or higher, with medians of 6 and higher. The inappropriateness of the request was seen as high in all six essays, with the majority rating it 6 or higher. In sum, the large majority of Japanese participants rated the American generated essays as showing Amae. The finding was further supported by the fact that consistent with the definition of Amae, Japanese participants perceived the request to be inappropriate and also perceived that the requester had a high expectation that it would be granted.
Study 2: Means, Standard Deviations, Median, and Distribution of Amae Ratings by Essay Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Essay Type</th>
<th>Amae M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>6 and above %</th>
<th>5 and above %</th>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>7.0</td>
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<td>6.0</td>
<td>59.1</td>
<td>77.3</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>7.0</td>
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<td>92.4</td>
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<td>1.29</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>83.3</td>
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</table>

**Note.** For Amae and expectation, the scales ranged from 1 = not at all to 7 = very much/extremely. For the inappropriateness, the scale ranged from 1 = very inappropriate to 7 = very appropriate (reverse scored).

Discussion

Study 2 tested whether Americans react to a situation that Japanese would describe as Amae in the same way as the Japanese. Americans reacted positively in an Amae situation and perceived it as a sign of a close relationship, like the Japanese, suggesting that feelings of positive Amae exist in American culture despite the absence of a verbal label. We also found that the Japanese recognize Amae in the examples provided by the Americans. The difference in the appraisal of control for the provider of help seems to indicate, however, that the reasons why people react positively toward Amae are not identical in the two cultures.

General Discussion

Two studies examined individuals' reactions to the descriptions of Amae, an emotion that is said to be unique to Japanese culture, in the U.S. and Japan. We first showed that Amae can be a positive experience for the Japanese. Consistent with our hypothesis, Japanese inferred closer relationships and felt more positive and less negative emotion when a friend requested their help than when the friend requested help from someone else or from no one. This finding was then replicated in Japan and, more important, in the U.S. Despite the lack of an English word to describe the concept of Amae and despite cultural values of autonomy and independence that would rather discourage Amae, American participants'
reactions to Amae situations were similar to the Japanese: Americans perceived closer relationships and experienced more positive emotion and less negative emotion when a friend requested help from them than when the friend requested help from someone else or from no one. We further found that the Japanese were able to recognize Amae in Americans’ descriptions of times when they asked or were asked for a favor. These findings all support our hypothesis that Amae can exist in cultures that have no word for it.

Contrary to the common image of Amae as a kind of “dependence” or “passive love” (Doi, 1973), we also found that in both cultures, participants thought that the person asking for help had as much control over the situation as the person being asked for help. This finding is consistent with the view that Amae is not necessarily a form of dependence, but can be an active way of seeking affection or controlling others (Yamaguchi, 1999, 2004). A person making an Amae request does not need to relinquish power to the other, but could consciously or unconsciously exert control so that the request will be accepted with pleasure.

Our findings suggest that emotions that are supposedly “culturally unique” may not be totally incomprehensible in other cultures. In 1969, Ekman and his colleagues (e.g., Ekman & Friesen, 1971) revolutionized research on emotion by showing that people from different cultures are able to recognize the same basic emotions. Since then, it has been assumed (Mesquita, 2001) that some emotions are universal and some emotions are culturally specific, but as Lutz (1985) pointed out, no one has actually tested the hypothesis of cultural specificity. Our data suggest that the universality versus cultural specificity of emotions is not an either/or question, but a matter of degree. Some emotions may be salient and easily accessible in all cultures, while others are not, but people may have the ability to experience all kinds of emotions, even if some of them are less emphasized or hypocognized in their culture (Levy, 1984).

**Limitations**

We do not claim that all emotions can be experienced in all cultures. Our studies only examined one emotion (Amae) in two cultures (Japan and the U.S.). We only looked at one aspect of Amae (positive side of Amae), in a very specific setting (a friend asking or not asking for help), and only from the perspective of the person being asked for help. We chose this particular situation because feeling happy about being asked an inappropriate request seemed most foreign to American culture and thus provided the most stringent test of our hypothesis. Despite the accumulating reports on cultural differences between the two cultures, our research showed that Amae does exist in both. Nevertheless, it cannot tell us when and how often Americans experience Amae, compared to Japanese.

We also examined Amae in a situation in which there were a close relationship, an inappropriate request, and an expectation that the request would be granted. These are the necessary ingredients for the Japanese to experience a situation as Amae (Yamaguchi, 1999), but we do not know whether these same ingredients are necessary or sufficient for Americans.

Although Amae is a broad concept that characterizes a relationship, an interaction, a behavior, or a belief (Doi, 1971), our research focused exclusively on the emotional aspect of Amae. We do not know whether Americans spontaneously form Amae relationships or hold Amae beliefs with intimate others. What we have shown is that in two situations that exemplify Amae for the Japanese, Americans feel the same way
as the Japanese.

In our studies, we relied on vignettes to hold constant the emotion-eliciting situation. The use of vignettes suited our purpose because we wanted to assess people's cognitive and emotional responses of the same situations, those that were known to be defined as Amae situations by the Japanese. Still, vignette studies raise questions of validity, objectivity, and realism because researchers have to assume that what the respondents imagine they would feel in the situation corresponds to what they would actually feel in that situation. Some studies suggest that people are not always accurate in predicting their behaviors and feelings (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977). Our studies are therefore not intended to provide a conclusion; instead, we hoped to provide a starting point for future research using behavioral measures in more realistic settings. In future studies, we plan to conduct laboratory experiments to address the limitation of vignette methodology and to examine the behavioral responses in Amae. For example, we could recruit pairs of friends and experimentally assign one to a situation that requires asking a favor of their partner. We could then observe how the request is made, how the partner responds, and what emotions both parties feel during and after the request.

**Cultural Differences in the Experience of Amae**

The cultural differences that we found for Amae suggest that the experience of an emotion may be similar, but not identical in different cultures. As humans, we may all have the potential to experience similar emotions, but the surrounding culture and its dominant concerns may add specific nuances to the experience. As Mastumoto (2001) pointed out, "universality and cultural relativity are not mutually exclusive" (p. 182). The relevance of control for Amae in the U.S. and Japan is a good example of how a common emotion can have different cultural flavors. Americans thought that they were more in control of the situation when the friend asked them for help than when the friend did not ask them for help, whereas this was not true for the Japanese. Control is important in American emotional experience, but less so in Japan (Mauro, Sato, & Tucker, 1992). The data suggest that for the Japanese, Amae implies closeness, trust, and security in the relationship, qualities that are highly valued by both people, regardless of which one is making the request. For the Americans, issues of patronage and pity may lurk in the background, creating a heightened sensitivity to issues of control and the balance of power. Amae might be used as a tool for affirming relationships in Japan and as a tool for affirming the sense of control in the U.S.

Consequently, the threshold between pleasant Amae and unpleasant Amae may differ across cultures, depending on whether issues of trust or control are involved. In future research, we hope to explore the subtle cultural differences in the experience of Amae and its relation to cultural values. For example, it would be interesting to examine the difference in the range of behaviors that elicit positive Amae in each culture. Being asked for an inappropriate favor is a negative experience if the costs are too high; responding to a favor takes time, effort, energy, and sometimes money; it can cause stress; and it often means interruption of other things one wants to do. The closer the relationship, the more tolerant people are toward inappropriate requests, but people have limits. We can speculate that in a culture that emphasizes interdependence, people may be more tolerant of inappropriate requests, may interpret them more as a sign of intimacy, and may consequently experience positive Amae more frequently. On the other hand, in a culture that emphasizes self-sufficiency, people may experience positive Amae in fewer situations, with a more limited number of close others, and hence less frequently. The difference in the activation of positive Amae may shape people's response to the requests and their expectation that...
requests will be granted, which in turn may influence the effectiveness of Amae as a strategy to obtain a favor.

Communal Relationships and Amae
In our study, we examined Amae between close friends, a relationship that has often been described in the Western literature as a “communal relationship” (Clark & Mills, 1979). A communal relationship is a relationship in which members have a general obligation to be concerned about the welfare of close others, such as friends, romantic partners, and family members (Clark & Mills, 1979). Although Amae occurs in close relationships, we believe that Amae is different from mere helping in a communal relationship. First, in communal relationships, it is assumed that people help others because they believe the welfare of the other member might affect their own welfare (Clark & Mills, 1979). The idea of common fate also applies in Amae relationships, but, in Amae, there is the additional notion that the person being asked for a favor feels trusted, respected, valued, and even in control of the situation (for the Americans). For example, we would expect that the feelings of pity and sympathy would lead to helping in communal relationships, whereas in Amae, the feelings of being particularly trusted may be more important.

Second, communal relationships are characterized by a lack of concern about reciprocity and are contrasted to exchange relationships in which people keep track of their contribution and the benefit they obtain from the relationship. In Amae, people seek trust as well as reciprocation. Therefore, Amae can be understood in terms of exchange. The person providing help does so in exchange for the feeling of trust and intimacy. Moreover, in adult friendships, people often take turns in showing Amae and trust. Thus, Amae does not necessarily require communal relationships.

Third, Amae is different from mere helping in communal relationships because Amae involves an inappropriate request from the person in need. If a teenager offers a ride to his girlfriend, carries her bags, and pays for her lunch, he may feel positive emotions, but not Amae, because the girl has not asked for his help. Helping behavior generates Amae feeling only when there is an inappropriate request, not when someone volunteers to help. In sum, Amae is conceptually related, but distinct from helping in a communal relationship.

Nonetheless, research on Amae suggests some connection with the research on communal relationships. Williamson and Clark (1989) reported that people in a communal relationship felt better when they helped others than when they did not provide help. Our research on Amae is consistent with their findings: In a close friendship (i.e., a communal relationship), both Americans and Japanese felt more positive emotion (and less negative emotion) when asked for help than when not asked for help. The research on close relationships may have tapped into some aspects of Amae without recognizing it as such, due to the lack of the Amae concept. It would be interesting in future research to explore how Amae occurs in communal versus exchange relationships or how Amae contributes to the perception of the relationship as communal or exchange-based. For example, we could manipulate the relationship as being communal or exchange-based and examine whether people experience Amae when asking/being asked for an inappropriate favor. Or, one could manipulate the inappropriateness of the favor and see whether it influences the perception of relationships as communal or exchange-based.

Language and Emotional Experience
The role of named emotional concepts in emotional experience is another important avenue for future research. Although emotional experience may range through many nameless states in an infinite variety of nuances for people of all cultures, most people may prefer the known, defined, named states to the more ambiguous intermediate states. The emotions named by a language may act as magnets for emotional experience, attracting undefined feelings toward the emotions that are defined. Having no name for Amae, Americans who experience it might assimilate the feeling to gratitude or anxiety (if they are making the request) or to pity and sympathy (if they are granting it). William James (1890) argued that “the trouble with emotions in psychology is that they are regarded too much as absolutely individual things” (p. 449). The names are categorical, but the feelings are not; they shade from one to another, and in any culture the one and the other are defined by language. People describe their emotions in the language they know, and the categories of their culture undoubtedly influence the emotions they feel; however, our research shows that these categories do not completely circumscribe people's emotional lives. Given a description of the kind of situation that elicits an emotion that is unnamed and unfamiliar in their culture, people can recognize it, can at least partially understand it, and can call up memories of experiences that generated it.

Amae situations may be quite rare in American culture. Or it may occur frequently, but go unnoticed because of the lack of a name or a concept. As Morsbach and Tyler (1986) noticed:

(In Western culture) the ideal of individualism and independence is far from realized in practice. In recent years, the emergence of, for example encounter groups, the communal sharing of drugs, and so forth has shown that psychological interdependence is a powerful need. Furthermore, North European Protestantism has been the religion which stressed individualism most strongly, whereas Catholicism retained socially acceptable channels for amae-type feelings, such as the cult of the Virgin Mary or the practice of Confession. (p. 305)

We are currently conducting research using event sampling as a first step toward examining the prevalence of Amae in the U.S.

Our research suggests that even emotions that are regarded as culturally unique can be experienced by people from other cultures, although the experience may not be identical. Of course, emotions that do have translation equivalents may not be identical experiences either. Sadness and Kanashii may not be the same thing. However, there is no reason to believe that the experience of the same emotion is identical among members of the same culture either: Who is to say whether two Americans who say that they are sad or two Japanese who say they are feeling kanashii are really feeling identical emotions? In the future, we hope to move beyond the simplistic dichotomies of universality and cultural specificity, of hypercognition and hypocognition, and explore the distinctive flavors familiar and unfamiliar emotions acquire in different cultures and the reasons that some emotions are hypocognized in some cultures and hypercognized in others.

Footnotes

1 The person asking for a favor and the person being asked may both feel Amae in the situation. This does not mean that both parties experience the exact same emotions. The requester might also feel embarrassment, guilt, or hope while the person being asked for help might feel empathy, sympathy, or annoyance. Two people can feel Amae even if the situation elicits different sets of emotions, just as love
can be accompanied by jealousy in one and compassion in the other.

2 In Japanese, seeking to do as one pleases (*kimama-ni-suru*) does not necessarily imply autonomy as in the U.S. It can imply that the person is selfish and inconsiderate of others' needs.

3 In a pilot test, 132 Japanese college students were asked how inappropriate it would be “if someone not very close made the request” on a 7-point scale (1 = very inappropriate, 7 = very appropriate): the mean was 2.82 (SD = 1.13) for the Computer request, 2.32 (SD = 1.70) for the Dog request, and 2.57 (SD = 1.75) for the Hotel request. All the means were statistically different from the midpoint 4, \( t_{(130)} > 6.0, p < .001 \).

4 Asking a professional agency for a paid service is *not* Amae because the act of asking help is no longer considered inappropriate.

5 We did not use a repeated-measure MANOVA when analyzing the two closeness measures (i.e., closeness of the relationship and the expectation to become friends), because we did not expect any main effect of closeness or interaction between closeness and condition.

6 Analyses excluding the data from the Asian American participant were identical to the results reported in the text. We decided to keep the data from the Asian American participant because she said she was unfamiliar with Japanese culture.

7 The questionnaire included the Computer scenario, even though the Japanese found it irritating in Study 1, and therefore it was not as good an example of positive Amae as the other two scenarios used in that study. In Study 2, the Americans perceived the request to fix the computer as more difficult than the Japanese did, and participants in both cultures responded to it somewhat negatively, suggesting that 1) it had somewhat different connotations in the two cultures, and 2) that it was not a clear example of positive Amae even in Japan. Thus we decided not to include the data from the Computer scenario.

8 That participants went through all three conditions looks like a within-subject design that may be more susceptible to demand characteristics than between-subjects designs. However, demand characteristics themselves are cultural, and if American values of independence are salient, one might expect demand characteristics to produce greater differences between the two cultures. If demand characteristics act in the same way in both cultures, that is also evidence of the recognition of Amae by Americans.

9 Three Japanese coders fluent in English independently rated the extent to which each of the essays represented “Amae” on a scale from 1 = not at all Amae to 7 = very much Amae. In 85 out of 116 essays (73.5%), the mean Amae ratings of the three raters was greater than 4.0 and 47 (40.5%) had a mean greater than 5.0. Among the 10 essays that were rated as 5 or higher by all three coders, we arbitrarily chose three essays from the Friend’s Amae category and three from Own Amae category. The six essays were back-translated into Japanese by two bilingual Japanese.

10 These correlations are consistent with Leu’s (2004) findings that negative correlations between positive and negative emotions are more pronounced among Americans than among East Asians, especially in pleasant situations. Uchida and Kitayama (2004) also found that happiness is a purely positive experience
for the Americans, whereas it can have negative connotations for the Japanese.

Further univariate tests indicated a significant main effect of culture for positive emotion, $F_s (1, 110) > 19.0, ps < .001$, but not for negative emotion. Consistent with previous cultural studies (e.g., Kitayama, Markus, & Kurokawa, 2000; Lee, Jones, Mineyama, & Zhang, 2002), Americans expressed more positive emotion than Japanese, whereas Americans and Japanese did not differ in their experience of negative emotion.

We also conducted separate univariate ANOVAs for each of the dependent variable and found no significant interaction for both ratings of closeness and the likelihood of friendship in the Plant and Hotel scenarios, $F(2, 117) < 1.0, p > .40$.

The modern analogy of encounter groups would be support groups.

References


Manuscript, Stanford University.


**APPENDICES**

**APPENDIX A**

**Computer Scenario**

Your best friend S who is also your roommate has to write up a term paper by tomorrow morning and is burning the midnight oil. You decide to go to bed before S because you have an early class. At midnight, S's computer breaks down. It would take the whole night if S tried to fix it alone. S has several friends who are good at computers, and you are one of them. S knows that you can fix the computer very easily,

[Amae] … and asks you to fix the computer.[No Amae] … but does not ask anyone to fix the computer[Other Amae] … but asks another friend to fix the computer

**Dog Scenario**

L is a close friend of yours who has lived in your neighborhood for a long time. L has to go out of town for a training seminar for several days. L has a dog but cannot take it to the seminar, so L has to find someone to come to look after the dog. The pet service would be very expensive. L has several friends, including you, who are likely to agree to take care of the dog. You feel that you could do it.

[Amae] … L asks you to do it.[No Amae] … L decides to leave the dog at a pet service.[Other Amae] … L asks another friend to do it.

**Hotel Scenario**

N is your oldest and best friend from junior high and high school. You came to the city for college. N decided to go to a college near home, but you have kept in regular contact. One day, N calls you to see whether you can get together when N will be visiting the city for three days. You ask if N has a place to
stay.

[Amae] … N asks to stay at your apartment.[No Amae] … N gives you the name of a hotel.[Other Amae] … N tells you the name of another friend.

APPENDIX B
L is a close friend of yours who has lived in your neighborhood for a long time. L has a beautiful garden with a collection of rare plants that need to be watered every day. L has to go out of town for a training seminar for several days. L does not want the plants to die, so L has to find someone to come to the garden every day to water them. Hiring a gardener would be very expensive. L has several friends, including you, who are likely to agree to water the garden. You feel that you could do it.

[Amae] … L asks you to do it.[No Amae] … L decides to hire the gardener.[Other Amae] … L asks another friend to do it.

APPENDIX C
Friend's Amae
1. “In Physics, my fairly close friend E asks me frequently to help her with her homework. I am flattered that she comes to me although I feel also she may be using me. I do all the work and she gets credit for it. It's a big favor because the homework is a fairly large part of our grade and it happens multiple times a week. We are not best friends but do hang out- in larger crowds. I suppose it is acceptable for her to ask me but I sometimes feel like I'm too wanting to be nice than wanting to help her.”

2 “My best friend asked me to wash her laundry, type her paper, and clean her room because she was too busy with sorority pledging. I did not want to do all of it because I had a lot of work to do but I did it anyway to be a good friend. I had an attitude at first because I felt pressured but eventually I said “oh, whatever.”

3. “A person I work with, J, asked me to cover for them for the whole weekend at work. I have known J for a couple of months now, but we’re not all that close. I would be making some extra overtime by covering for J, but I have to sacrifice all weekend plans and some sleep to help J out. I agreed to do it because I need the money, but I felt like a shmuck for doing it. I had previous plans, nothing earth shattering, but regardless. I felt like my kindness was taken advantage of because this isn't the first time I've covered for J.”

Own Amae
1. “This semester, I waited til the last minute to write a 10 page paper. I asked my cousin to stay with me and help. I felt guilty because I knew he had his own exams to study for. But at the same time, I didn't care, I needed help with my paper and he's a good paper writer.”

2. “I am a very slow typist so I asked my best friend to type my term paper for me. It was an imposition on her because she was planning to go out that day but agreed to help me, so my paper would not be submitted late. I know that she was probably the only person who would agree to do it so I did not bother to ask anyone else. I know that it was rude of me to ask for such a big favor but I was desperate for help.”

3. “Once (ok well several times) I have had to ask a friend to complete a homework assignment for me and turn it in because of time constraints I couldn't do it myself. R more than happily agreed and I felt that
R was a true friend because R helped me out in a time of need more than once and did not have a problem with it and even offered to help in other ways too.”

Submitted: June 1, 2005 Revised: December 2, 2005 Accepted: January 17, 2006

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Accession Number: 2006-07383-011
Digital Object Identifier: 10.1037/1528-3542.6.2.279