

# The Relationship between Individualism / Collectivism Consultation and Harmony Needs

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## Abstract

This study examines how individualism and collectivism impact the need for consultation versus harmony respectively and whether they underlie direct and indirect communication during face-threatening situations. A MANCOVA design was employed testing individualism/collectivism, while controlling for social desirability, on consultation expectations and harmonious facework strategies from self-report questionnaires (n = 654) collected in the Chile, Hong Kong, Israel, Japan, Sweden, and the United States. Linear regression results show a direct link between individualism and consultation needs and collectivism and harmony needs indicating that when individualists' face is threatened, they need to be consulted directly about the situation at hand, while face-threatened collectivists need to be treated with harmonious (indirect) communication to manage their face.

**Keywords:** *face, facework, national culture, individualism, collectivism, cross-cultural communication, value survey module, VSM 94*

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## Introduction

Individuals know people mostly from their own cultural network; consequently, intercultural interactions generally occurs between strangers (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003). It is only when individuals conduct business overseas or attempt to accomplish other goals outside their usual network that they are likely to engage in intercultural communication.

Consequently, identifying and understanding underlying cultural values is essential for successful intercultural interactions (Earley & Peterson 2004: 115-110). Studies have examined how different cultural values determine the way people communicate to accomplish goals while also maintaining poise (e.g., Park & Guan 2006: 204-183). Considerations occur because it is difficult to decipher how to communicate effectively with people from other cultures; particularly when one is balancing attaining goals and maintaining composure with people who see things differently. The different perspectives people from dissimilar cultures hold are referred to as cultural norms. Cultural norms condition people to relate to others in patterned ways (Gudykunst & Kim 2003; Xizhen 2014). One classic example is how initial business meetings in places like the US get straight to the point. In contrast, in Japan, when business partners first meet, much time is spent socializing initially before plunging into the substance of a business deal.

These cultural patterns reflect fundamental values that underlie communication. Hence, the values behind getting straight to work reflect the individualistic value of consulting the other (as a courtesy). In contrast, the value sharing contexts before signing a contract, reflects the collectivistic notion that *face* must be attended to first. Establishing harmony gives *face* which founds good business relationships. Thus, collectivists need harmonious communication.

Hofstede (2001) identified four specific cultural dimensions (i.e., individualism/collectivism, power distance, masculinity/femininity, and uncertainty avoidance). However, the cultural dimension most powerful in explaining attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors is individualism/collectivism (Ting-Toomey 2010: 180-169).

*Individualism/Collectivism* describes the relationship between individuals and their relationship to groups. In individualist societies, “people prefer to act as individuals rather than as members of groups” (Hofstede 1984: 6). However, in collectivistic cultures “people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout people’s lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty” (Hofstede 2001: 225). Individualism is also related to low *power distance* which is “the extent to which [people] in a society accept inequality in power and consider it as normal” (Hofstede 1986: 307); while collectivism is related to a high power distance (Hofstede 1983: 89-75). This means that people who are individualistic, also believe they should have control over their own destiny (Bandura 2001: 27). Consequently, those from low power distance individualistic cultures expect authority figures to consult with them about decision making (Hofstede 2001).

Individualistic agency needs also explain research confirming the relationship between cultural individualism, human rights, and equality (Diener, Diener & Diener 1995: 864-851). Accordingly, individualistic countries give their citizens more freedom than collectivistic cultures (Basabe & Ros 2005: 221-189). Growing up with freedom socializes members of individualistic cultures to feel entitled to be consulted and thereby validated.

Underlying collectivistic needs for harmony are important because they can be a factor behind communication mishaps (Jia 2002:295-289). On the one hand, McLuhan and Fiore’s (1968) claim that the world has become a global village is accurate. For example, the world has become smaller by means of internet access, improved transportation, and the globalization. Alternatively, data shows that world value systems are more divided than ever (Inglehart 2005). Failed communication attempts that cause others to lose face can derail communicators’ goals, putting them in unsustainable positions (Pheng & Leong 2000: 316-307). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to assess whether individualism and collectivism influence consultation and harmony needs and to test whether these needs underlie direct and indirect communication -- strategies likely to be employed to maintain positive impressions.

## **Individualism, Collectivism, and Saving Face: Direct Versus Indirect Communication**

A large body of research highlights how individualists prefer direct communication while collectivists prefer indirect communication, particularly in face-threatening situations (e.g., Adair et al. 2004:111-87). Direct communication can be defined as messages that have the meaning included within them (Hammer & Rogan 2002: 575-551), including logical viewpoints, direct declarations, and expressiveness (Hammer 2005: 695-675).

Direct speech is efficient because it is concise, evident, and unequivocal. However, it commits the speaker to what is said which could easily cause people to lose face. For example, being politically incorrect could cause one to lose face; as in the case cited by Hamann (2013) of Justine Sacco, a PR executive who was fired for tweeting: “Going to Africa. Hope I don't get AIDS. Just Kidding I'm White!” If this proclamation were stated indirectly, this person could deny the statement’s intention, but direct statements ensure the meaning is embarrassingly clear.

So why would individualists prefer direct communication? Individualists favor direct communication partly because they can assert control over their relationships. Direct messages employ *low-context communication* – communication where the meaning is explicitly stated (Gudykunst et al. 1996: 543-510). In fact, findings with regard to *facework* – behavioral actions enacted to protect one’s face – indicate that individualism is responsible for more dominating and less other-oriented facework than collectivism (Oetzel, et al. 2001: 258-235). Direct communication strategies are risky and could destroy

relationships if not purposefully considered. However, individualists' need to manage relationships is so strong that they are willing to risk taking responsibility for their direct assertions.

Besides wanting control, individualists directly communicate to establish two-way communication, even if it means superiors involving subordinates in decision making (Pheng & Leong 2000: 316-307). Americans (individualists) prefer two-way communication because they often face complex open-ended situations requiring participative input (Pheng & Leong 2000). Indeed, individualism is related to the propensity to express voice (Chelminski & Coulter 2007: 118-98). Accordingly, individualists believe it is a loss of face when they are not consulted in decision making. Being consulted assures individualists that their opinion matters as unique individuals. This is partly because individualists promote their own welfare over the interests of their group (Hofstede 1983: 89-75), try to stand out and tend to use self-honoring facework (Gelfand, et al. 2002: 845-833). In contrast, collectivists tend to be other-honoring and prefer using consensus and mutual cooperation (Ting-Toomey 2005: 92-71).

In collectivistic cultures, the self is *interdependent*, which means that people feel linked to others in their primary group (Markus & Kitayama 1991: 253-224). Accordingly, collectivists must maintain connection and adjust their comportment to conform and be accepted by others; otherwise, they risk losing face (Markus & Kitayama 1991: 253-224). Consequently, they prefer to use indirect communication (Park et al. 2012: 187-179).

The distinctive feature of indirect communication is that the meaning is outside the message (Hammer & Rogan 2002: 575-551). Indirect communication styles consist of influencing through face work or third parties or using ambiguity (Hammer 2005: 695-675). However, the ambiguities of indirect speech can be a source of misunderstanding and conflict in relationships (Tannen 1991) which could also lead to a loss of face.

So why do collectivists use indirect communication? In summarizing culture and communication literature, "to be inserted after review" concluded that most collectivists prefer to be indirect because they are more comfortable avoiding conflict and losing face. For example, Adair and Brett (2005) studied intra-cultural negotiations in high-context and collectivistic Russia, Japan, Hong Kong, and Thailand. These negotiators communicated less directly and emphasized less task information than low-context negotiators did, but were still perceived as effective. Nevertheless, collectivists' need to uphold face is so important, they will risk being misunderstood for the sake of maintaining face. To uphold face, collectivists also place a greater emphasis on preserving harmonious interpersonal relations (Adair & Brett 2005:111-87).

The combination of indirect communication with an interdependent self explains collectivists' focus on others. Given this orientation, collectivists prefer one-way communication, where superiors use authority and subordinates provide little or no feedback. This helps preserve social harmony designed to avoid situations where disagreements could lead to losing face (Pheng & Leong 2000: 316-307) .

## **Consultation versus Harmony Needs**

While numerous studies have examined individualism/collectivism and direct/indirect communication, studies examining the primary needs behind these phenomena have previously not been tested. Underlying needs are important to identify because they are operating covertly during impression-management situations. For example, if something face-threatening occurs, individualists are likely to need to consult and address the problem while collectivists are likely to need to ease the situation and create a harmonious non-confrontational atmosphere.

When two people from different cultures meet, they rely on their past experiences and judgment to decide which communication is appropriate. However, if the two have conflicting needs, it is important to focus on what initially seems to be inappropriate communication. Therefore, viewing individuals' culture-based needs in greater depth could help researchers' better understand how to determine appropriate communication given inconsistent needs. Consultation and harmony needs have been referred to in the

literature (Hofstede 2001; Li 2006: 603-583), but their presence has not been previously tested. To fill this gap, this study attempts to establish greater support for the premise that consultation and harmony expectations are operating when people experience face-threatening situations. Identifying and understanding underlying cultural values is crucial for successful intercultural interactions (Xizhen 2014). It is therefore worthwhile to inform our understanding of appropriate communication with those from other cultures.

## Individualism and Consultation Needs

Individualists base their identity on their self alone (Hofstede 2001); so they tend to feel that they accomplish tasks through their own agency (Bandura 2001: 27-1). This perspective is evidenced by findings indicating that individualism is associated with greater respect for human rights (Basabe & Ros 2005: 221-189) and preferences for self-management. In kind, these notions highlight the individualistic need to be consulted about work (Hofstede 2001).

For years, Americans (individualists) have been plagued by the challenge to negotiate solutions with other nations who have collectivistic value systems. For example, US activism – political action to affect human rights beyond national boundaries – is particularly individualistic; and collectivistic nations bitterly resent such activity (Basabe & Ros 2005: 221-189). One illustration is how relations between the US and Egypt (collectivistic) are experiencing "unrest" because the US demanded a substantive rather than a "symbolic" response to human rights abuses (Shahshahani 2013).

Those from collectivistic cultures however, are not concerned with individuals (such as hostages or corpses) because they focus on symbolic equality like the status between negotiation partners and governmental face concerns (Cohen 1997). Similarly, individualism/collectivism influences work group perceptions. Just as collectivistic governments believe that decisions made at the top are none of anyone's business (Cohen 1997), collectivistic managers believe likewise.

Just as individualists are more likely to be activists, they are also likely to feel engaged at work through participative consultation. In fact, individualists tend to negotiate their identity through self-centered agency (Bandura 2001: 27-1) -- that people should promote their own welfare over the interests of their group (Hofstede 1983: 89-75). In order to feel engaged at work, individualists need to be consulted at the workplace.

Ting-Toomey (1988) argued that individualistic cultures are low-context –and correspondingly collectivistic cultures are also high context. Both high-context and low-context cultures -- were originally broken down by Hall (1976) according to two distinctive communicative patterns. Specifically, in high-context cultures, communication is implicit while in low-context cultures, communication is explicit. This is true to such an extent that members of low-context cultures are often perceived as excessively talkative, belaboring the obvious, and redundant (Hecht, Andersen, & Ribeau 1989: 185-163). Additionally, in face-threatening conflict situations, members of low-context cultures tend to use more confrontational solution-orientated strategies than their collectivistic counterparts (Meng-Yu 2009: 58-55). This explicit approach to communication corresponds to individualists' consultation needs. In order to maintain their face, they need to be consulted and participate. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are posed:

*H1: Members of individualistic cultures will enact more consultational face-saving communication than members of collectivistic cultures.*

*H2: Consultation needs will lead to the greater use of direct communication strategies to save face.*

## Collectivism and Harmony Needs

Collectivists base their identity in their social system. Consequently, collectivists emphasize conformity, empathy, and dependence which acts to smooth over social situations and allow people to blend into the

group (Bargiela-Chiappini & Haugh 2009: 293). Collectivists with interdependent selves also fear being personally ostracized or shaming their group (Stadler 2013: 75-66). To forestall losing face, collectivists pursue harmony during interactions (Breland, et al. 2011: 207-194). Given collectivists' need for harmony, they are less likely to take a stand even if it could lead to greater happiness (Diener & Suh 2003: 434).

Thus, harmony needs can be explained by collectivists' associated high power-distance which is also associated with *unjust world beliefs* (Furnham 1993: 329-317), acceptance of unpleasant emotions (Diener & Suh 2003: 434) and authority. Traits of harmony and acceptance clarify research confirming the connection between collectivistic citizens effectively living under authoritarian governmental systems (Kimmelmeier, et al. 2003: 322-304). Collectivistic citizens' acceptance of power differentials and unwillingness to risk losing face allows more dictatorial governments to flourish (Moore 2003). This leads to practicing the ideal of harmony where individuals engage in more negotiation, less confrontation, and more peaceful solutions (Li 2006: 603-583).

When harmony is present, collectivistic high-context cultures can be "cultures in which people are deeply involved with others and subtle messages with deep meaning flow freely" (Hall 1976: 39). Findings show that in face-threatening conflict situations, members of high-context cultures use more nonconfrontational indirect communication strategies (Meng-Yu 2009: 58-55) which are more likely to lead to trust, an essential element of harmonious relationships (Lovell, Lee, & Brotheridge 2012: 482-467). In high-context cultures a direct or confrontational mode of communicating can be perceived as highly face threatening (Gudykunst, et al., 1988). It follows, therefore, that indirect communication (e.g., verbal ambiguity and equivocation) is initiated as a mindful effort to avoid face-threatening clashes. Thus, the following hypotheses are posed:

*H3: Members of collectivistic cultures will enact more harmonious face-saving strategies than members of individualistic cultures.*

*H4: Harmony needs will lead to the greater use of indirect communication strategies to save face.*

## Method

To test H1-H4, surveys were administered to a large multicultural sample. Individualistic and collectivistic participants responded to questionnaires. Then quantitative tests were carried out. Implications of statistically significant results were then further analyzed.

## Design and Statistical Procedures

This study examined whether individualism/collectivism impacts consultation and harmony face-saving needs in six cultures by means of a multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) design. Social desirability was included as a covariate (Crowne & Marlowe 1964). All samples had more than 70 participants which provided adequate power for MANCOVA designs (Cohen 1988). Linear regression analyses tested whether consultation needs influence direct communication and whether harmony needs influence indirect communication.

## Participants

To adequately operationalize culture, subjects were matched on as many demographic characteristics as possible. A total of 658 college students participated in this study: 442 women and 216 men. These participants represented the following countries: Chile, Hong Kong, Israel, Japan, Sweden, and the United States. The Chilean sample (n = 70) came from two Universities in Santiago. The Hong Kong sample (n = 92) came from two Hong Kong Universities (n = 92). The Israeli sample (n = 81) came from Universities in Haifa, Ramat Gan, and Tel Aviv. The Japanese sample (n = 98) came from Nara, Japan. The 92 Swedish participants came from Universities in Lund, Trollhattan-Uddevalla, and Stockholm. Finally, the United States sample (n = 241) came from a Midwestern University.

## Experimental Procedure

College professors teaching in their native culture distributed questionnaires to their students. This study was part of a larger one where respondents read a vignette representing a face-threatening situation and rated nine different strategies in terms of likelihood of use. Respondents were asked to indicate on a five-point Likert scale the extent to which they would use each strategy. USA respondents and respondents from Hong Kong, Israel, and Sweden received questionnaires in English because they were bilingual.

Hispanic participants filled out the questionnaire in Spanish. To assure validity, their questionnaire was translated into Spanish by one person and back-translated by a different translator. The same procedure was repeated for the Japanese participants.

## Instrumentation

There is a great deal of controversy relating to the conceptualization of individualism's multifaceted nature (e.g., House, Javidan, & Dorfman 2001: 505-489 ; Markus & Kitayama 1994: 579-568) and still remains (Ting-Toomey 2010). For example, some researchers hold that individualism is multidimensional (e.g., Gudykunst et al. 1996: 543-510) -- at least on the individual level. Others stress that there is substantial individual response variation within the same culture (Park, et al. 2012: 187-179). This study, however, conceptualizes individualism/collectivism as existing on a continuum (Hofstede 2001). Concurrent validity for Hofstede's (1984) original scores on individualism was established by Schimmack, Oishi, and Diener (2005) who correlated Hofstede's (1984) data set with many other individualism instruments. Given this study's focus on the cultural level, Hofstede's (1984) operationalization of individualism/collectivism by country rankings, modified by his *Value Survey Module* (VSM 94) calculations from actual population data were utilized for this study. Thus, individualism was measured by combining the highest versus the lowest ranking cultures on VSM 94 calculations (Hofstede 1994). The VSM 94 is made up of five four-item questionnaire segments on five-point Likert scales to compare culturally determined values between people from different countries. For the actual calculations from Hofstede's VSM 94 measure see Table 2.

The author constructed scales to measure *consultation expectation strategies* because no other instrument existed to measure them. The *Consultation Strategies Scale* (CSS) was constructed basis on Hofstede's (2001) description of consultation needs. The CSS was pretested to confirm its reliability. To assure construct validity, items were created for different contexts: organizational, school, and familial. A pilot test using 200 U.S. students was conducted yielding reliabilities of .77 for parents, .73 for school, and .79 for organizational structural change. This study used the organizational context version of the CSS (see Appendix A). The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .76.

*Harmony strategies* were measured using Cocroft's (1992) construction of response items. The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .72. *Social desirability* was measured using the Crowne and Marlowe (1964) Social Desirability Scale. The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .71. (see Appendix A for scale items)

## Results

The context of this study was a face-threatening situation. Most intercultural encounters tend to be face-threatening because due to globalization, we tend to have to work or negotiate with strangers whose communication could be easily misinterpreted. Because unsuccessful communication attempts can cause people to lose face -- putting them in unmanageable circumstances (Pheng & Leong 2000: 316-307), understanding underlying objectives behind communication could help interlocutors to communicate more successfully with their cultural counterparts. Consequently, this study sought to understand whether underlying individualistic consultation needs are behind the direct communication known to be used by individualists. In contrast, this study also attempted to identify whether underlying harmony needs are behind the indirect communication known to be used collectivists (Gudykunst, et al., 1988). To accomplish this, tests to affirm that individualists have consultation needs and collectivists have harmony

needs were carried out. A second set of tests showed that consultation needs impact on direct communication and that harmony needs affect indirect communication.

More specifically, results showed that members of individualistic cultures ( $M = 4.19$ ,  $SD = .71$ ) are more likely to utilize consultation strategies than members of collectivistic cultures ( $M = 3.66$ ,  $SD = .85$ ). Additionally, members of collectivistic cultures ( $M = 2.40$ ,  $SD = .56$ ) are more likely to utilize harmony strategies than members of individualistic cultures ( $M = 2.07$ ,  $SD = .58$ ) to manage face (see Table 3) thus supporting H1 and H3.

ANOVA results revealed that Chilean responses were significantly lower than all of the other countries tested and that the other five countries tested did not differ from one another. Thus, for this analysis, a MANCOVA with social desirability as the covariate was employed to control for any differences between samples. Bartlett's test of sphericity ( $923.27$ ,  $[1, 44]$ ,  $p < .0001$ ) indicated that multivariate analysis of covariance was warranted. The independent variable was individualism/collectivism. The dependent variables were facework strategies: consultation and harmony. The multivariate main effect for individualism/collectivism was significant (Wilk's  $\lambda = .84$ ,  $F(2, 650) = 60.38$ ,  $p < .0001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .16$ ). There were significant univariate effects for consultation expectations,  $F(1, 653) = 75.46$ ,  $p < .0001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .10$ , and harmony,  $F(1, 653) = 54.19$ ,  $p < .0001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .08$ . Regression analysis was carried out to test H2 and H4. H2, that consultation needs will lead to the greater use of direct communication strategies to save face, was substantiated ( $F(1, 658) = 20.71$ ,  $p < .0001$ ; Adjusted  $RR^2 = .03$ ). In addition, H4, that harmony needs will lead to the greater use of indirect communication strategies to save face, was also substantiated ( $F(1, 657) = 50.31$ ,  $p < .0001$ ; Adjusted  $R^2 = .07$ ). See Table 4 for additional regression statistics including  $\beta$  weights for significant findings.

## Discussion

### Implications in Relation to Hypotheses

The purpose of this study was to explore whether individualism/collectivism influences consultation and harmony needs and to test whether they underlie direct and indirect communication respectively. Research on the effects of individualism and collectivism on communication has primarily focused on how individualists use direct *low-context* communication and on how collectivists use indirect *high-context* communication (e.g., Adair et al. 2004: 111-87; to be inserted after review; Park et al. 2012: 187-179). However, the relationship between culture and communication is deeper. For communication to be effective between people from different countries, an understanding of each other's cultures and how each society communicates is essential. Therefore, this study examined and empirically tested the underlying consultation and harmonious needs that go along with direct and indirect communication styles during interactions.

These results should be qualified given the understanding that this analysis is on the national level and that there are individual differences. However, these results can be considered as a rule of thumb when conducting cross-cultural training. Research shows that employees in overseas affiliates at times resist management initiatives and can react angrily when changes clash with their values and beliefs (Smollan & Sayers 2009: 457-435). Additionally, if employers are concerned about turnover among US expatriates, it is advisable for them to provide cross-cultural training addressing their expectations of their foreign employers because unmet expectations about communication have been shown to be related to dissatisfaction, lower commitment, and voluntary turnover (Tannenbaum, Mathieu, Salas, & Cannon-Bowers 1991: 769-759). Similarly, in interpersonal contexts, relationships also suffer due to cultural misunderstandings.

Keeping this in mind, this study supported H1 that members of individualistic cultures will carry out more consultative face-saving communication than members of collectivistic cultures indicates that using low-context communication is essential to promote relationships with individualists. Thus, if US (individualistic) employees are working for a Japanese (collectivistic) employer, for example, the results of this study would indicate that they would expect to be consulted about work decisions. However, given

the likelihood that top-down decisions are made and considered acceptable by collectivists, individualistic employee consultation needs are not likely to be met by collectivistic employers. It would therefore be important in cross-cultural situations for individualistic employees to be prepared for collectivistic management styles in advance.

Moreover, as the results that substantiated H2 indicate, if individualists are not prepared to communicate effectively with their collectivistic counterparts, they are likely to use direct communication strategies automatically in face-threatening situations. This is problematic because direct communication can be easily construed as a face-threatening act (Merritt & Helmreich 1996: 224-175) by collectivists who prefer more harmonious face-saving strategies as was corroborated by the significant results in H3. Collectivists have harmony needs partly because they perceive their face to be regulated in a given social structure (Earley 1997). Because their sense of self is relational, collectivists consider the disruption of affiliations to be face threatening and avoid direct expressions that could hurt others' feelings (Holmes 2008: 110-102). In accordance with the support found for H4, harmony needs are likely to lead to the greater use of indirect communication strategies.

The dialogue styles used by members of individualistic and collectivistic cultures are fraught with competing needs. Research shows that individualists tend to handle conflicts directly through competition and problem solving, whereas collectivists are more likely to handle conflict in relationship-preserving indirect ways (Bazerman, & Curhan 2000: 314-279), like loyalty and passive neglect. To deal effectively across cultures behaviors should be interpreted considering interactants' culturally influenced preferences, expectations, and orientations (Stadler 2013: 75-66). To do this, individualists could increase their harmonious indirect communication such as restraint, persuasion through face work, using third parties, and ambiguity (Hammer 2005: 695-675) with collectivists.

In contrast, collectivists could engage in more direct communication including reasoned arguments, direct statements, and expressiveness with individualists (Hammer 2005: 695-675). This is partly because individualists are more likely to win negotiations with their greater skill using direct negotiation styles (Viswat & Kobayashi 2012). In addition, individualists are uncomfortable with indirect communication such as social exchange maneuvers and feel that their direct self-promotion is appropriate (Liu, Lee, Hui, Kwan, & Wu 2013: 840-832). Another tactic of positive stereotyping (e.g., Americans are so outgoing) used by collectivists can be face-threatening to individualists because unlike collectivists (Siy & Cheryan 2013: 102-87), it makes individualists feel depersonalized and stereotyped when they are lumped together with their group. Consequently, direct communication also needs to be genuine when communicating with individualists.

In addition to the actual communication style, other improvements in communicating to enhance face for constructive relationships between individualists and collectivists could include paying attention to normative ways of interacting as well as to the relationship between interlocutors (Schnurr, & Zayts 2013: 616-593). Thus, individualists would do well to try to be more indirect in their dealings with those from collectivistic cultures and realize that employing direct self-promotion could be looked down on by collectivists who may subscribe to Confucian values of modesty.

This study's results provide insight into which specific areas of communication to focus on during intercultural interactions. Direct and indirect communication styles resulting from consultation versus harmony needs are typically responsible for cultural clashes in communication. It is critical for culturally-aware individuals to recognize where and when not to communicate using direct or indirect communication styles, keeping in mind others' face needs.

## Limitations

Some researchers claim that individualism/collectivism have been defined so broadly in the literature that it has lost its original meaning (Oyserman et al. 2002: 72-3), creating calls to eliminate these labels altogether (Cohen 2009: 194-204). This study addressed this concern by measuring individualism using

definitions theoretically based on Hofstede's (2001) theory, using his country classification system as well as a secondary measurement to verify the construct validity of individualism/collectivism.

Second, this study's self-report design has both strengths and weaknesses. On the one hand, the self-report method has the advantage of being able to measure information that is inside respondents' minds and not readily observational. On the other hand, because this is a lab-based research design there is room for doubt about the generalizability of the results to actual settings.

Finally, the reliance on students as research subjects has strengths and weaknesses. On the one hand, using students limits variation in relevant demographic characteristics. On the other hand, the lack of variability in student samples controls extraneous variance that could act as competing predictors to culture as an independent variable.

## Future Research

The findings this study indicate that direct and indirect communication styles result from consultation versus harmony needs. In order to solidify this study's findings further, future research should replicate and further test these notions by means of other methodology such as observation and/or direct interviews. Future scholars are also urged to consider other designs from triangulated multiple methods to reinforce the present findings. This study's findings would be augmented by carrying out future research studies in more naturalistic settings such as actual workplaces or relationships as opposed to self-reports.

This study also showed that there are also underlying values that explain and help predict how people from different cultures are likely to instinctively react. Therefore, future research should attempt to anticipate and test the deeper meanings behind cultural communication practices. Greater understanding of nuances in cultural individualism/collectivism values could help members of different cultures to promote improved relationships.

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## Tables

**Table 1:** *Participants*

	Chile	Israel	Japan	Sweden	U.S.	Hong Kong
Mean Age	21.04	23.32	19.15	23.26	19.52	17.68
SD	(7.29)	(4.12)	(1.56)	(10.85)	(2.98)	(11.63)
Mean Education	15.49	14.11	13.04	14.7	14.25	14.32
SD	(1.59)	(1.40)	(2.21)	(3.42)	(1.44)	(2.81)

*Note:* SD = Standard Deviation; # =Number

**Table 2:** *Cultural Dimension Scores and Ranks for 6 Countries in CCa and VSMb*

<b>Individualism - Collectivism</b>		
Country	VSM 94	CC
Chile	(2)97	23(6)
Hong Kong	(5)70	25(5)
Israel	(4)92	54(3)
Japan	(6)66	46(4)
Sweden	(1)119	71(2)
USA	(3)95	91(1)

*Note:* Ranks are in parentheses. 1 = Highest and 6 = Lowest. a.CC = Culture's Consequences (Hofstede 2001). b. VSM 94 = Value Survey Module (Hofstede 1994).

**Table 3:** *Regression Model Harmony Needs and Indirect Communication*

	<i>b</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Indirect Communication	.275	.267	7.09	.0001

*Note:  $b$  = standardized coefficient;  $B$  = Unstandardized coefficients;  $t$  = t-test results;  $p$  = the  $p$ -value (the probability of obtaining the observed sample results when the null hypothesis is actually true).*

**Table 4** Regression Model Consultation Needs and Direct Communication

	<i>b</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Direct Communication	.121	.175	4.55	.0001

*Note:  $b$  = standardized coefficient;  $B$  = Unstandardized coefficients;  $t$  = t-test results;  $p$  = the  $p$ -value (the probability of obtaining the observed sample results when the null hypothesis is actually true).*

## Appendix A

### Questionnaire

#### **Part 1: How Would You Respond?**

*Please answer all the following questions by marking the response that best describes how you would respond in the situations described. There are no right or wrong answers. (Please respond to all the questions.) After reading the scenario below, please indicate the extent to which you might respond in the way indicated in each statement.*

*If you strongly agree with the statement, circle 5; if you strongly disagree, circle 1. Circle any number between 1 and 5.*

*Imagine that you are in a foreign country as a tourist and you are currently visiting with an acquaintance from this foreign country (you met this afternoon in the museum). This acquaintance invites you out for dinner. While dining in a fancy restaurant you accidentally knock over your glass of fruit juice. It shatters and your drink goes everywhere, including onto your acquaintance's white shirt. Everyone in the restaurant sees this.*

1. STRONGLY DISAGREE
2. DISAGREE
3. UNDECIDED
4. AGREE
5. STRONGLY AGREE

1. I would apologize directly    1 2 3 4 5
2. I would express my regrets forthrightly    1 2 3 4 5
3. I would share my real thoughts about the accident frankly    1 2 3 4 5
4. I would say what I think with no reservations    1 2 3 4 5
5. I would acknowledge what I see as the truth (that I am responsible) straight to his/her face    1 2 3 4 5
6. I would try express my regrets indirectly    1 2 3 4 5
7. I would express myself in question form (e.g., asking if he/she is o.k. or if I could help)    1 2 3 4 5
8. I would express my regrets indirectly    1 2 3 4 5

9. I would deliver my reaction subtly 1 2 3 4 5
10. I would respond to the other's reaction in a subtle way 1 2 3 4 5
11. I would express sympathy for the other person's predicament 1 2 3 4 5
12. I would try to avoid conflict with the other person 1 2 3 4 5
13. I would avoid outright disagreement with him/her 1 2 3 4 5
14. I would try to smile and express positive emotions only 1 2 3 4 5
15. I would try to smooth over topics that might lead to disagreement (e.g., offering to pay the dry cleaning bill to avoid disagreement) 1 2 3 4 5
16. I would maintain harmony between me and my acquaintance 1 2 3 4 5

### **Part 2: Rituals & Work**

*How often do the following statements below apply? Please indicate the extent to which the following occur in your culture. If it NEVER occurs circle 1; if it RARELY occurs, 2; if it SOMETIMES occurs, 3; if it OFTEN occurs, 4; and if it ALWAYS occurs, 5.*

1. NEVER
  2. RARELY
  3. SOMETIMES
  4. OFTEN
  5. ALWAYS
18. If my supervisor rearranged the furniture in my office, I would expect them to explain why they were doing this before actually doing it 1 2 3 4 5
  19. If my supervisors suddenly changed their management style, I would feel uncomfortable if I experienced this change without an explanation 1 2 3 4 5
  20. Good bosses tell their employees what their vacation plans are in advance 1 2 3 4 5
  21. If supervisors make decisions that affect the employees they should consult them first 1 2 3 4 5
  22. My colleagues really don't mind if their employers make decisions without their consent because this is their job 1 2 3 4 5
  23. Good employers clearly let their employees know what the rules are 1 2 3 4 5
  24. How frequently, in your experience, are subordinates afraid to express disagreement with their superiors? 1 2 3 4 5

### **Part 3: Ideal Job**

*Now, please think of an ideal job. DO NOT CHOOSE YOUR PRESENT JOB, if you have one. Please circle how important each of the following items are in that ideal job.*

1. of very little or no importance
2. of little importance
3. of moderate importance
4. very important
5. of utmost importance

*In choosing an ideal job, how important would it be to you to:*

25. have sufficient time for your personal or family life 1 2 3 4 5

26. have good physical working conditions (good ventilation and lighting, adequate work space etc)  
1 2 3 4 5
27. have a good working relationship with your direct superior 1 2 3 4 5
28. have security of employment 1 2 3 4 5
29. be consulted by your direct supervisor in his/her decisions 1 2 3 4 5
30. have an element of variety and adventure in the job 1 2 3 4 5
31. An organization structure in which certain subordinates have two bosses should be avoided at all costs 1 2 3 4 5

### **Part 6: Attitudes**

*The following questions will reflect your attitudes in general. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? If you strongly agree with the statement, circle 1; if you strongly disagree, circle 5. Feel free to circle any number between 1 and 5.*

1. STRONGLY DISAGREE
2. DISAGREE
3. UNDECIDED
4. AGREE
5. STRONGLY AGREE

32. I'm always willing to admit it when I make a mistake 1 2 3 4 5
33. I always try to practice what I preach 1 2 3 4 5
34. I never resent being asked to return a favor 1 2 3 4 5
35. I have never been irritated when people have expressed ideas very different from my own 1 2 3 4 5
36. I'm sometimes irritated by people who ask favors of me 1 2 3 4 5
37. I have never deliberately said something that hurt someone's feelings 1 2 3 4 5
38. I like to gossip at times 1 2 3 4 5
39. There have been occasions when I took advantage of someone 1 2 3 4 5
40. I sometimes try to get even rather than forgive and forget 1 2 3 4 5
41. At times I have really insisted on having things my own way 1 2 3 4 5
42. There have been occasions when I felt like smashing things 1 2 3 4 5
43. I never hesitate to go out of my way to help someone in trouble 1 2 3 4 5
44. I have never intensely disliked anyone 1 2 3 4 5
45. When I don't know something I don't at all mind admitting it 1 2 3 4 5
46. I am always courteous, even to people who are disagreeable 1 2 3 4 5
47. I would never think of letting someone else be punished for my wrongdoings 1 2 3 4 5
48. I sometimes feel resentful when I don't get my way 1 2 3 4 5
49. There have been times when I feel like rebelling against people in authority even though I knew they were right 1 2 3 4 5
50. I can remember "playing sick" to get out of something 1 2 3 4 5
51. There have been times when I was quite jealous of the good fortune of others 1 2 3 4 5
52. I am sometimes irritated by people who ask favors of me 1 2 3 4 5

*Now I need some information about you (for statistical purposes):*

53. 1. Male \_\_\_\_\_

2. Female \_\_\_\_\_

54. How old are you today? \_\_\_\_\_

55. How many years of formal school education have you completed?

1. Primary School \_\_\_\_\_ years

2. High School \_\_\_\_\_ years

3. College \_\_\_\_\_ years (Full-time Equivalency)

*Thank you very much for helping me with this project. the findings will help us increase our understanding of communication in different cultures.*

## About the Author

Rebecca Merkin has a Ph.D. in Intercultural Communication from Kent State University. She presently is an Associate Professor in the department of communication studies at Baruch College – CUNY in New York, New York. She is the author of a number of peer-reviewed articles on the topic of cross-cultural communication.

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