

THE SMILE AS A MASKING AND A QUALIFYING DISPLAY STRATEGY A Polish-American comparison

Piotr Szarota

*Warsaw School of Social Psychology
Poland*

Sylvia Bedyńska

*Warsaw School of Social Psychology
Poland*

Stanisław Sterkowicz

*Cracow Academy of Physical Education
Poland*

David Matsumoto & Seung Hee Yoo

*San Francisco State University
USA*

Why do we smile?

- There are numerous reasons why people do smile.
- They smile out of joy, out of pride, out of embarrassment, and out of contempt.
- They smile out of politeness, out of courtesy, out of lust, and out of sympathy.
- They smile to show their emotion, and they smile to hide their true feelings.
- How, when and why they smile usually depends on culture. Different cultures have their own “smiling codes”.

The smile in American culture

- What makes Americans the worlds leading smilers?
- Cheerfulness
- First one should point to the central importance of positive feelings in American culture. In particular, that culture fosters and encourages cheerfulness. It could be seen first and foremost in American most common aphorisms: “Cheer up, things could be worse”, “Smile, look on the bright side!”
- As Platt (1995) put it: „*Smile! Look cheerful when you go out in public!* says the American mother to her toddler. So we grow up into automatic smilers”.

- Happiness
- There's not only cheerfulness, there's also constant pursuit for happiness. The Declaration of Independence proclaims that the pursuit of happiness is an inalienable right.
- As Markus and Kitayama put it (2000) "Failing to be happy implies that one is shirking one's responsibility and failing to realize the American cultural mandate". Small wonder that the percentage of Americans reporting happiness is above 80 percent.
- And guess what is a prototypical expression of happiness?

- Friendliness
- And on top of it, there is American friendliness.
- “There is a strong preference to preserve the appearance of cordiality and friendliness, even when strong differences of opinion are present. Nice words and polite smiles are expected as something natural during everyday social interaction” (Stewart & Bennett, 1999).

Jean Baudrillard (1988) on the American smile

- The American smile is something you like or dislike. French philosopher Jean Baudrillard comments:

„...Whether I am right in all this or not, they certainly do smile at you here, though neither from courtesy, nor from an effort to charm. This smile signifies only the need to smile. It's a bit like the Cheshire Cat's grin: it continues to float on faces long after all emotion has disappeared. A smile available at any moment, but half-scared to exist, to give itself away [...] The smile of immunity, the smile of advertising: *This country is good. I am good. We are the best* [...]”.



The smile in Polish culture

- Unlike Americans, Poles are very hesitant to smile in public. And they have good (cultural) reasons.
- Sincerity
- As Anna Wierzbicka (1999) puts it: “In Poland the assumption that a person’s face should reflect his or her feelings is far more than an individual preference: it is a cultural premiss, supported by linguistic evidence in the form of pejorative expressions like *falszywy uśmiech* (a false smile) and *sztuczny uśmiech* (artificial smile) [...]” Such expressions imply that „someone is *displaying good feelings towards another person* that in fact are not felt, and that *of course* it is very bad to do so”.

- Pessimism
- It seems that there is no cultural norm of cheerfulness or optimism in Poland. Instead Poles like to complain and it is OK to express bad feelings in public.
- As Dariusz Dolinski (1996) puts it: “In Poland when asked *How are you?* Someone who says that (s)he is doing fine is perceived as boastful and conceited. In answer to such a question it is considered polite to complain about financial problems, bad luck, poor health or one’s boss”.
- While Americans “usually define their mood as better than usual” (cf. Johnson, 1937), Poles estimate it on the average as “worse than usual” (Dolinski, 1996, Wojciszke, 2004).

Klos Sokol (1997) on the Polish smile

- Laura Klos Sokol – American linguist married to a Pole and living in Warsaw comments that „Americans smile more in situations where Poles tend not to”; Poles „don’t initiate an exchange of smiles in a quick or anonymous interaction”.
- „In everyday life, the approach to fleeting interactions in Poland is often take-me-seriously. Rather than the cursory smile, surface courtesy means a slight nod of the head. And some Poles may not feel like masking their everyday preoccupations. From this perspective, the smile would be fake”.

Predictions

- We predicted that generally in Poland people would mask and qualify „bad feelings” less likely than Americans. On the other hand, Americans with their preoccupation with positive feelings would mask and qualify them less often than Poles.
- We also predicted that in „somewhat” collectivistic Poland negative emotion would more likely be masked or qualified in the in-group setting like family or a circle of good friends, while in individualistic America, the negative feelings would rather be masked or qualified in the out-group settings (e.g. with acquaintances). Opposite pattern will be expected in a case of happiness.
- The last prediction was based on the Matsumoto’s theoretical model as well as the results of the previous Polish-American comparison (Matsumoto & Hearn, 1989).

Measure

Display Rules Assessment Inventory (DRAI)

- Participants chose a behavioural response when they experience one of the seven (basic) emotions in different social settings;
- Subjects chose what they think they SHOULD do in a given situation, not what they ACTUALLY do;
- Situations include interactions with family members, friends and colleagues (i.e. target persons) in public (e.g. in the restaurant) or in private (at home);
- Emotions include anger, contempt, disgust, fear, sadness, surprise, and happiness;

- Behavioural strategies include:
 1. Expression: Express the feeling as is with *no inhibitions*;
 2. Deamplification: Express the feeling, but with *less* intensity than one's true feelings;
 3. Amplification: Express the feeling, but with *more* intensity than one's true feelings;
 4. Qualification: Express the feeling, but together with a *smile* to qualify one's feelings;
 5. Masking: *Smile* only in order to hide one's true feelings.

Subjects

Polish sample

162 university students (91 females: 71 males)

Age (M=26.3; SD=6.5)

American sample

424 university students (281 females: 143 males)

Age (M=22.7; SD=6,1)

Data reduction

- In order to simplify the model we decided to reduce 20 target person categories into following four:
- Family: mother, father, older sister, younger sister, older brother, younger brother;
- Friends: close friend who is female, close friend who is male;
- Acquaintances: acquaintance who is male, acquaintance who is female, classmates of a higher class year, classmates of a lower class year, classmates of the same class year (separately male and female);
- Professors: male teacher/professor in his 50s or 60s, female teacher/professor in her 50s or 60s, male teacher/professor in his 30s or 40s, female teacher/professor in her 30s or 40s.

RESULTS

- In Poland, as well as in the States the most popular display strategies were identified as Expression and Deamplification. The other three were apparently used rather sporadically.
- When it comes to main effects of CULTURE, there is only one significant difference between Poland and USA. Surprisingly Americans decided to chose the Expression strategy more often than did Poles ($F=5.52$; $p<0.05$).
- However, there is also a clear tendency for Americans to use Deamplification strategy more readily than Poles ($F=2.79$, $p=0.09$).

Qualifying

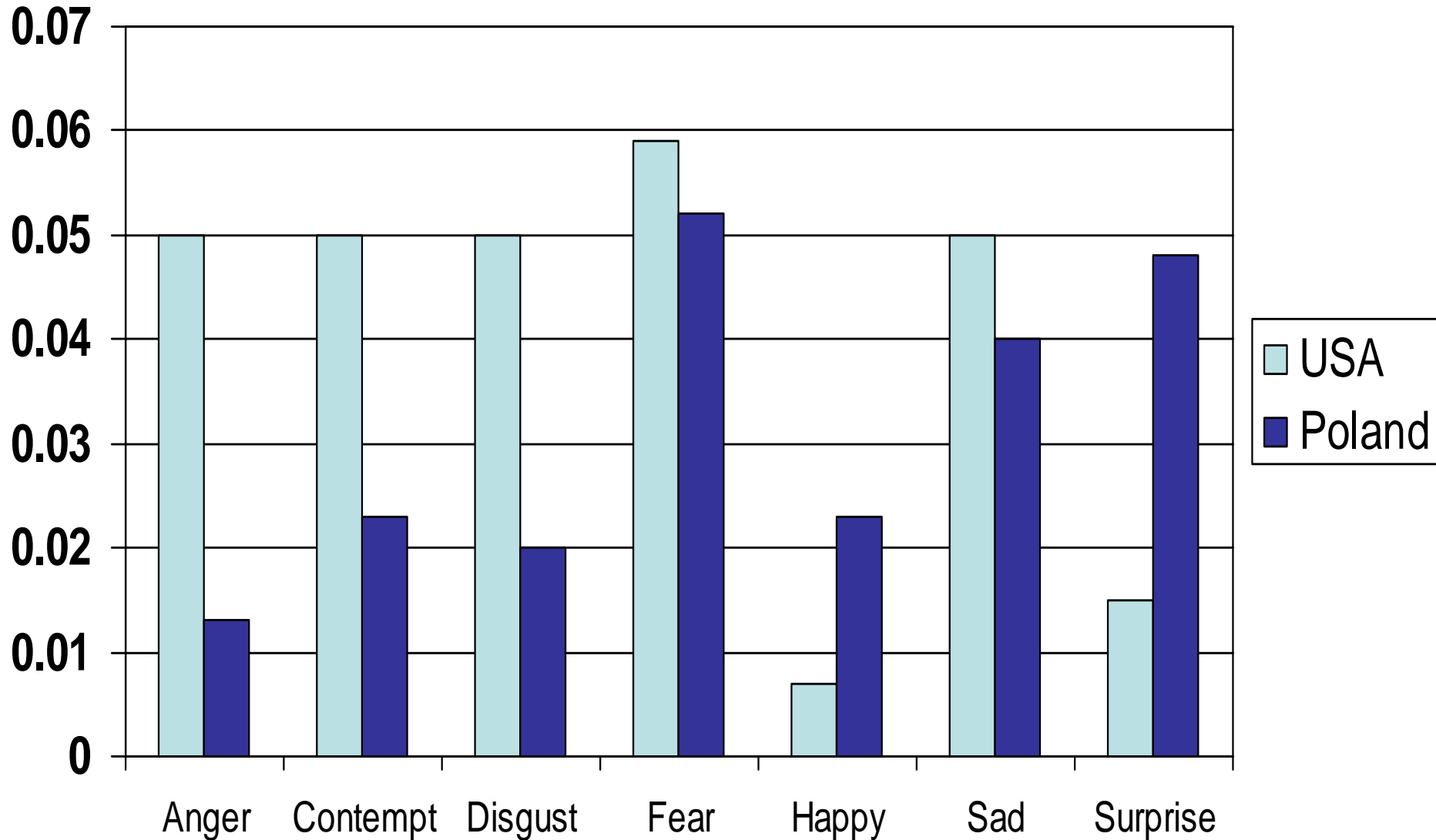
- Main effect of CULTURE is not significant (F=0.06; ns.);
- Interaction: CULTURE by EMOTION not significant (F=0.72; ns.);
- Interaction: CULTURE by TARGET not significant (F=0.37; ns.);
- Interaction: CULTURE by TARGET by EMOTION not significant (F=0,85; ns.)

Masking

- Main effect of CULTURE is not significant (F=0.06; ns.);
- Interaction: CULTURE by EMOTION is significant (F=3.16; p<0.01);
- Interaction: CULTURE by TARGET is significant (F=2.63; p<0.05);
- Interaction: CULTURE by TARGET by EMOTION is significant (F=1.61; p=0.06)

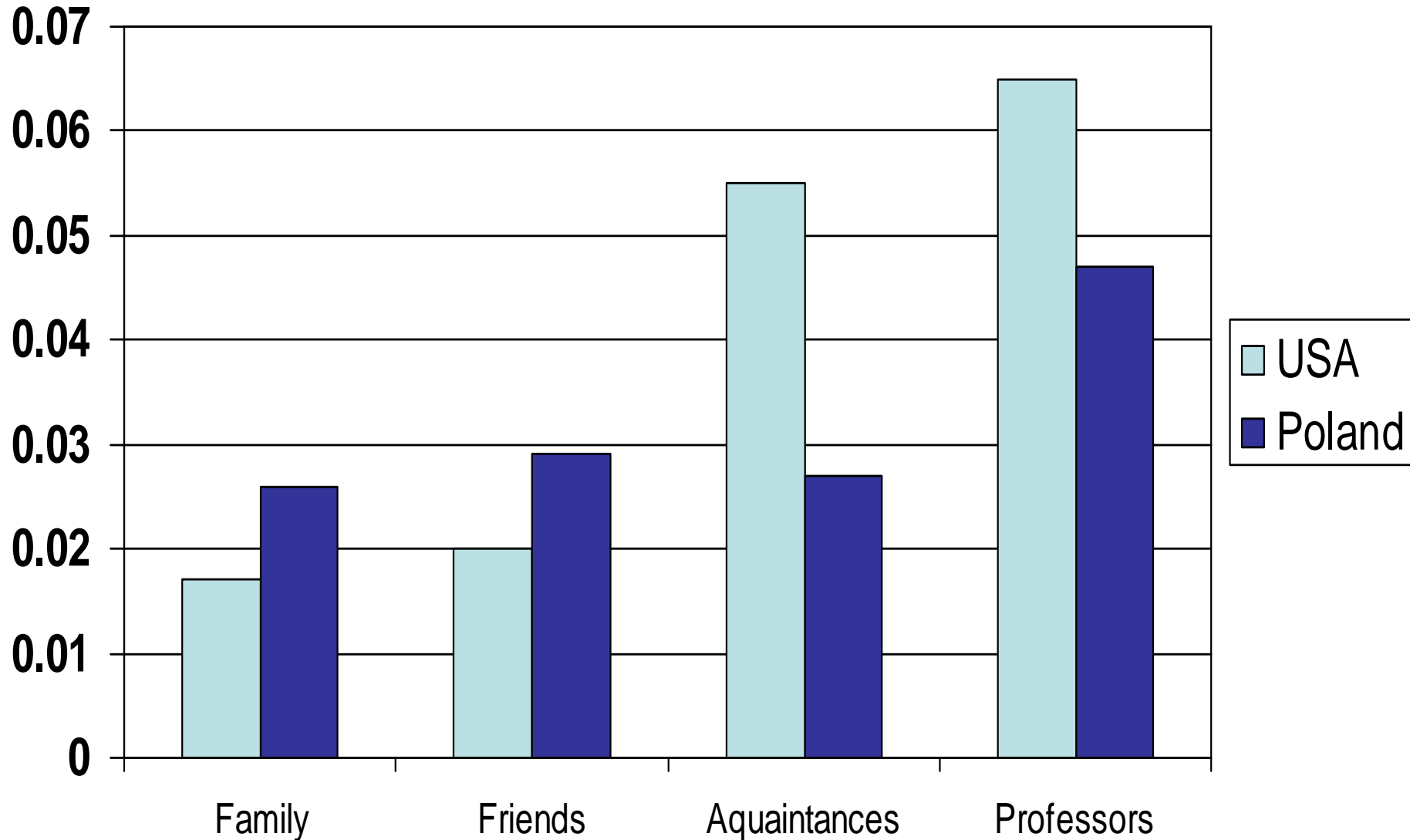
Masking

EMOTION by CULTURE Interaction (F=3.16; p<0.01)



TARGET by CULTURE Interaction

($F=2.63$; $p<0.05$)

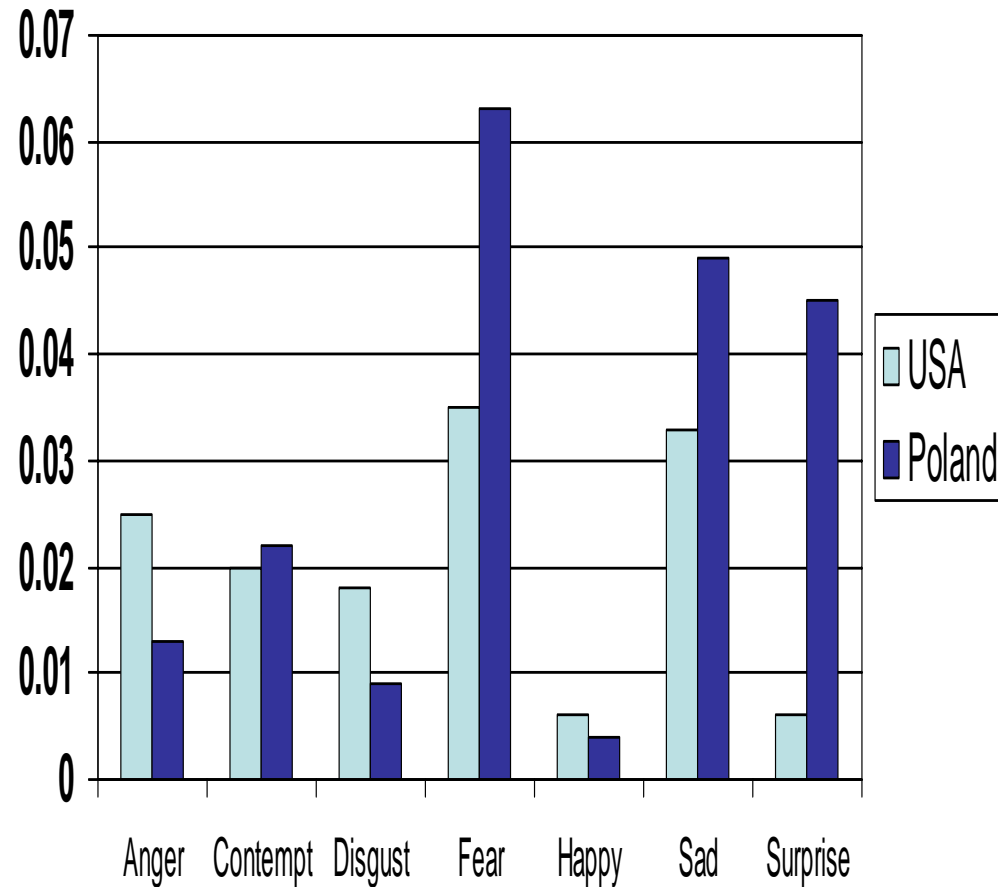
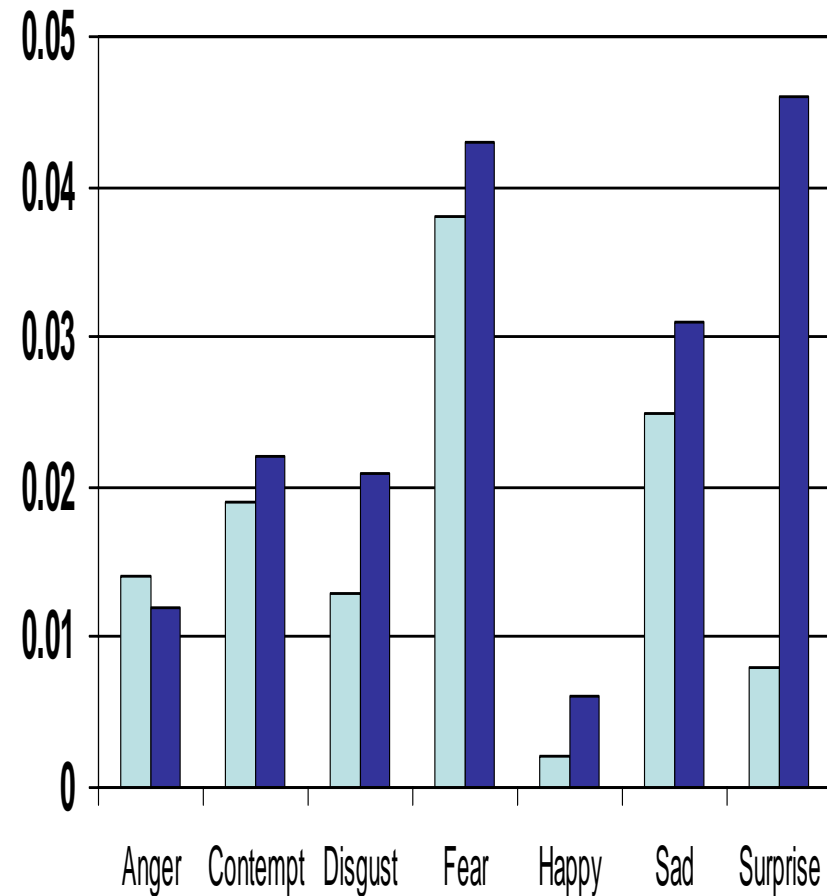


TARGET by CULTURE by EMOTION

Interaction ($F=1.61$; $p=0.06$)

FAMILY

FRIENDS

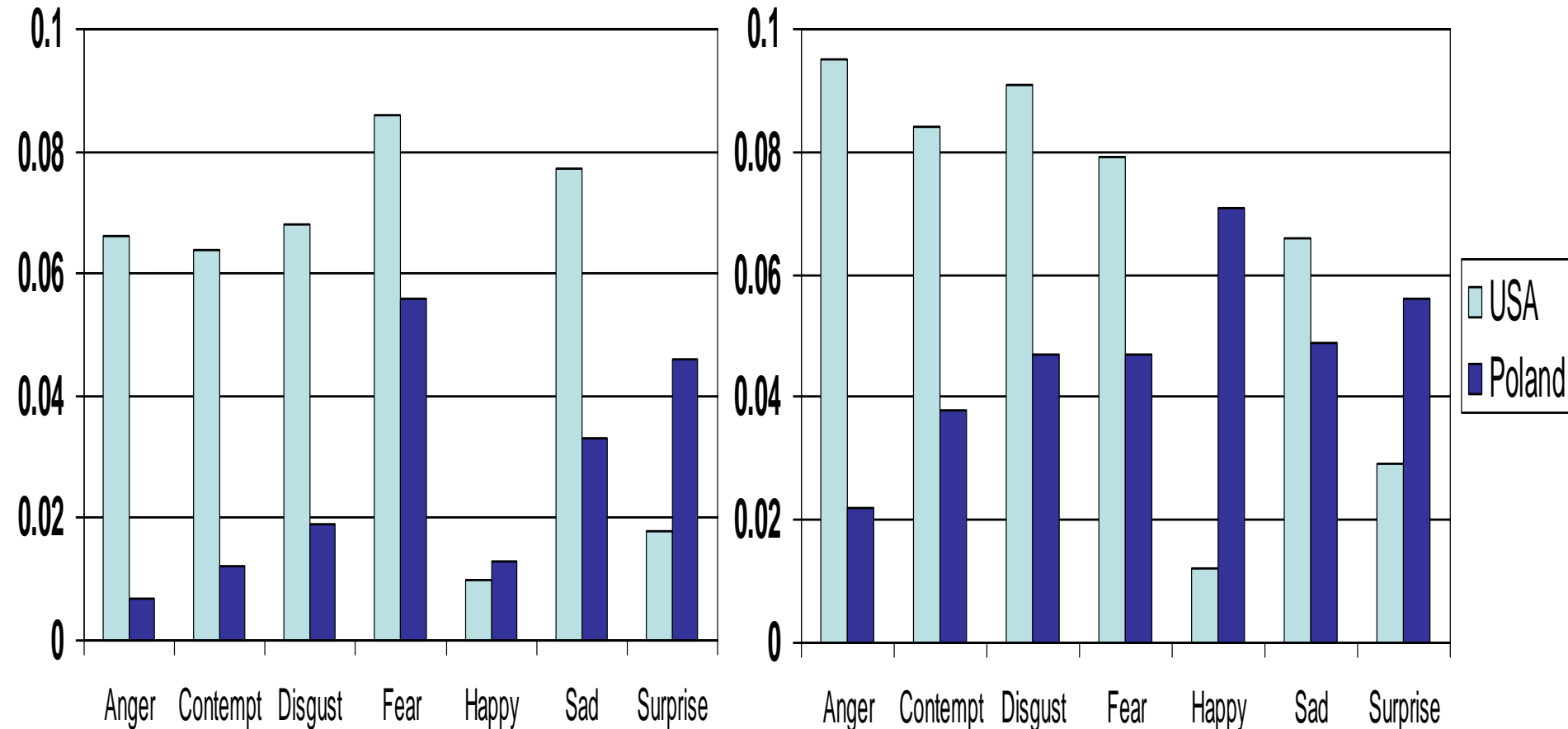


TARGET by CULTURE by EMOTION

Interaction ($F=1.61$; $p=0.06$)

AQUAINTANCES

PROFESSORS



Discussion

- The fact that cross-cultural differences were found only in case of Masking points to its distinctiveness when compared to Qualifying. Although smile is involved in both of them, it apparently carries different messages.
- The first hypothesis stating that Poles mask negative emotion less eagerly than Americans, and Americans are less tempted to mask positive ones, regardless of social context, was partially confirmed. Poles appeared to mask anger, contempt, and disgust (but not fear and sadness) less eagerly than Americans, and Americans do mask happiness less readily than Poles.

- Regarding the predicted cross-cultural differences in behaviour towards in- and out-groups, only a hypothesis concerning the out-groups was confirmed. Poles do mask negative emotions (anger, contempt, disgust, but not fear and sadness) less readily than Americans while interacting with acquaintances and lecturers.
- The opposite pattern was found for happiness, but only during the interaction with professors. However, we have to note, that it might be also due to differences between cultural models of student-teacher relations (more formal in Poland).
- The most surprising finding would be Polish eagerness for masking surprise regardless of social context. Apparently showing surprise is a bad form in Poland.



Thank you for listening!