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## Communication to Reduce Embarrassment Between Individualistic and Collectivistic Cultures

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**COMMUNICATION TO REDUCE EMBARRASSMENT  
BETWEEN INDIVIDUALISTIC AND COLLECTIVISTIC CULTURES**

by

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B.A. December 1996, Old Dominion University


A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of  
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## ABSTRACT

### COMMUNICATION TO REDUCE EMBARRASSMENT BETWEEN INDIVIDUALISTIC AND COLLECTIVISTIC CULTURES.

Puvana Ganesan  
Old Dominion University, 1998  
Director: Dr. Thomas J. Socha

*Nearing Autumn's close.  
My neighbor---  
How does he live, I wonder?  
---Basho*

Intercultural communication is an inherent aspect of life, and "as we move or are driven toward a global village and increasingly frequent cultural contact, we need more than simply greater factual knowledge of each other. We need, more specifically, to identify what might be called the 'rulebooks of meaning' that distinguish one culture from another" (Barnlund, 1975, p. 7).

This thesis sought to discover and contribute valuable content to this "rulebook of meaning" through intercultural communication between high-context, collectivistic cultures and low-context, individualistic cultures in the situation of experiencing embarrassment. One goal of this study was to determine if distinct differences do exist between collectivistic and individualistic cultures in regards to ways of dealing or coping with embarrassment. Since specific embarrassment reduction strategies were identified for the two cultures, then in order to have a better understanding of the cultures, each must develop an understanding of how the other reacts and responds when embarrassed; thus adding an important component in the "rulebook of meanings."

This thesis is specially dedicated with all my gratitude and love  
to my parents,  
Mr. Ganesan and Mrs. Manon,  
for reasons they know best.

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## INTRODUCTION

- Tom (American): We were discussing human sexuality in my psychology class today. It was very interesting. What do you girls think about it?
- Diana (American): Oh well, I think sexuality depends on individuals, and we should be open-minded enough to discuss issues pertaining to it without any reservation. What do you think, Puvana?
- Puvana (Asian): Uh . . . umm . . . uh . . . I . . . I don't know (looking down:embarrassed).

Situations of embarrassment, such as the example above, frequently occur in many intercultural communication episodes. This is not surprising since communication between anyone, let alone participants of different cultures, is complex. In general, intercultural communication can be defined as "a symbolic, interpretive, transactional, contextual process in which the degree of difference between people is large and important enough to create dissimilar interpretations and expectations about what are regarded as competent behaviors that should be used to create shared meanings" (Hoopes, 1980, p. 6). It can also be defined as "the process of message interaction between two or more people in which a communication climate characterized by cultural differences influences the outcome of the interaction" (Dodd, 1987, p. 6). I consider intercultural communication to be communication between people of different cultures, beliefs, social norms, and traditions.

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Note: The journal model/style specifications used in this thesis is in accordance with the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (1994).

Intercultural communication is an important and growing area in research and application for many reasons. When viewed from an historical perspective, the foundations of intercultural communication include various factors. According to Dodd (1987), the first factor pertains to the evolution of national attitudes towards a more global view of our world. In addition, after the Second World War, programs focusing on world situations and U.S. policy abroad influenced the development of intercultural development studies, together with the establishment of the United Nations and other organizations that played important roles in creating the need to understand culture and communication. Apart from these factors, the 1960s brought about a cultural awakening and in particular, with the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964, the United States discovered its diversity through an array of minority groups dwelling and coexisting in its land (Dodd, 1987, p. 22 - 23). These historical factors also changed the perspective of communication on the whole. For example, "today, relatively few people are surrounded by neighbors who are cultural replicas of themselves. Tomorrow, we can expect to spend our lives in the company of neighbors who will speak a different tongue, seek different values, move at a different pace, and interact according to a different script" (Barnlund, 1975, p. 3). Barnlund (1975) also asked an important question: "If people currently show little tolerance or talent for encounters with alien cultures, how can they learn to deal with constant and inescapable existence?" (p. 4).

Intercultural communication is indeed important in navigating our world. In order to better understand intercultural communication, we first need to understand that intercultural communication encompasses a vast area of messages and meanings that involve disclosing messages, the nature of the sender and receiver of the message, and the context of an episode. It also involves antecedent attributes of the participants, the climate for interaction which is created as two people (A and B) of different cultures interact, and messages that form an intercultural relationship between A and B. These factors and others prompt intercultural consequences and effectiveness of the messages encoded and decoded by both A and B. Dodd (1987) developed a model of intercultural communication that illustrates these complexities. The model has been reproduced by using the SmartDraw computer program; thus, it is modified in size and shape, but not in content. See figure 1.

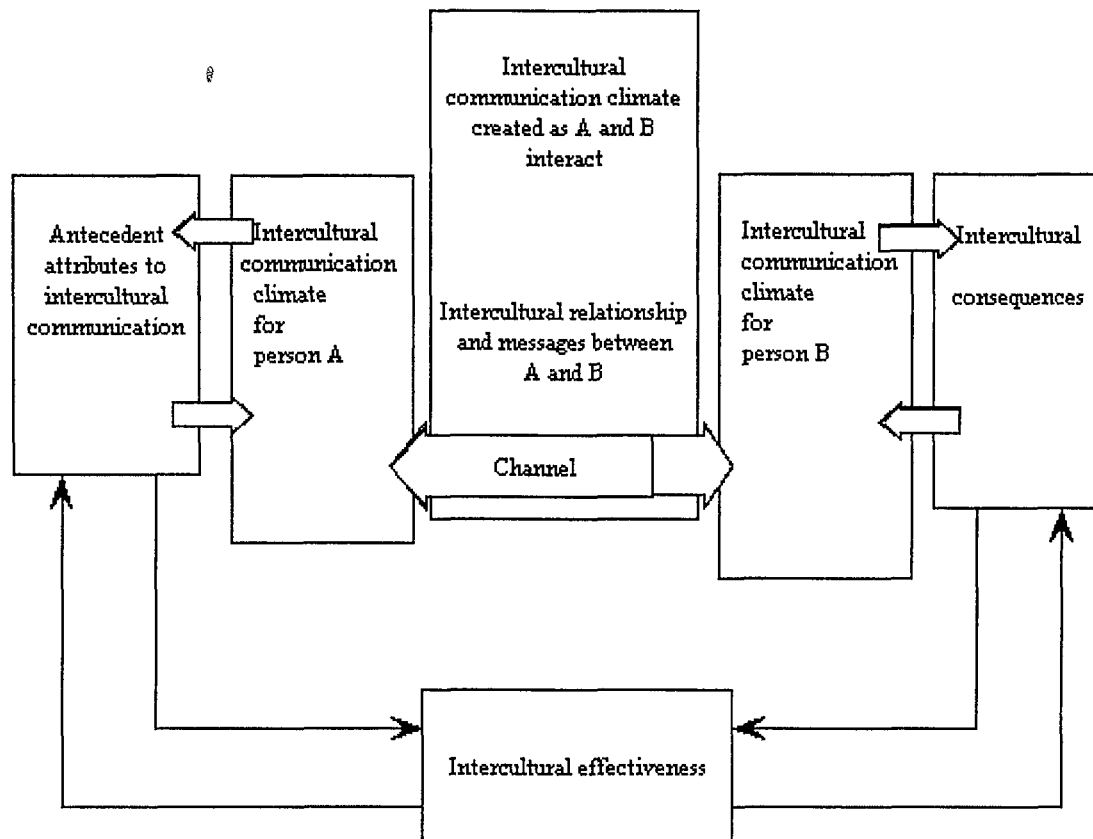


Figure 1. A model of intercultural communication.  
[Dodd, 1987, p. 6]

There are many ways that an intercultural episode can go awry, and many reasons as to why these problems may occur. One problematic aspect of intercultural communication involves the topic of taboo in different cultures, and often, embarrassment results for the person who feels that a certain topic is taboo or unfit for public discussion. In an intercultural context (based on Dodd's model of intercultural communication), taboo enters via antecedent attributions

that affect interpersonal climate which, in turn, affects the outcome of an intercultural communication episode. The embarrassment might result in negative consequences such as dissatisfaction with the intercultural relationship, further embarrassment and withdrawal.

Embarrassment is not only consequential in intercultural episodes, but it is an inherent problem in all relationships. Past efforts to study embarrassment have shown that it is multi-faceted and sometimes difficult to analyze. For example, embarrassment is an emotion that can be easily mistaken. The emotion of embarrassment is defined as "affective component of the cognitive process of self-awareness" (Lewis, 1995, p. 5), but is frequently mistaken for shame, humiliation, and fear. It is viewed as a negative emotion. In order to identify this emotion, it has been suggested that overt embarrassment is recognized or can be perceived using facial expression and other expressive displays such as body motion and smiling (Crozier, 1990, p. 5). Further, embarrassment has been characterized by a well-defined behavioral display that communicates "discomfort in the presence of others . . . being upset or disturbed by others' scrutiny or remarks, or merely because others are present" (Buss, 1980, p. 204). Among behaviors that reflect embarrassment are: smiling facial expression, gaze aversion, and movement of hands to touch hair, face, and clothing" (Tangney & Fischer, 1995, p. 8). Nonverbal behaviors that directly incorporate elements of avoidance or coping with embarrassment can be utilized as an adapter to reduce embarrassment. In communication, adaptors are

frequently used, and adaptors function as tools to accompany and enhance communication or to distract attention from an unpleasant situation through nonverbal displays. For example, when someone is communicating to another person about something he or she dislikes very much, that person could fold his/her arms to him/herself, and this is an adaptor which gives others a clue that the person is feeling uncomfortable or uneasy. In this way, adaptors are often used when people are embarrassed.


However, I do not feel that nonverbal behavior alone is effective in embarrassment coping strategies because emphasis on intercultural communication is neglected when an embarrassed person engages in nonverbal behavior as a coping mechanism while the other, who may have possibly caused the embarrassment, offers no solution to ease the situation. In other words, there could be a better link which may enhance intercultural communication if one is aware as to the types of messages one could use to facilitate the face-restoration of the embarrassed person.

A related construct, "embarrassibility, defined as the disposition to be particularly susceptible to experience embarrassment, has seldom been studied" (Asendorpf, 1990, p. 12). Further, "little is known about the development of embarrassment and embarrassment displays" (p. 96). Given that embarrassment is likely in intercultural episodes, I wish to identify embarrassment reduction strategies and the reasons that affect people's choices of embarrassment reduction strategies. For example, I am interested in

examining whether people of different cultures display different types of embarrassment reduction strategies when they are in embarrassing episodes. In particular, I wish to examine embarrassment reduction message strategies used between people of high-context cultures (collectivists) and people of low-context cultures (individualists).

“Edward Hall (1966) made an important contribution to intercultural communication when he distinguished between high and low-context cultures on the basis of their communication patterns” (Infante, Rancer, & Womack, 1993, p. 432). In a high-context culture, information in a message is encoded in the physical context or in “the person’s mental catalog of rules, roles, and values” (p. 432) while in the low-context culture, the information in a message is contained in the explicit or verbal message. While there exists both types of messages in all cultures, “Hall believes that one form or the other tends to predominate” (Infante, Rancer, & Womack, 1993, p. 432). As can be seen below, Samovar and Porter (1994) show examples of various cultures placed along rank-ordered dimensions of high and low-context settings. See figure 2.

## HIGH-CONTEXT CULTURES



Japanese

Arab

Greek

Spanish

Italian

English

French

American

Scandinavian

German

German-Swiss

## LOW-CONTEXT CULTURES

Figure 2. High-context and Low-context cultures.  
[Samovar & Porter, 1994, p. 23)

High-context communication occurs when most of the information is already in the person while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message: Little is said, much is assumed. In a low-context communication, the mass of information is vested in the explicit code: Much is said, little is assumed (Samovar & Porter, 1994). For example, American culture is classified as low-context because Americans openly express conflict or dissatisfaction, whereas the Chinese or the Japanese whose cultures are high-context, tend to



interpret messages depending on intuition or a common sense understanding of the message rather than on the specific words which are spoken (Ting-Toomey, 1985). I believe that the example given at the opening of this paper highlights the differences between a high-context and a low-context culture. Tom and Diana, who are Americans, come from a low-context culture while Puvana who is Malaysian, comes from a high-context culture. The three friends are having a conversation when Tom brings up the topic of human sexuality and asks for Diana and Puvana's opinion on the matter. Diana discloses her ideas about human sexuality without hesitation or embarrassment whereas a very embarrassed Puvana looks down, stammers, and concludes by saying "I don't know" in response. However, we can elaborate on this dichotomy to create a much enhanced understanding of the two forms by introducing two other forms: Collectivistic and Individualistic cultures.

According to Hofstede (1991), the key differences between a Collectivistic and Individualistic culture pertains to general norms, family, school, and workplace. Hofstede's (1991, p. 67) table below enables us to clearly see the differences between collectivistic and individualistic societies. See Table 1.

Table 1

Differences Between Collectivistic and Individualistic Societies

COLLECTIVIST	INDIVIDUALIST
People are born into extended families or other ingroups which continue to protect them in exchange for loyalty.	Everyone grows up to look after him/herself and his/her immediate (nuclear) family only.
Identity is based in the social network to which one belongs.	Identity is based on the individual.
Children learn to think in terms of 'we.'	Children learn to think in terms of 'I.'
Harmony should always be maintained and direct confrontations avoided.	Speaking one's mind is a characteristic of an honest person.
High context communication.	Low context communication.
Trespassing leads to shame and loss of face for self and group.	Trespassing leads to guilt and loss of self-respect.
Purpose of education is learning how to do.	Purpose of education is learning how to learn.
Diplomas provide entry to higher status groups.	Diplomas increase economic worth and/or self-respect.

COLLECTIVIST	INDIVIDUALIST
Relationship employer-employee is perceived in moral terms, like a family link.	Relationship employer-employee is a contract based on mutual advantage.
Hiring and promotion decisions take employees' ingroup into account.	Hiring and promotion decisions are supposed to be based on skills and rules only.
Management is management of groups.	Management is management of individuals.
Relationship prevails over task.	Task prevails over relationship.

Note. From Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind, by G. Hofstede, 1991, p. 67.

Individualism and collectivism are two terms that refer to “a cluster of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors toward a wide variety of people” (Hui & Triandis, 1986, p. 240). Based on individualism and collectivism, I will narrow the cultures I would like to include in this proposal to Americans (Caucasians and African-Americans) constituting low-context, individualistic culture and Asians (Malaysians, Filipinos, Indians, Chinese, Japanese) constituting high-context, collectivistic culture. “Cultural individualism-collectivism has a direct influence on behavior (e.g., through norms/rules used to guide behavior), but it also influences behavior indirectly through the personalities, values, and self-

construals that individual members learn when being socialized into their culture” (Gudykunst & Matsumoto, 1996, p. 21). In other words, I am interested in finding out what types of self-embarrassment reduction strategies might be employed by a person from a low-context, individualistic culture in contrast to a person from a high-context, collectivistic culture during embarrassing intercultural situations. In general, I will attempt to identify if the cultures have differences in self-embarrassment reduction strategies. In this thesis, the term ‘culture’ is used to indicate major classifications of culture in general, following Hofstede’s categories (individualistic and collectivistic cultures). Also, to narrow down the type of culture in this study, the term ‘ethnicity’ will be used such that an example of individualistic culture would be a specific ethnicity: American. Further, what type of message behaviors to reduce other’s-embarrassment could potentially be used by an American to appease an embarrassed Asian and vice-versa? I will also examine embarrassability differences between Americans and Asians and attempt to link the differences in embarrassability and embarrassment reduction strategies (self and other).

This topic is important for the field of communication to foster better intercultural understanding. Also, this particular study is needed because there is a lack of understanding and knowledge of cultural taboos which lead to embarrassment, message misinterpretation, and intercultural hostility. This is evident in the interracial disharmony that exists widely in the United States, as well as the widespread use of cultural stereotypes such as ‘Asians are Chinks’

and 'White-Americans are rednecks.' I believe that these stereotyping behaviors occur because of differences in orientation to communication patterns that exist between cultures. For example, the table below will illustrate the differences in communication patterns between East Asians and North Americans. See table 2.

Table 2

Comparison between the North American and the East Asian Orientations to Communication Patterns

East Asian Orientations	North American Orientations
1. Process orientation	Outcome orientation
Communication is perceived as a process of infinite interpretation	Communication is perceived as the transference of messages
2. Differentiated linguistic codes	Less differentiated linguistic codes
Different linguistic codes are used depending upon persons involved and situations	Linguistic codes are not as extensively differentiated as East Asia
3. Indirect communication emphasis	Direct communication emphasis
The use of indirect communication is prevalent and accepted as normative	Direct communication is a norm despite the extensive use of indirect communication
4. Receiver centered	Sender centered

---

East Asian Orientations	North American Orientations
Meaning is in the interpretation	Meaning is in the messages created by the sender
Emphasis is on listening, sensitivity, and removal of preconception	Emphasis is on how to formulate the best messages, how to improve source credibility, and how to improve delivery skills

---

Note. From "The impact of Confucianism on interpersonal relationships and communication patterns in East Asia," by J.C. Yum, 1994, In L. Samovar & R. Porter (Eds.), Intercultural communication: A reader (7th ed.), p. 78.

Based on the table above, we can see distinct differences in the communication patterns between East Asians and North Americans, which consecutively are a high-context, collectivistic culture and low-context, individualistic culture. If both cultures do not understand each other's orientations and differences in the patterns of communication, stereotyping behaviors become inherent and this, in turn, leads to intercultural hostility and lack of respect for each other. This is why I believe that intercultural communication and understanding could be the impetus to solving many problems pertaining to stereotyping behaviors and negative assumptions about different cultures of the world. I intend to contribute to the effort of understanding

and establishing better intercultural communication through this thesis proposal which will deal with intercultural embarrassment reduction strategies.

This thesis is divided into four major sections: a review of literature, method, analysis of data, and results and conclusions. Under method, I will describe the participants and procedures including data collection, material/apparatus, design, independent variable, dependent variable. Next, I will provide the data analysis procedures, and then, I will present the results and conclusions which will report and summarize the findings of this study. Now, let me outline several studies that will provide the foundation and theoretical framework for this thesis.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature review will be organized into two sections: Theoretical foundations of intercultural communication and embarrassment management theories.

### Theoretical Foundations of Intercultural Communication

First, the article "Taboo-topics among Chinese and English friends" (Goodwin & Lee, 1994) pertains closely to my proposed study. Goodwin and Lee's theory, which was not given a specific name, claimed and supported that Singaporean-Chinese, both male and female, will exhibit a greater amount of taboo and embarrassment in conversations by being more taboo demonstrative in relationships compared to their British friends. Also, the theory claimed and supported that men will demonstrate more taboo than women.

In an article entitled "Communication Boundary Management: A Theoretical Model of Managing Disclosure of Private Information Between Marital Couples," Petronio (1991) presents an approach that could be utilized "to understand the way individuals regulate disclosure of private information." The Communication Boundary Management theory functions on two interlinked levels--macro and micro. According to Petronio (1991), in the macro level, a need to regulate the way individuals communicate in order to control potential risk to self during the act of revealing personal or private information which may deem the 'discloser' to be vulnerable, arises. Thus, to protect oneself from vulnerability, the individual may form a boundary around himself/herself to



control the flow of information from the 'discloser' to the 'disclosee.' As for the micro level, the theoretical perspective of the Communication Boundary Management theory becomes a transactional exchange marked by a demand-respond sequence (a basic communication necessity). In addition, Petronio points out that the macro level brings about the idea that there is a coordination of boundaries in which spouses maintain separate yet connected communicative systems used to protect vulnerabilities when a need to disclose private information arises. On the other hand, the micro level brings about an implied demand for a response that could potentially satisfy certain expectations when a spouse opens up his or her communication boundaries and discloses personal information to an unsuspecting partner. In other words, the "underlying notion suggested here is that of need complementarity" (Petronio, 1991, p. 315).

Gudykunst and Nishida (1984) reasoned that Uncertainty Reduction Theory explains cross-cultural communication and intercultural communication in general. Using an experimental design, the researchers tested the influence of culture, cultural similarity, attitude similarity, and self-monitoring on several aspects of uncertainty reduction between Americans and Japanese. The American and Japanese participants were asked to pretend that they had been 'introduced' by a friend at a social gathering to a same sex stranger and asked to interact with this stranger. They were also asked as to how they anticipated to behave during this meeting with a stranger who was either an American or a Japanese with attitudes which were similar to or different from the attitudes of the

participant. The study found that cultural differences did play a part in the use of the theory, and that Japanese participants had the tendency to not self-disclose or ask questions as uncertainty reduction strategies whereas the American participant had a higher likelihood of doing so (Infante, Rancer, & Womack, 1993, p. 436).

This study confirms that the Japanese approached uncertainty matters by choosing not to self-disclose whereas Americans had the tendency to boldly question the uncertainty experienced. This is important because the study establishes the fact that cultural differences have great impact on the way that people may react to the same situation, in this case, a situation of uncertainty produced from being introduced to a stranger. However, I think that this study did not delve deeply enough into the variable in question (uncertainty) to adequately identify what the Japanese and American subjects did to show this uncertainty and how uncertainty was defined in terms of intercultural communication. Also, this study could have a stronger impact if uncertainty was derived in intercultural communication through variables like taboo or embarrassment.

In an article pertaining to "Face Negotiation Theory," Ting-Toomey (1988) provided several propositions regarding facework negotiation and cross-cultural conflict styles. The propositions state that members of individualistic, low-context (LC) cultures tend to express a greater degree of self-face maintenance with direct face negotiation strategies which are more dominating or controlling in

a conflict situation. As for the members of collectivistic, high-context (HC) cultures, they would tend to express a greater degree of mutual-face with indirect face negotiation strategies which lean towards a more obliging or smoothing approach (p. 226-229). So, in the low-context (LC) culture, "individuals can fight and scream at one another over a task-oriented point and yet be able to remain friends afterwards" whereas in a high-context (HC) culture, "the instrumental issue is closely tied with the person that [who] originated the issue. To openly disagree with or confront someone in public is a severe blow and an extreme insult, causing both sides to 'lose face'" ( Ting-Toomey, 1985, p. 77). The theory also assumes that :

- (a) members in all cultures try to maintain and negotiate face in all communication situations; (b) the concept of face is especially problematic in uncertainty situations when the situated identities of the interactants are called into question; (c) conflict, as a class of uncertainty situations, demands active face-work management by both conflict parties; (d) conflict parties, in a conflict situation, will engage in two types of face-work management: self-face concern and mutual face-concern, negative face maintenance and positive face maintenance, and (e) the cultural variability dimension of individualism-collectivism will influence members' selection of one set of conflict styles (such as avoidance style and obliging style) over others (such as confrontational style and solution-oriented style). (Ting-Toomey & Cole, 1990, p. 79).

The Communication Accommodation Theory or CAT is also relevant to this proposal. Originally presented by Giles (1973), the Communication Accommodation Theory pertains to the nature of accommodation which can be divided into long term-short term, intergroup and interpersonal, as well as cultural variability and accommodation (Gallois, Giles, Jones, Cargile, & Ota, 1995). This

theory deals with “individual and sociostructural levels of communication . . . with motivation and overt behavior” (p.147). From an intercultural context, the model below maps out this theory more clearly (Gallois, Franklyn-Stokes, Giles, & Coupland, 1988, p. 163). See Figure 3.

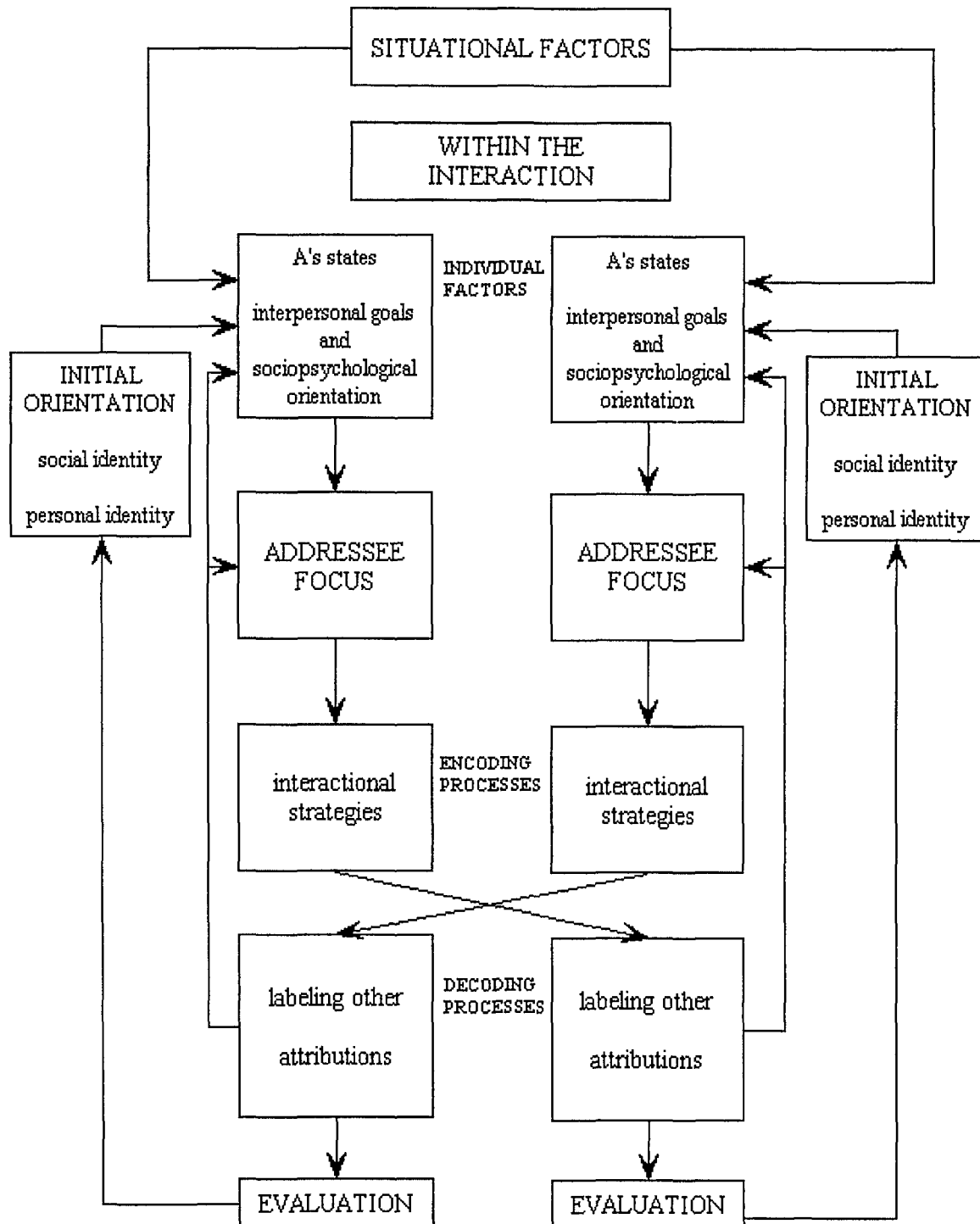


Figure 3. A model of communication accommodation in intercultural encounters.  
[From Gallois et al., 1988, p. 163]

The model pertains to A and B within an intercultural communication context applying the CAT. This means that the two interactors (A and B) have their own individual factors which comes about due to situational factors. In other words, given a situation, A and B have individual interpersonal goals and socio-psychological orientations towards each other which is impacted by initial orientations based on social and personal identities. Then, upon initial interaction, there will be an addressee focus which leads to interactional strategies. Here, the encoding processes occur and after this, A and B would label each other with attributions according to how they feel. This is the decoding process, and after this process, the evaluation is made. A evaluates B and B evaluates A; therefore, if the outcome of the interaction is positive, then A and B have successful intercultural communication in a given situation, but if not, communication accommodation to reduce the negativity of the interaction comes into play.

“Two premises are central to Communication Accommodation Theory : i) During communication, people try to accommodate or adjust their style of speech to others, and ii) “They do this in order to gain approval, to increase communication efficiency, and to maintain positive social identity with the person to whom they are talking” (Infante, Rancer, & Womack, 1993, p. 231). This can be done by employing either a convergent strategy where individuals adapt to each other by “slowing down or speeding up speech rate, lengthening or shortening pauses and utterances or using certain forms of politeness” while

divergent strategies include “accentuating vocal and linguistic differences to underscore social differences between speakers” (p. 231). This can be employed in my research proposal pertaining to intercultural embarrassment. I have extended the model of Communication Accommodation Theory in intercultural encounters (as shown previously) by including the concept of embarrassment to further explain my research goals for this thesis. See figure 4.

Basically, by adding the component of embarrassment prior to the evaluation stage, and given the scenario that A is embarrassed by B (cause of embarrassment), we can note that the overall evaluation regarding the intercultural communication between A and B is: Conflict. Conflict here is in the sense that A does not feel positive or comfortable with B, and so, my research attempts to discover what B can do to reduce A's embarrassment and how does A cope with his/her embarrassment? This is in connection to CAT because A and B both need to accommodate the embarrassment which produces an uneasy situation and return it to a regular, comfortable flow of communication. I think that embarrassment reduction strategies will be most useful in accommodating A and B's problem. See figure 4.

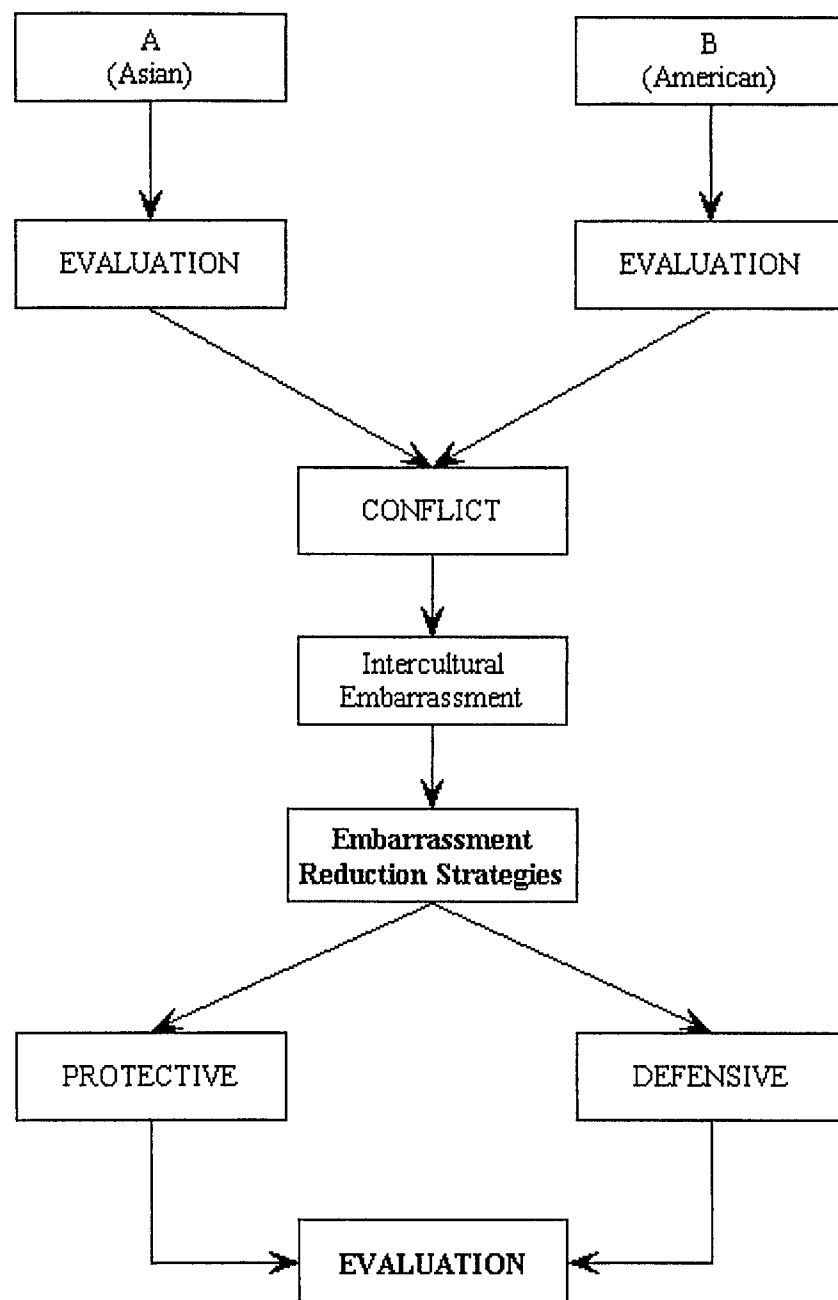


Figure 4. A proposed model of communication accommodation in intercultural embarrassment encounters. Puvana Ganesan, 1998



Since intercultural embarrassment produces conflict between members of distinct cultures, we should attempt to understand how conflict is approached by different cultures. Since we are dealing with conflict (caused by embarrassment) within the context of an intercultural communication study, the two cultures that have relevance to this research are the individualistic, low-context culture and the collectivistic, high-context culture, as outlined earlier in the introduction.

According to Ting-Toomey (1994), members of an individualistic, low-context culture tend to have basic attitudes towards conflict as follows:

- 1) Conflict is viewed as an expressed struggle to air out major differences and problems.
- 2) Conflict can be both dysfunctional and functional.
- 3) Conflict can be dysfunctional when repressed and not directly confronted.
- 4) Conflict can be functional when it provides an open opportunity for solving problematic issues.
- 5) Substantive and relational issues in conflict should be handled separately.
- 6) Conflict should be dealt with openly and directly.
- 7) Effective management of conflict can be viewed as a win-win problem-solving game.

As for members from a collectivistic, high-context culture, Ting-Toomey (1994) came up with the following basic attitudes toward conflict:

- 1) Conflict is viewed as damaging to social face and relational harmony and should be avoided as much as possible.
- 2) Conflict is, for the most part, dysfunctional.
- 3) Conflict signals a lack of self-discipline and self-censorship of emotional outbursts.
- 4) Conflict provides a testing ground for a skillful face-work negotiation process.
- 5) Substantive conflict and relational face issues are always intertwined.
- 6) Conflict should be dealt with discreetly and subtly.
- 7) Effective management of conflict can be viewed as a win-win face negotiation game. (Ting-Toomey, 1994, p. 364).

To further understand the ways in which two distinct cultures might approach or view conflict, the table below presents a summary of characteristics of the why, when, what, and how questions of conflicts in a low-context culture versus a high-context culture. See table 3.

Table 3

Questions of Conflicts in Low-Context Versus High-Context Cultures

Key Questions	Low-Context Conflict	High-Context Conflict
<b>Why</b>	Analytic, linear logic Instrumental-oriented Dichotomy between conflict and conflict parties	Synthetic, spiral logic Expressive-oriented Integration of conflict and conflict parties
<b>When</b>	Individualistic-oriented Low collective normative expectations Violations of individual expectations create conflict potentials	Group-oriented High collective normative expectations Violations of collective expectations create conflict potentials
<b>What</b>	Revelment Direct, confrontational attitude Action and solution oriented	Concealment Indirect, non-confrontational attitude "Face" and relationship oriented
<b>How</b>	Explicit communication codes  Line-logic style: rational factual rhetoric Open, direct strategies	Implicit communication codes  Point-logic style: intuitive affective rhetoric Ambiguous, indirect strategies

Note. From "Toward a theory of conflict and culture" by S. Ting-Toomey, 1985, In Communication, culture, and organizational processes by Gudykunst, W., Stewart, L., and Ting-Toomey, S. (Eds). p. 82.

The basic attitudes above which individualistic and collectivistic cultures have towards conflict is relevant to my study because it provides a foundation as to

how these two cultures might deal with embarrassment, which if occurs interculturally, can be deemed as a cultural conflict. Further, this distinct classification of how low-context, individualistic and high-context, collectivistic cultures view conflict provides a firm theoretical support for the hypothesis and research questions in this study.

### Embarrassment Management

The next few studies are categorized in one group because they deal exclusively with the theme of embarrassment. The claims are mentioned first followed by the empirical results, and then how the studies are complementary to my proposed research will be presented.

Another very interesting and relevant study by Petronio (1984) is "Communication Strategies to Reduce Embarrassment Differences Between Men and Women." In this study, three hundred and twenty-four male and female undergraduate students answered a two-part questionnaire on embarrassment. In part one, participants were asked to recall briefly their most embarrassing experience, and the most embarrassing experience was rated on a 5 point scale. As for part two of the questionnaire, participants were given a list of 32 communication strategy choices which could potentially reduce their own embarrassment as reported by them. The main aim of the study was to use a discriminant analysis to determine whether there existed a linear connection to the strategies that could predict gender classification. In summary, the results showed that men tended to verbally blame the incident on something else,

apologize to others around them, retreat from the incident, or just laugh at their own behavior whereas women tended to also verbally blame incident on others who were present and criticize their own behavior. This was a defensive orientation. As for the protective orientation, men wanted others to apologize to them, point out that nothing out of place occurred, and to change the topic while women wanted others to be the center of attention, be embarrassed alongside with them and express sympathy for the embarrassed one, or wanted others to become angry and yell. According to Petronio (1984), her study's findings suggested that women and men use different strategies to reduce embarrassment. The outcome of this study also identified strategies which can be used to reduce embarrassment (p. 31). See Table 4.

Table 4  
Communication Strategies to Reduce Embarrassment

Defensive Orientation	Protective Orientation
<b>Defensively changing the subject (Justification)</b>	
Person changes the topic	Wants others to change the topic
Person verbally blames the incident on something else	Wants others to verbally blame the incident on something else
<b>Introduce information excusing the performance (Excuse)</b>	
Person pretends he/she is physically injured	Wants others to pretend that he/she was only clowning around
Person states he/she was not really trying to do that which caused embarrassment	Wants others to apologize to him/her thus shifting responsibility
Person gives an excuse, thus minimizing the incident	
<b>Introduce redeeming of self-enhancing information(Justification)</b>	
Person tells information about him/herself that would cause others to see him/her in a positive light	Wants others to give him/her a chance to try again

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**Defensive Orientation**


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Person looks for a chance to try again,  
thus, redeeming him/herself

Person tells other crazy things he/she  
has done

Person apologizes to those present, thus  
taking responsibility

---

**Protective Orientation**


---

Wants others to point out  
he/she is a good person in  
many ways

**Denying or minimizing failure (Justification)**

Person laughs at the incident to deny  
failure

Wants others to indicate  
nothing inappropriate  
happened

Person pretends nothing inappropriate  
happened

Wants others to ignore the  
incident

**Implicitly seeking identification from others (Excuse)**

Person laughs at his/her own behavior

Wants others to become  
embarrassed too

Wants others to express  
sympathy for him/her

**Scapegoating (Excuse)**

Person verbally blames incident

Wants others to make

---

Defensive Orientation

---

on others present

Person makes someone else the  
focus of attention

---

Protective Orientation

---

themselves center of attention

Wants others to verbally blame  
the incident on themselves

**Withdrawal (Escape)**

Person retreats from the situation

Wants others to leave the  
situation

**Requests for atonement**

Person criticizes him/herself

Wants others to demand  
he/she make amends for the  
situation

Wants others to become  
angry and yell

Wants others to laugh at what  
he/she did to cause own  
embarrassment

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Note. From "Communication strategies to reduce embarrassment differences between men and women," by S. Petronio, 1984, in The Western Journal of Speech Communication, 48, p. 31.

Petronio's study identified embarrassment reduction strategies that men and women use; however, culture or ethnicity was not a variable that was



considered in her study. In an e-mail interview I conducted with Dr. Petronio on January 31, 1998, she claimed that ethnicity was a critical variable, which was not looked at in her study. She also indicated that her study's claims were not supported by a similar study done by Metts and Cupach, and she attributed this to the missing variable: ethnicity. Thus, ethnicity which is the independent variable in my study may well prove results which may have more generalizability qualities. Also, I will take it a step further from Petronio's identification of embarrassment reduction strategies by gender to identification of embarrassment reduction strategies by culture.

In an article entitled "Embarrassment, Facework, and Eye Contact: Testing a theory of embarrassment" by Modigliani (1971), 95 male undergraduates enrolled in an introductory psychology course at the University of Michigan took part in an experiment to partially fulfill a regular course requirement. Participants were made to sit around a table (four at a time) and assigned roles by a rigged drawing that caused them to become "linemen" (workers) while the confederates became "staffmen" (supervisors). Two subjects assigned to worker roles and two confederates assigned to supervisory roles participated in each experimental session and worked together as a team on a series of complementary division-of-labor jobs. Workers solved anagrams and supervisors fit the solved anagrams into crossword puzzles. "Since the workers' task was logically prior to that of the supervisors, each subject faced the potential embarrassment of doing poorly on his anagrams, thereby causing the entire

team to fail" (p. 17). Some subjects received extremely hard anagrams and led the team to failure while others received very easy anagrams and led their teams to success. There were two work conditions: public, where staffmen and linemen interacted with each other, and private, where subjects examined anagrams by themselves instead of interacting with confederate supervisors. Subjects in private conditions were also asked to fill out the "Confidential Job Self-Report" questionnaire.

Hypotheses 1 and 2 in this study were: Public-failure subjects should report feeling the most embarrassed, mitigated public failure subjects the next most embarrassed, and private failure subjects should report feeling little or no embarrassment. Hypotheses 3 and 4--concerning relationship between embarrassment, eye contact, and facework are applicable only to subjects who were to experience some embarrassment through public-failure and mitigated public-failure. The measures included self-reported embarrassment, change in proportion in eye contact, and facework index. The results of this study indicated public-success and mitigated public-success subjects felt that they made favorable impressions on their teammates; public-failure and mitigated public-failure subjects felt that they made unfavorable impressions on their teammates; private-success and private-failure subjects (whose team mates had no knowledge of their performance) felt they made a neutral impression. As for embarrassment, hypothesis 1 and 2 were supported, and subjects who suffered a loss of situational public-esteem experienced the most severe embarrassment.

Hypothesis 3 and 4 where private success and private failure subjects would be have least embarrassment were not supported because subjects with private failures did feel much embarrassment. As for facework, the data in this study show that greater embarrassment correlated with more facework while subjects with public-failure and mitigated public-failure decreased their level of eye contact during embarrassment. Thus, eye contact was reduced and facework was increased when subjects felt embarrassment.

This study is complementary to my research because it proves that public failure causes high levels of embarrassment which, in turn, reduces eye contact and increases facework, possibly to save face and return face to normal state. However, the subjects used in this study were all male, and we do not know if females would have reacted the same way if posed with public failure and private failure conditions. Also, the ethnicity of subjects was not considered, and there is no evidence that, perhaps, people from different cultures may react to public and private embarrassment differently than White American males did in this study.

Keltner (1995) examined the nonverbal displays of embarrassment and amusement in order to distinguish the two emotions, and to establish the hypotheses that embarrassment has a distinct nonverbal display. Participants were drawn from a larger sample who performed the Directed Facial Action Task (DFA) as part of a multi-task experiment. The method used included an experimenter in a adjacent room who could see the participants on a video

monitor and communicate over an intercom. Participants were aware of being videotaped during the DFA test which requires performing several facial expressions and a self report emotion inquiry. Participants who reported feeling stupid, silly, self-conscious, and ridiculous during the DFA test were deemed embarrassed, whereas participants who reported feeling amused, goofy, and funny, were deemed amused. The results showed that embarrassed participants looked down more rapidly and for a longer period of time, shifted their gaze position frequently, showed frequent smile controls (lower facial action such as lip pressing), and touched their faces frequently. On the other hand, results showed that amused participants did not shift gaze position or engage in smile controls. The hypothesis that there is a difference between embarrassment and amusement was supported while the hypothesis that there is distinct nonverbal behavior in embarrassment was also supported.

This study is complementary to my research because a difference was discovered between embarrassment and amusement; thus, making it easier to avoid misreading or mixing-up the two emotions. Further, the ways that participants reacted to embarrassment was recorded, and this enables me to be certain if the participants in my study are embarrassed or merely amused. Despite the fact that this study is useful, the ethnicity variable was not considered and this reduces its boundary conditions in the discipline because intercultural communication, which is very inherent, was neglected. I also feel that since this study was done in an experimental setting and participants were

aware that they were being videotaped, there is a possibility of the occurrence of the Hawthorne effect. This is when participants may have changed their behavior and not act as they normally would due to them being aware of the videotaping. This may deem the results of this study to lack accuracy. However, the study proved that embarrassment and amusement have distinct qualities, and this is important in providing me a basis for determining which one of the emotions are the participants in my study feeling.

In another study, Keltner (1995) hypothesized that embarrassment and shame will have distinct nonverbal displays. The study was done because many people believe that embarrassment and shame share similar nonverbal behavior and are variants of the same emotion. In contrast, the appeasement hypothesis suggests that embarrassment and shame will have distinct nonverbal displays. Keltner (1995) also claimed that African-Americans show more intense nonverbal display according to emotions, in comparison to Caucasians. The participants were 183 students (97 women, 86 men) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Half of the participants were African-Americans and the other half were Caucasians. The method employed was the participants observed and judged spontaneous displays of two positive emotions (amusement, laughter), two negative emotions (anger and disgust), and two self-conscious emotions (embarrassment and shame) shown by adolescent boys during an IQ test. Observers were to accurately identify the 6 displays of emotions while being more accurate in judging embarrassment and shame

displays of African-Americans. Results showed that the main hypothesis was consistent with the study in that shame and embarrassment have distinct nonverbal displays. When an African-American felt embarrassed, his/her facial expression registered more intensity for shame than for embarrassment, and this was the same for a Caucasian person. This further proves that shame registers a higher level of nonverbal display than embarrassment. Also, the study found that African-Americans were more expressive in their emotions than Caucasian-Americans. My critique for this study is similar to the previous study by Keltner, in that ethnicity was not considered and this limits the generalizability of the results from enveloping the field of intercultural communication. On the other hand, a distinction was found between shame and embarrassment. This would assist in avoiding the mix-up of the two emotions and enables me to clearly identify which one of the emotions that participants are feeling.

Metts and Cupach (1989) studied situational influence on the use of remedial strategies in embarrassing predicaments (reducing other-embarrassment). They discussed strategies for coping with embarrassment and the role of others in embarrassing predicaments. The participants were volunteer students enrolled in an introductory course in interpersonal communication at Illinois State University. They were asked to fill out questionnaires where they recalled an incident that made them significantly embarrassed and explain why they felt embarrassed, as well as how they attempted to reduce their embarrassment. Then, they rated the degree of

embarrassment felt using a seven-point semantic differential scale. The data analyses used was a log-linear analysis. Twelve participants returned blank questionnaires while 49 males and 71 females returned completed questionnaires (N=120). The results showed that aggression and escape are exclusive to embarrassed persons and avoidance strategies are used more frequently than aggression.

This study is also complementary to my thesis because two embarrassment coping mechanisms were discovered: aggression and escape. This would help me to add and identify more embarrassment reduction or coping mechanisms. The results of the study are important and my research will replicate this by analyzing if avoidance strategies are used more than aggression. Again, the critical variable of ethnicity was not included and this causes the results to lack validity in intercultural communication.

In an article entitled "Face-saving following experimentally induced embarrassment," Brown (1970) conducted an experiment to determine if an earlier conceptualization of face-saving in an interpersonal bargaining context could be extended to another source of public embarrassment. In this experiment, forty-eight entering freshman males in an introductory social science course at Cornell University were deemed as subjects. They were randomly assigned to conditions in a 2 X 2 factorial experiment. The independent variables were (1) participation in either an embarrassing or non-embarrassing task, and (2) observing audience's knowledge of the payoffs available to

students. The experimental conditions were that blindfolded subjects were given a task to sense an object during a 3 minute sensing period and to develop detailed impressions about the object's shape, texture, etc. For the embarrassing task, subjects were instructed to orally sense a 4-inch rubber pacifier by sucking, biting, and licking the object while the non-embarrassing task included subjects receiving a 4-inch rubber figure of a soldier and forming impressions about it through touch.

Brown hypothesized that sucking the pacifier would be more embarrassing than feeling the rubber figure by hand. Also, subjects were given a post-experimental questionnaire with the question "How did you feel during the (oral, touch) sensing period when you experienced the (pacifier, rubber soldier)? The hypotheses was well supported in that subjects who had to orally sense the pacifier reported far greater embarrassment than subjects who sensed the rubber soldier. No differences were found in audience knowledge of costs or to the interaction of these variables. In addition, subjects who had to perform the most embarrassing task and who knew that the audience was ignorant of their costs sacrificed more (63 cents) while the smallest sacrifices (33 cents) were made by subjects who performed the non-embarrassing task and knew that their payoffs had been announced to their class mates. The results of this experiment claim that there is a tendency for people to engage in costly face-saving behavior when embarrassed and that the emergence of face-saving depends heavily upon one's belief about the visibility of his/her acts.



The results from this study confirms my proposition that people who are embarrassed engage in face-saving without regards to cost. This is probably due to the fact that face-saving and restoring is more important than cost. Thus, this study is complementary to my proposed research because it proves that people who are embarrassed will do almost anything with no consideration to costs of doing it in order to ensure successful face-saving. However, only males were used as subjects in this experiment, and females were excluded; thus, the generalizability of the results is limited to only one sex. Further, there was no mention of ethnicity or culture being a variable that was considered, and this limits the boundary conditions of this study through the exclusion of intercultural communication and gender.

Miller (1987) investigated determinants of reactions to embarrassment of another. His study attempted to discover whether an actor's embarrassment could be emphatically shared by observers of that embarrassment. The results from this study show that embarrassed actors reported more embarrassment than control actors. Thus, observers who watched actors perform embarrassing tasks judged them to be more embarrassed than the observers watching the control actors perform embarrassing tasks. Also, whenever observers had a cooperative or competitive links to actors, they accurately detected the actors' embarrassment.

### Summary

The studies and theories reviewed above are relevant to the proposed

research by laying down the foundations of embarrassment, nonverbal behavior during embarrassment and by adding to our understanding of taboo, and embarrassment reduction strategies between men and women. The studies also pertain to my proposal because the results show that nonverbal behaviors (gaze shifting, face touching, lip pressing, aggression, escape, and avoidance) are expressed by embarrassed persons without fail. Therefore, it can be concluded that nonverbal behavior is a major indicator of embarrassment. A distinction was also found between embarrassment and shame: therefore, it would make it easier to distinguish whether the subjects in my study are feeling shame or embarrassment and avoid from confusing both emotions due to the evidence that embarrassment has its own set of nonverbal displays. Keltner's study shows that there are observable nonverbal differences in intensity between embarrassed Black and White Americans. This indicates that within a similar culture, in this case, a low-context, individualistic culture, differences do exist in the intensity of embarrassment displayed. The review also deals with coping with embarrassment, which directly relates to my research which is interested in the Americans' and Asians' coping strategies during embarrassment.

Modigliani's (1971) research claims that the results of the experiment clearly demonstrate "the close connection between embarrassment and loss of situational-subjective-public esteem" (p. 23) while subjects became most embarrassed in conditions where their performance led to negative evaluations from others. Further, subjects who reported feeling the greatest embarrassment

“made the greatest attempts to recoup their lost esteem through facework”

(p. 23). In an intercultural context, the embarrassment of a person can be considered as the loss of situational-subjective-public esteem, and the person will quickly try to ‘save face’ through embarrassment reduction strategies.

Brown’s (1970) study supports this through results from an experiment which claims that people who are embarrassed will have no considerations about costs when they are face-saving because face saving is considered much more important than the costs of doing so.

As for Petronio’s Boundary Management Theory, the examples provided pertained specifically to married couples/spouses. However, I feel that boundary management is also an inherent aspect of intercultural communication. In my view, boundary management between intercultural communicators is shaken when the elements of embarrassment is introduced into the intercultural relationship or dyad. This is due to the fact that on the macro level of boundary management, a need to regulate the way people communicate to avoid potential risk to the self arises, and this is the same in an intercultural embarrassment situation. For example, in an intercultural communication dyad, when A is embarrassed by B’s actions, a threat or potential risk is bombarded towards both A and B causing personal boundaries to become more concrete due to discomfort. This affects intercultural communication between A and B in a negative way. Thus, what I am aiming to do is to figure out the levels of embarrassment felt between A and B due to a situation, and what A or B can say

or do to reduce this embarrassment and efficiently manage personal boundaries and return in to a relaxed level. As for the micro level of this theory, a demand-response sequence is triggered when A embarrasses B; thus how can A reduce this embarrassment and return the intercultural relationship back into a comfortable state through boundary management? In short, what types of adaptive behaviors can be used to accommodate the embarrassment?

"Adaptive behavior is an attempt to accommodate to the perceived foreignness of the other participant, both through altering communication style and by adjusting to invoked difference in belief" (Ellingsworth, 1983, p. 197). On the other hand, attempts at adapting in an intercultural situation could be perceived as positive, compromising, and complimentary, but it can also be perceived as negative and insulting based on differences in cultural perceptions regarding embarrassing.

In turn, this is connected to Ting-Toomey's (1988) propositions pertaining to low-context (LC) and high-context (HC) face-negotiation theory because in an intercultural embarrassment situation, facework can be utilized to appease the discomfort felt by the partners. As the article in the literature review points out, face negotiation differs greatly between members of low-context cultures and members of high-context cultures. To elaborate further on the concept of face negotiation, Goffman states that "by facework, I mean to designate the actions taken by a person to make whatever he [or she] is doing consistent with face. Facework serves to counter-act 'incident'--that is, events whose effective

symbolic implications threaten face” (Goffman, 1976, p. 118). In this case, we can take it to mean that embarrassment is one of the concepts that threatens face (Petronio, 1984, p. 29). In short, “saving face, a type of facework, refers to the process of restoring an impression of self for others when one is out of face, in wrong face, or when there is a loss of face” (p. 29).

This can also be connected to Ting-Toomey’s (1994) identification of basic attitudes that individualistic and collectivistic cultures have towards conflict. Since intercultural embarrassment is a type of conflict, the basic attitudes in her classification of conflict between the low and high-context cultures contributed at deriving the hypothesis and research questions for this study.

The Face Negotiation Theory incorporated with the Boundary Management Theory can be used to reduce embarrassment and modify intercultural relationships, which have been hurt through embarrassment, into a more positive mode if used with embarrassment reduction strategies. This also goes for Hofstede’s (1991) Individualistic and Collectivistic Classification, Gudykunst’s Model of Uncertainty Reduction in Intercultural Encounters (1985), and the Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles, Mulac, Bradac, & Johnson, 1987). I have included several different theories that could form the theoretical framework for my proposed research. In short, there are many diverse approaches and theoretical frameworks which can be utilized towards this research. However, I believe that a combination of Hofstede’s low-context, High-context culture definitions, Petronio’s Embarrassment Reduction Strategies,

and Ting-Toomey's Face Negotiation Theory would be most fruitful. Together with this, the embarrassment reducing strategies as compiled by Petronio (1984) (On Table 2 earlier) makes my proposed topic feasible to investigate and enables me to efficiently handle the research due to a clear theoretical framework. Petronio (1984) discovered that differences exist in embarrassment reduction strategies between men and women. Using a similar approach, I on the other hand, would like to discover if differences exist in embarrassment reduction strategies in intercultural communication, particularly between individualistic and collectivistic cultures.

Since we do not really know much about embarrassment reduction strategies between the American (low-context, individualistic) and Asian (high-context, collectivistic) cultures, this study could serve as an eye-opener and insight to intercultural communication. Thousands of traditional Asians who were not born in America live in this country, and there is much stereotyping done by both cultures. For example, referring to a race by stereotypical names pertaining to color such as 'Darky or colored' for African-Americans and 'Yellow Skin' for Chinese. Thus, to co-exist more peacefully, embarrassment reduction strategies could help, for example, with managing stereotypical situations by accommodating embarrassment which could potentially be caused by one culture stereotyping another. "As we move or are driven toward a global village and increasingly frequent cultural contact, we need more than simply greater factual knowledge of each other. We need, more specifically, to identify what

might be called the 'rulebooks of meaning' that distinguish one culture from another (Barnlund, 1975, p. 7). This thesis attempts to find out yet another possible content for this "rulebook of meanings" through the discovery of intercultural embarrassment reduction strategies. To go further forward towards a more successful intercultural communication, and based on the framework that Americans are individualistic and have overt reactions while Asians are collectivistic, and have indirect reactions, the hypothesis and research questions for this study were formulated.

H1: Members from an individualistic, low-context culture will employ a more defensive communication of embarrassment reduction strategies in face saving.

H2: Members from a collectivistic, high-context culture will employ a more protective communication of embarrassment reduction strategies in face saving.

H3: There are differences in embarrassment reduction strategies between collectivistic, high-context cultures and individualistic, low-context cultures.

H4: Males have a greater tendency to engage in defensive embarrassment reduction strategies whereas females have a greater tendency to engage in protective embarrassment reduction strategies.

R1: Are there differences in embarrassment reduction strategies used in intercultural embarrassment situations?

R2: If there are differences, can these differences be explained according to the concepts of a collectivistic high-context culture and an individualistic low-context culture?



## METHOD

The method section consists of six sub-headings: participants, design, data collection, materials/apparatus, independent variables, and dependent variables.

### Participants

One hundred and forty students from Old Dominion University, United States and the University of Malaya, Malaysia, were participants in this study. The students consisted of sixty-nine Americans (males and females) constituting a low-context, individualistic culture and sixty eight Asians (males and females) constituting a high-context, collectivistic culture. The American participants included thirty-eight Caucasians, thirteen Blacks, six Hispanics, and nine Orientals including Filipino-Americans and Japanese- Americans, as well as three 'other' (native American Indian and Canadian-Jamaican). The Asian participants included thirty-one Malays, twelve Indians, four Filipinos, five Ceylonese, nine Chinese and seven 'other' constituting Pakistani, Pacific Islander, and Malay-Indian. Also, there were three participants who were neither Asian nor American, and did not specify their ethnicity. All participants were between the ages of 18-46 and gathered through a random convenience sample. This sampling method contributed positively to the generalizability of the results in this study, but it was still limited. However, the seventy Malaysian participants were deemed as a true Asian sample who have not been in the United States and not exposed extensively to an individualistic culture.

Participants were asked to complete a survey pertaining to a study about communication. This served as the “cover story” for the study. Then, they were be advised of their rights as human subjects and informed further of their right to terminate participation at any time in accordance with the “Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct” (American Psychological Association, 1994). This thesis was reviewed by the Human Subjects Review committee (College of Arts and Letters) and was found to be in compliance (98-015). As means of an incentive, participants were awarded either extra credit, candy, or stationery. This incentive did not modify subject responses or constitute as a confounding variable because it served merely as a means of thanking them for their participation. Participants were debriefed two weeks after the study was concluded by posting the results on the Communication grade posting board located at the first floor of the Batten Arts and Letters building. As for the participants in Malaysia, the results were posted at the lobby of the University of Malaya. For the Human Subjects Letter and Consent Forms in English and Malay, (See Appendix A, B, & C).

### Design

The design for this study is a between-subjects post-test only design. This design ensures that the two categories of subjects (Americans and Asians) will be accurately compared (between-subjects). There will be no pretest because participants answering the survey will automatically be deemed as the post-test. Thus, there will be no sensitization to this study due to the lack of a

pretest. To visualize the design, please note the Campbell and Stanley Notation of Design (See Appendix D).

### Data Collection

First, upon obtaining permission from the Information Center of Old Dominion University, I set up a desk at the University Webb Student Center. Then, when I approached my potential participants, I introduced myself as a graduate researcher to establish credibility. Then, the participants were advised of their rights as human subjects by informing them that the approximate time needed to complete the survey will be between 5 - 8 minutes and that the anonymity of their identities was protected. In addition, participants were also informed about the possible risks involved in the study, that is a very slight level of personal discomfort that may be triggered by a possibly embarrassing scenario, and they were advised of their right to terminate participation at any time. Further, I asked if there were any questions that participants may wish to ask before they filled out the surveys. Then, Consent Forms were handed out to participants. I explained that there are two envelopes on the desk marked "Consent Form" and "Survey." Further, I elaborated that when a participant completes both forms, he or she should place them in the respective envelopes, and this will ensure that their names would not be associated with their responses. After that, the surveys were given out and directions on completing the surveys were explained. I told the participants that they have four scenarios that they can respond to using six close-ended options and one open-ended

option by which they can then mark the boxes corresponding to the behavior or strategy that they would most likely engage in. Participants were also told that they can pick only one response. If a participant does not feel that he or she would choose any one of the six provided options, then he or she can go ahead and write out a desirable response in connection to the particular scenario he or she is facing. Apart from the four scenarios, participants were asked to fill out three demographic information and one (consisting of four determinants) question pertaining to the type of culture a participant belongs to: Individualistic or collectivistic.

After the participants completed the surveys, they were reminded to detach the bottom portion of the Consent Form containing debriefing information, and they were thanked and offered a reward of candy or stationery.

I also conducted data collection in classrooms upon obtaining the instructor's permission. I limited my classroom data collection to only Communication courses taught by the Department of Communication & Theatre Arts at Old Dominion University. In this case, the means for thanking participants differed. I negotiated extra credit opportunities with the instructor to serve as incentive for participants who completed my survey.

The same procedures applied to participants from the University of Malaya, Malaysia. My two assistants in Malaysia conducted the data collection by means of the same survey used for participants in the United States. The only difference was the language that the survey employed and the change in a

manipulation question from “How long have you been in the United States?” (for Americans) to “Have you ever been to the United States?” (for Malaysians). I translated the English language survey into the Malay language, which is the native language of Malaysia and the main medium used in Malaysian academia. This enhanced the clarity of questions in the survey for the Malaysian participants and avoided misunderstandings. The same incentives were offered and confidentiality, as well as anonymity was assured. The only problem I encountered in the process of translating the survey from English to Malay was the fact that in the Malay language, there is no vocabulary for the word “embarrassed.” Upon consulting an English-Malay dictionary, the Malay word “Malu” which in direct translation means “shame” perfectly fit the meaning of ‘embarrassment.’ In Malay, when one feels “malu,” he/she is not feeling the emotions of shame but rather the emotions of embarrassment. I believe this solves the potential misunderstanding of the word “malu” which denotes “shame” in English, but connotes and denotes “embarrassed” in Malay.

#### Materials/Apparatus

The research tool or apparatus used to conduct this study is a survey I labeled the ‘Communication Survey.’ The modified survey has ideas borrowed from the Embarrassability Scale which was developed by Modigliani (Edelmann, 1987). Participants filled out the Communication Survey, which consists of four scenarios linked to embarrassing experiences. I chose four scenarios so that I could claim that the findings were not due to only one scenario but hold across

several scenarios; thus, increasing the generalizability of the findings. Each scenario described a potentially embarrassing situation associated with a high likelihood of occurrence in everyday life, and this was determined by asking participants to check the box before each scenario to indicate if they have never been in that embarrassing situation. Less than 10% of participants checked the boxes indicating that they have not experienced any one of the scenarios presented in the survey, thus contributing to the high likelihood of occurrence. Then, participants picked out the responses linked with embarrassment reduction strategies by checking the appropriate boxes which corresponded with the response of their choice.

Each scenario in the survey has six close-ended embarrassment reduction strategies developed by Petronio (1984) and one open-ended option in case participants felt that none of the six strategies presented as choices were relevant to their behavior in a particular scenario. There are 32 embarrassment reduction strategies, as shown in the literature review earlier, and these were originally eight global strategy types which were the brainchild of Modigliani's (1971) research on face-work, as well as previous literature from Brown (1970), Brown and Garland (1971), Schwartz and David (1976), Scott and Lyman (1970), and Shields (1979). From the eight types, Petronio generated the thirty two strategy options between a protective and defensive orientation to embarrassment. The roots are grounded in Goffman's (1976) theoretical work which proposes that "people tend to have a defensive orientation when

individuals save face for themselves or a protective orientation when people save face for others" (Petronio, 1984, p. 31). Based on this theory and with Ting-Toomey's classification of high-context, low-context conflict, as well as Hofstede's individualistic, collectivistic cultural orientations, I predict that people in a low-context, individualistic culture will more often resort to defensive embarrassment reduction strategies whereas people in a high-context, collectivistic will more often resort to protective embarrassment reduction strategies.

The survey measured this prediction by cross-checking the number of participants who picked defensive strategies versus participants who picked protective strategies as their responses to the scenarios. In turn, this was compared with the participant's cultural orientation in the manipulation check where questions pertaining to ethnicity are asked.

The Embarrassibility Scale by Modigliani (1971) was chosen as the basis for embarrassing scenarios in my survey because its reliability, as assessed by Coefficient Alpha, is 0.88, and the correlation of each item with the total scale ranges from 0.64 to 0.85, with a mean value of 0.78 (Edelmann, 1987).

Therefore, the Embarrassibility Scale is reliable because it is predictable and consistent. The scale also indicates that it is uni-dimensional, that is measuring only one construct: embarrassment. This contributes to the validity of the scale, which is a content validity. Edelmann (1987) said that the "Embarrassibility Scale assesses the likelihood that a specific event will occasion embarrassment in any

given sample. This proves that the scale is precise in measuring embarrassment, and it is applicable to a variety of people from all ages and races. See Appendix E for Modigliani's Embarrassability Scale. "Clearly, the embarrassability scale assesses the likelihood that a specific event will occasion embarrassment in any given sample" (Edelmann, 1987, p. 123). Despite the fact that Modigliani's scale ensures that samples feel embarrassed, I decided to borrow only three items (namely items 3, 16, and 21-See appendix D) from the scale and modified the items for a college setting because I wanted to make sure that participants have actually experienced the chosen scenarios in their lives rather than simply role-playing the scenarios. This will lend the results more credibility because participants can actually relate their feelings to real-life occurrences rather than imagining that the scenarios have happened to them.

Apart from the four scenarios, the survey included four manipulation check questions such as demographic details about ethnicity, sex, time factor (How long have you lived in the United States?-- for American participants and Have you ever visited the United States?--for Malaysian participants. The survey was in two languages: English and Malay. See Appendix F and G.

#### Independent Variable

The independent variable in this study is culture. The two levels of culture are low-context, individualistic culture and high-context, collectivistic culture. There will be a manipulation check consisting of time and ethnicity, as well as the determination of whether a participant is from a low-context, individualistic



society or a high-context, collectivistic society. The manipulation check will be questions addressed in the survey such as, "How long have you been in the United States?" (time factor) for participants in America, and "Have you ever been to the United States? If yes, for how long?" for participants in Malaysia, "What is your ethnicity-- Asian or American?" (ethnicity factor), and a question pertaining to the determination as to which category of culture/society does a participant fit into. The question encompasses four categories derived from Hofstede's (1991, p. 67) classification of individualistic and collectivistic cultures, and the question is: "Which one of these BEST describes you/your culture (?).

Pick one for each category.

1. ☐ My identity is based on my family/social group I belong to  
☐ My identity is based on myself/individuality
2. ☐ As a child, I learned to think in terms of "we"  
☐ As a child, I learned to think in terms of "I"
3. ☐ I prefer to go to my child's soccer game than work overtime for extra money  
☐ I prefer to work overtime for extra money than go to my child's soccer game
4. ☐ I believe that employer-employee relationships should be like a family  
☐ I believe that employer-employee relationships should be a contract with mutual advantage.

This also serves to operationalize variables, and the measure for the independent variable will be determined by the manipulation check. This item in the survey will also enable me to discover if Americans engage in collectivistic behaviors more than individualistic behaviors and vice-versa.

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable in this study are embarrassment reduction strategies. There will be two types of embarrassment reduction strategies: defensive orientation and protective orientation, as outlined by Petronio (1984). The outline and classifications of these two types of embarrassment reduction strategies can be seen earlier in the literature review section. The type of validity employed is content validity, where validity is established through items in the survey. The reliability of the dependent variable will be assessed by having at least two items that consistently measure the same concept; thus, establishing a reliability check.

## ANALYSIS OF DATA

The data obtained from 140 participants who filled out the Communication Survey was analyzed by employing the SPSSX Discriminant Analysis (Version 8.3) computer program system with Pearson's Correlation as a selection criterion to analyze culture, gender, and communication strategies to reduce embarrassment. This program allows researchers to do many types of statistical analyses. In this thesis, the mean score of the Communication Survey for each of the conditions specified below will be calculated:

- i) ALLPD with CULTURE--The data analysis for these variables will indicate if culture plays a role in influencing a person to engage in defensive or protective embarrassment reduction strategies, for example, would people from a high-context, collectivistic culture engage in protective embarrassment reduction strategies more than defensive strategies? This analysis will also answer the main hypotheses in this study.
- ii) ALLPD with ETHNIC1--This condition will indicate if people from a specific collectivistic culture: Asians, and a specific individualistic culture: Americans, would engage in protective or defensive embarrassment reduction strategies.
- iii) ALLPD with SEX--This analysis will allow us to see if sex (males and females) determines a specific preference in embarrassment reduction strategies: protective strategies or defensive strategies. In short, would men choose defensive strategies while women choose protective strategies and vice-versa?
- iv) ETHNIC1 with CULTURE--In this condition, the statistical analysis will

produce mean scores which will indicate if Asians are from collectivistic backgrounds and if Americans have individualistic backgrounds, as predicted.

These are the main foci of the data analysis section because the statistical t-tests run on the variables mentioned above will give insight on the hypothesis and research questions which are posed in this study. Apart from the four main data analyses, there were several other variables taken into consideration for statistical analysis. The results could prove to shed more light and further understanding of the connection between communication strategies to reduce embarrassment and culture. The variables are as below:

- i) SEX with EMCOLIN--This condition will allow us to see if differences in sex (male or female) causes different levels of embarrassment for the embarrassing scenarios presented in the survey. In short, would women be more embarrassed than men in certain scenarios?
- ii) ETHNIC1 with EMCOLIN--The mean scores obtained for this condition will tell us if Americans and Asians experience higher or lower levels of embarrassment in the four scenarios presented in the Communication survey.

Hypotheses 1 and 2, pertaining to the two levels of culture (collectivistic and individualistic) in relation to protective and defensive embarrassment reduction strategies, were analyzed using a t-test which tests for mean differences in the two levels of culture. Hypothesis 3 pertaining to gender in relation to protective and defensive embarrassment reduction strategies was also analyzed using a t-test. The reason a t-test was used is because there was

a need to examine differences between two groups measured on an interval dependent variable. This indicates that the means of individualistic, low-context Americans' preferences in embarrassment reduction strategies and the degree of embarrassment felt due to the scenarios will be compared with the means of collectivistic, high-context Asians' preferences in embarrassment reduction strategies and the degree of embarrassment felt in the posed scenarios. All statistical tests will be conducted at the  $p < .05$  level. This is done to ensure that there is a 95% significance and confidence that the results which will be obtained is not due to chance. (See appendix H for codebook and appendix I for SPSSX program statement).

## RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

The results section are reported in consistency with the order of variable conditions mentioned earlier in the data analysis section. The most important question that needs to be answered pertains to the main hypotheses which are:

H1: Members from an individualistic, low-context culture will employ a more defensive communication of embarrassment reduction strategies in face-saving.

H2: Members from a collectivistic, high-context culture will employ a more protective communication of embarrassment reduction strategies in face-saving.

H3: There are differences in embarrassment reduction strategies between collectivistic, high-context cultures and individualistic, low-context cultures.

Results show that the correlation found between defensive and protective communication strategies to reduce embarrassment with culture (collectivistic and individualistic) has an inverse relationship with an  $r$  value (correlation) of  $-.33$ ,  $p < .05$ , which is statistically significant. A correlation coefficient of  $-.33$  indicates that there is a definite but small relationship between embarrassment reduction strategies and culture. This means that when a person from an individualistic culture gets embarrassed, he or she will engage in defensive embarrassment reduction strategies. On the other hand, when a person from a collectivistic culture gets embarrassed, he or she will engage in protective embarrassment reduction strategies. The results as reported above clearly

support the main hypotheses in this study. See table 5 for statistical information.

Table 5

A Comparison of Embarrassment Reduction Strategies By Individualistic and  
Collectivistic Cultures

	Collectivistic		Individualistic		
	4	5	6	7	8
<b>Defensive</b>					
4	11.1	14.3	18.6	32.1	<b>85.7*</b>
5	22.2	51.4	32.6	35.7	
6	<b>44.4*</b>	31.4	44.2	28.6	14.3
7	14.8	2.90	4.70	3.60	
8	7.40				
<b>Protective</b>					

Note. Values are reported as a mean between subjects. The bold values indicate the average mean of the cross tabulation between embarrassment reduction strategies (protective and defensive) and culture (collectivistic and individualistic). \* $p < .05$ .

As the table indicates, 85.7% of people from a significantly individualistic culture (indicated by the number 8) picked the extreme end of defensive embarrassment reduction strategies whereas 44.4% of people from a significantly collectivistic culture (indicated by the number 4) have a greater tendency to move towards protective embarrassment reduction strategies. As for the extreme protective strategies, 7.4 % of the participants claim to choose this, and it is interesting to note that they are an exclusively collectivistic group, and the rest of the cells leading up to the individualistic culture is empty. Thus, we can claim that no individualist in this sample had the tendency to engage in extreme protective embarrassment reduction strategies. However, due to the presence of more than 20% of empty cells, I was not able to run a chi-square test, so the above interpretation of the data is qualitative rather than statistical.

The next statistical analysis was between protective and defensive embarrassment reduction strategies and specific types of individualistic and collectivistic cultures (ALLPD and ETHNIC1). See table 6.



Table 6

Crosstabs of Embarrassment Reduction Strategies with Ethnicity

Variable	Cases	Mean	t value	2-tail prob.	DF	SD
ETHNIC						
Group 1	69	<b>5.0725</b>	-2.75	.007*	135	.846
Group 2	68	<b>5.5000</b>				.970

Note. The variable ETHNIC signifies ethnicity or specific examples of culture; Group 1= American, Group 2= Asian. The number of cases add up to a total of 137 participants [3 were not classified into either American or Asian], and the bolded values indicate the mean scores of Group 1 and Group 2. DF=degrees of freedom; SD=standard deviation.

\* $p < .05$  (statistically significant)

In this case, the specific ethnicity which embraces the two major classifications of culture are Americans as individualists and Southeast-Asians as collectivists. The predictions in the hypotheses claim that Americans will have a low mean score while Asians will have a high mean score in the cross tabulation of the two variables related to embarrassment reduction strategies and ethnicity. The results obtained prove this hypotheses because Americans obtained a low mean score of 5.0, Asians obtained a higher mean score of 5.5, with a  $t$  value of -2.75. Further, the means were statistically significant at  $p < .05$ .

The results suggest that Americans will engage in defensive embarrassment reduction strategies, and Asians will engage in protective embarrassment reduction strategies. This further explains that ethnicity does

play a critical role in the choice of embarrassment reduction strategies.

See table 7 for detailed statistical report.

Table 7

A Comparison of Embarrassment Reduction Strategies By American and Asian Ethnicity

	Asian	American
<b>Defensive</b>		
<b>4</b>	<b>14.7</b>	<b>30.4</b>
<b>5</b>	36.8	33.3
<b>6</b>	35.3	34.8
<b>7</b>	10.3	1.4
<b>8</b>	<b>2.9</b>	
<b>Protective</b>		

Note. Group 1= Americans, Group 2= Asians; bolded values indicate the percentage of participants would use extreme defensive and extreme protective embarrassment reduction strategies.

As the table above shows, 30% of Americans and 14% of Asians in this study claimed to engage in extreme defensive strategies while for the extreme

protective strategies, the Asian cell has 2.9% and the American cell is empty. In a qualitative sense, this indicates that Asians would engage in extremely protective communication to reduce embarrassment while Americans would not. However, the greatest number of Asians (36.8%) employed defensive embarrassment reduction strategies while the greatest number of Americans employed strategies in between defensive and protective. In general, hypotheses 1, 2, and 3 were supported.

Since the statistical analysis supports the claim that ethnicity correlates with changes in choice of embarrassment reduction strategies, can this claim be applied to gender as well? This takes us to the next statistical analysis which is embarrassment reduction strategies and biological sex (ALLPD and SEX). It was predicted by past researchers that males will have a greater tendency to engage in defensive embarrassment reduction strategies while females will have a greater tendency to engage in protective embarrassment reduction strategies. In Petronio's (1984) study, this claim was supported, but in Metts and Cupach's (1989) study, this claim was not supported.

In this study, the hypotheses (H4) that males will have a tendency to communicate defensively to reduce embarrassment while females will have a tendency to communicate protectively to reduce embarrassment is predicted to produce a low mean score for men and a high mean score for women. The results in this study showed that this was supported. The mean score for males was 5.1, and the mean score for females was 5.4, so there is a trend for men to

communicate defensively to reduce embarrassment and for women to communicate protectively for the same objective. The reason that I claim for a trend to exist is because the mean scores between males and females had a probability of .06 ( $p > .05$ ), which was very close to achieving statistical significance. See table 8.

Table 8

T-Test for Independent Sample of Sex and Embarrassment Reduction Strategies

Variable	Cases	Mean	SD	t Value	2-tail Prob.	DF
SEX						
Group 1	55	<b>5.1455</b>	1.044	-1.60	.056**	138
Group 2	85	<b>5.4000</b>	.834			

Note. The variable SEX signifies the biological sex of participants; Group 1 = Males, Group 2 = Females. The number of cases add up to a total of 140 participants, and the bolded values indicate the mean scores of Group 1 and Group 2. DF= degrees of freedom; SD=standard deviation.  
\* $p > .05$  (Not statistically significant)

The last important statistical analysis is to discover if the specific type of ethnicity in this study holds up to the particular classification of culture that it is claimed to belong to. In other words, how far is it true that in general, Americans belong to the individualistic classification of culture, and Asians belong to the collectivistic classification of culture? In order to discover this, a t-test was run to find the mean between the variables ETHNIC1 (American and Asian) with

CULTURE (individualistic and collectivistic). It was predicted that Americans will have a high mean and Asians will have a low mean.

Results showed that at a high mean of 5.9, Americans are individualistic (moving towards the higher end of the individualism range) while at a low mean of 5.3, Asians are collectivistic (moving towards the higher end of the collectivism range). This was supported at a  $t$  value of 3.18 and a statistically significant probability value of .002. See table 9.

Table 9

T-Test for Independent Sample of Ethnicity and Culture

Variable	Cases	Mean	SD	$t$ Value	2-tail Prob.	DF
Group 1	69	<b>5.9420</b>	1.069	3.18	.002*	135
Group 2	68	<b>5.3382</b>	1.154			

Note. The variable Group 1= American, Group 2 = Asian. The number of cases add up to a total of 140 participants, and the bolded values indicate the mean scores of Group 1 and Group 2. DF= degrees of freedom; SD=standard deviation.

\* $p < .05$

Since this study focuses primarily on communication pertaining to embarrassment,  $t$ -tests were also run to analyze embarrassment with variables such as sex, ethnicity, and protective or defensive strategies to reduce embarrassment.

First, let us take a look to see if sex correlates with differences in embarrassability. At a  $t$  value of 2.80 for males, and 2.87 for females, sex does not seem to explain any differences in intensity and depth of embarrassability. Results show that both males and females felt a similar level of embarrassment for the four embarrassing scenarios presented in the survey. However, this was not statistically significant.

Second, a  $t$ -test was run to find out if ethnicity is linked to differences in embarrassability. At a  $t$  value of 2.83 for Americans and 2.81 for Asians, results indicate that Americans and Asians felt a similar level of embarrassment for the four scenarios; however, this was also not statistically significant.

Third, a  $t$ -test was run to discover if communication to reduce embarrassment (protective or defensive) was influenced by the intensity of embarrassment. It was reported that at higher levels of embarrassment, people have the tendency to engage in defensive communication strategies; 100% of people who chose the extreme end in the range of defensive communication chose 4.50 as level of embarrassment (the range ends at 5.0, which indicates extreme embarrassment) while 33.3% of people who chose the extreme end in the range of protective communication chose 4.25 as level of embarrassment. The correlation obtained between variables (protective/defensive strategies and levels of embarrassment) was an  $r$  value of  $-.0188$  indicating that there is almost no relationship between embarrassment reduction strategies and levels of embarrassment. This means that the possibility of embarrassment levels being

a confounding variable is not an issue, and it is the impact of culture instead of levels of embarrassment which can be associated to one's choice of protective or defensive communication to reduce embarrassment.

### Discussion

The findings of this research suggest that culture influences the way one may communicate to reduce embarrassment and to save face. In addition, the findings also further underscore that Americans and Asians fall into two opposite classifications of culture: individualistic and collectivistic. As discussed thoroughly in the theoretical framework which provides the backbone to this study, individualistic low-context people tend to be more concerned with self-image and a need to save personal-face whereas collectivistic high-context people tend to be more concerned with public-image and a need to save personal as well as other-face. In short, it can be termed as a face-restoration for individualistic people and a face-giving for collectivistic people. Using the proposed scheme of accounts for interpretation, the essence of the findings is the support of the study's two main hypothesis where culture does indeed play a role in influencing communication strategies to reduce embarrassment. Further, there seems to be a trend where men are finding a need to justify their embarrassment by using defensive communication strategies while women are finding a need to use protective communication strategies. This can also be applied to a broader context where the findings claim that individualistic people have a need to be defensive to reduce embarrassment while collectivistic people

have a need to be protective to reduce embarrassment.

Applying this new evidence in the study of intercultural communication, as well as the theoretical proposal to the embarrassment reduction strategies in this study, Americans who are proven to encompass individualism use communication strategies such as, (1) changing the topic; (2) retreating from a situation; (3) criticizing him/herself; (4) laughing at his/her own behavior; (5) giving an excuse to minimize the incident; and (6) apologizing and taking responsibility, to reduce their embarrassment. On the other end of the spectrum, Asians who are proven to encompass collectivism use communication strategies such as, (1) wanting others to become embarrassed too; (2) wanting others to ignore the incident; (3) wanting someone else as the focus of attention; (4) wanting others to express sympathy for him/her; (5) wanting to be given another chance to try again; and (6) wanting others to indicate nothing inappropriate happened, to reduce their embarrassment.

As for indicators to individualism and collectivism, the items modified from Hofstede's category of two major cultures showed a trend for people of both cultures in these areas which will be discussed here. In this study, 44% of people chose to be identified based primarily on their family and social groups while 56% of people chose to identify themselves based on individuality and self-image. This shows that despite the existence of two very different classifications of culture, people of both cultures, seem to be moving towards individualism. This is especially evident in collectivist Asians who reside in the United States. It



is interesting to note that Asian-Americans seem to be straying away from the “we” identity to the “I” identity. Thus, instead of maintaining their collectivistic cultural orientation, Asians who are exposed to individualistic societies like the United States, show a preference in embracing the focus on individuality. Of course, this is apparent in the new generation of young Asians and perhaps, the future generation of Asians may completely stray away from collectivism on the whole. Currently, it does seem as though Asians in general, still engage in the “we” identity despite a growing trend towards the “I” identity which could very well be an impact of modernism and a future of enhanced emphasis on science and technology.

On the other hand, both cultures seem to place more importance in children rather than money-making. 82% of the people in this study claimed that they prefer to go to their child’s soccer game rather than work overtime to make extra money while only 17% of people chose the opposite. Also, 59% of people preferred a work relationship that resembled a family link while 41% preferred a work relationship that was a contract with mutual benefits.

The interpretation offered for the prevalence of collectivistic cultures utilizing protective communication strategies to reduce embarrassment, supports the notion that collectivists tend to stick together. It also confirms the stereotypic notion that when one collectivist fails, the others also have to experience a downfall. For example, in Japan, school children are taught not to compete with each other, but rather help each other in their school work. So, if one fails, the

failure is reflected on all the children in a particular class. This is the opposite in individualistic cultures, and the interpretation offered for the prevalence of individualists utilizing defensive communication strategies can be applied to the notion that each individual lives for him or herself, and also the assumption that success is not measured in group efforts (unless an effort is specifically known as team work).

The findings of this study could prove to be new evidence in the increasingly important arena of intercultural communication. This new information could be one of the many keys to reduce intercultural misunderstandings and improve intercultural communication. Further, by applying the appropriate communication strategies to reduce embarrassment, intercultural conflicts could be significantly reduced since embarrassment is a prevalent problem in intercultural harmony. In addition, this study could also enhance intercultural relationships through a better understanding of how to deal with conflict situations which has embarrassment as one of its components.

#### Future Research

For future research, I would suggest incorporating a wider variety of ethnicity in the sample. What I mean by this is that instead of focusing only on two specific ethnic groups (Americans and Asians) encompassing individual and collective cultures, more generalizable results could be obtained if other various ethnicities such as Arabs, Europeans, and Africans are used as participants. These ethnic groups can easily be categorized as individualistic or collectivistic;

thus, lending this study further reliability in terms of generalizing results.

Another suggestion for future research is to focus more closely on the existing trend that men and women use differing communication strategies to reduce embarrassment. Perhaps, a more thorough analysis of biological sex and embarrassability could make this trend become a reliably supported hypotheses. For example, I did not compare embarrassment reduction strategies between Asian women and American women or Asian men and American women because the emphasis of this study was culture.

Another suggestion for future research is to replicate this study using contexts which are not related to university and student populations. Perhaps, this study done in the context of married intercultural couples or intercultural employer-employee relationships could yield further interesting insight on the communication to reduce embarrassment. Also, using two generations of samples could bring about more insightful findings, for example, attempting to discover if a second-generation Asian is more strongly collective in comparison to a fourth-generation Asian. This finding could claim or disclaim my thoughts that as we move into a more modern and futuristic society, collectivism may no longer be desirable by the future generation.

“Individualistic and collectivistic tendencies exist in all cultures, but one tends to predominate” (Gudykunst, 1991, p. 47). This thesis opens an area where intercultural misunderstandings in terms of embarrassment could be further understood.

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Appendix A

**HUMAN SUBJECTS LETTER**

Dr. Thomas J. Socha  
Human Subjects Coordinator  
Department of Communication and Theater Arts  
Old Dominion University  
Norfolk, VA 23529

January 30, 1998

Dear Sir,

Re: Human Subjects Letter

- **Purpose:** To find out if differences exist in embarrassment reduction strategies between two classifications of culture: low-context, individualistic (Americans) and high-context, collectivistic culture (Asians).
- **Confidentiality:** To ensure confidentiality of subjects in this study, participants' names or identities will not be linked to any information or results gained from the study. To further ensure anonymity of participants, the data collected will be correlated and presented in aggregate form.
- **Risks:** There is a very minuscule amount of risk involved in this study whereby participants may encounter a slight level of discomfort if presented with a possibly embarrassing topic/scenario in the survey.
- **Time:** The approximate time that is needed for participants to complete the survey will be 5 - 8 minutes.
- **Incentive:** The incentives which I plan to offer the participants in order to motivate and thank them for participating in the study are extra credit in a Communication course, candy or stationery (colorful erasers, pencils).
- **Debriefing:** Two weeks after the study is concluded, results will be posted on the Communication and Theater Arts grade posting board located on the first floor of the Batten Arts and Letters building.
- **Participants:** The participants will consist of 140 male and female students from Old Dominion University and University of Malaya between the ages of 18-46. They will be a random convenience sample.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ (Puvana Ganesan)

## Appendix B

## CONSENT FORM

Dear Participant:

I kindly request your permission to use your responses in a graduate communication study pertaining to culture. I assure you that your responses will be handled with the utmost confidence by not linking your name and identity to any responses; thus, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity. There may be a very slight risk of personal discomfort involved due to a possible embarrassing scenario. The approximate time required to answer the survey will be 5 - 8 minutes, and you will receive a choice of candy or stationery in appreciation of your participation. Results will be posted at the Communication and Theater Arts grade posting board, on the first floor of Batten Arts and Letters building, two weeks after the study is concluded. I am grateful and I thank you very much for your support.

 **Sign here:** \_\_\_\_\_

Please detach for your reference before placing form in appropriate box

✂️ \_\_\_\_\_

Results will be posted at the Communication and Theater Arts grade posting board, on the first floor of BAL, two weeks after the study is concluded.



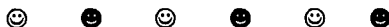
## Appendix C

**SURAT KEBENARAN**

Pelajar Yang Dihormati,

Saya adalah seorang pelajar Masters dari Old Dominion University, Amerika Syarikat, dan saya ingin memohon kebenaran anda untuk menggunakan jawapan anda dalam satu ujikaji ataupun tinjauan dalam bidang sains komunikasi. Saya pastikan anda bahawa saya tidak akan kaitkan nama dan identiti anda dengan jawapan yang anda tampilkan. Dalam tinjauan ini, saya ingin memberitahu anda bahawa ada kemungkinan ataupun kebarangkalian kecil yang anda akan terasa sedikit malu berkaitan dengan situasi yang akan dikemukakan. Juga, tinjauan ini akan mengambil masa sebanyak 5 hingga 8 minit sahaja untuk dijawab, dan anda boleh membuat pilihan diantara gula-gula ataupun alat tulis sebagai tanda terima kasih saya pada anda. Saya amat berterima kasih terhadap sokongan anda dalam tinjauan ini.

👉 Tolong tandatangan di sini: \_\_\_\_\_



Appendix D

**CAMPBELL AND STANLEY NOTATION OF DESIGN: BETWEEN-SUBJECTS**

**POSTTEST ONLY DESIGN**

X1      01

X2      02

X1: Culture--Individualistic (American)

X2: Culture--Collectivistic (Asian)

01: Embarrassment Reduction Strategies (Defensive & Protective)

02: Embarrassment Reduction Strategies (Protective & Defensive)

## Appendix E

**MODIGLIANI'S EMBARRASSIBILITY SCALE**

1. You slip and fall on a patch of ice in a public place, dropping a package of groceries.
2. You are a dinner guest, and the guest seated next to you spills his plate in his lap whilst trying to cut some meat.
3. A group of friends are singing "Happy Birthday" to you. ←
4. You discover you are the only person at a social occasion without formal dress.
5. You are watching an amateur show and one of the performers who is trying to do a comedy act is unable to make people laugh.
6. You are calling someone you have met for the first time in order to arrange a date.
7. You are muttering aloud to yourself in an apparently empty room when you discover someone else is there.
8. You walk into a bathroom at someone else's house and discover that it is occupied by a member of the opposite sex.
9. You are in the audience watching a play when it suddenly becomes clear that one of the actors has forgotten his/her lines, causing the play to become a standstill.
10. You are being lavishly complimented on your pleasant personality by your partner on your first date.
11. You notice that your tutor has forgotten to do up his fly.
12. You enter an apparently empty room, turn on the light and surprise a couple necking.
13. You are talking to a stranger who stutters badly due to a speech impediment.
14. Your mother/father has come to visit you and was accompanying you to work/college.
15. You are a dinner guest and cannot eat the main course because you are allergic to it .
16. You are alone in the lift with your professor/boss who has just given you a bad grade/reference. ←
17. You walk into a room full of people you do not know, and are introduced to the whole group.
18. You trip and fall when entering a bus full of people.
19. You are opening some presents while the people who gave them to you are watching.
20. You ask someone on crutches if they have had a skiing accident and they tell you they were crippled by polio as a child.
21. You have forgotten an appointment with your professor/boss, and remember it as you meet him/her in the entrance the next day. ←
22. You are talking in a small group which includes a blind person, when someone next to that person unthinkingly makes a remark about everyone being as blind as a bat.

← Signifies items which were modified and utilized in the Communication Scale

## Appendix F

## 🐼 Communication Survey 🐼

**Instructions:** Please respond to the situations below by circling **ONE** response that **BEST** fits you. If you have NOT experienced one or more of the scenarios, please mark the box before each letter and imagine that the scenario has happened to you. Also, rate how embarrassed you feel about each scenario.

- ☐ **A.** You have forgotten an appointment with your professor, and remember it as you meet him/her the next day. You would:

1. Give an excuse thus minimizing the incident
2. Want the person to indicate that nothing inappropriate happened
3. Laugh at the incident to deny failure
4. Want the others to become embarrassed too
5. Want others to leave the situation
6. Apologize and take responsibility
7. Other (please fill in): \_\_\_\_\_

Rate your level of embarrassment: Not at all   1   2   3   4   5 Extremely High

- ☐ **B.** On the first day of class, your professor requires you to sit/stand up and say something about yourself to the whole class. You say something which is an obvious blunder, for example, "Last summer, I visited New York and saw the statue of Berlivity" and your classmates look strangely at you. You would:

1. Laugh at your own behavior
2. Want others to ignore the incident
3. Want someone else as the focus of attention
4. Change the topic
5. Want others to verbally blame the incident on something else
6. Tell about other blunders/crazy things you have done
7. Other (please fill in): \_\_\_\_\_

Rate your level of embarrassment: Not at all   1   2   3   4   5 Extremely High

☐ C. You are with your professor who has given you a bad grade, you would:

1. Want him/her to give you a chance to try again
2. Retreat from the situation
3. Want others to make themselves the center of attention
4. Tell him/her positive information about yourself
5. Want him/her to express sympathy for you
6. Criticize yourself
7. Other (please fill in): \_\_\_\_\_

Rate your level of embarrassment: Not at all   1   2   3   4   5   Extremely High

☐ D. A group of friends are singing "Happy Birthday" to you in public, you would:

1. Want others to make themselves the center of attention
2. Pretend nothing inappropriate happened
3. Want others to ignore the incident
4. Retreat from the situation
5. Pretend to be physically injured
6. Want others to pretend that he/she was only clowning around
7. Other (please fill in): \_\_\_\_\_

Rate your level of embarrassment: Not at all   1   2   3   4   5   Extremely High

**Please check the following/fill in the blanks as it applies to you:**

1) I have been in the United States for: \_\_\_\_\_ years (please fill in).

2) --Broadly speaking, I would identify myself as an:

☐ American   ☐ Asian   ☐ Other (fill in) \_\_\_\_\_

--Specifically speaking, I identify myself as:

☐ White   ☐ Black   ☐ Hispanic   ☐ Oriental   ☐ Other (fill in) \_\_\_\_\_

3) I am:   ☐ Male   ☐ Female

4) Age (fill in): \_\_\_\_\_ years

5) Pick one from each pair of options i-iv which **BEST** reflects yourself:

- i. ☐ My identity is based on my family/social group I belong to
- ☐ My identity is based on myself/ individuality



- ii. ☐ As a child, I learned to think in terms of “we”  
☐ As a child, I learned to think in terms of “I”
  
- iii. ☐ I prefer to go to my child’s soccer game than work overtime for extra money  
☐ I prefer to work overtime for extra money than go to my child’s soccer game
  
- iv. ☐ I believe that employer-employee relationships should be like a family link  
☐ I believe that employer-employee relationships should be a contract with mutual advantage



Thank You!

## Appendix G

**TINJAUAN KOMUNIKASI**

**Arahan:** Tolong tampilkan jawapan anda pada situasi di bawah dengan memilih **SATU** kenyataan yang **tersesuai** dengan anda. Jika anda tidak pernah mengalami salah satu daripada situasi tersebut, tolong tandakan kotak sebelum situasi itu, dan gunakan imaginasi bahawa anda pernah mengalaminya. Juga, pilih nombor yang berkaitan dengan rasa malu anda selepas setiap situasi.

- ☐ **A.** Anda terlupa akan satu pertemuan dengan guru/profesor, dan anda teringat hal ini apabila bertemu dengan guru/profesor itu pada keesokan hari. Anda akan:

1. Beri alasan untuk meminimakan hal tersebut
2. Mahu guru/profesor anda untuk menunjukkan bahawa tiada apa-apa yang salah telah berlaku
3. Ketawakan hal ini untuk menafikan kesalahan anda
4. Mahu guru/profesor anda merasa malu
5. Mahu guru/profesor anda meninggalkan situasi tersebut
6. Minta maaf dan ambil tanggungjawab terhadap kesalahan anda
7. Lain (Sila tulis di sini): \_\_\_\_\_

Langsung tidak malu    1            2            3            4            5    Teramat Malu

- ☐ **B.** Pada hari pertama di kelas, guru/profesor meminta anda untuk duduk/berdiri dan beri informasi pasal diri anda kepada seluruh kelas. Anda tersebut sesuatu yang ternyata salah, sebagai contoh "Bulan lalu, saya gembira kerana dapat berkelahi di Port Dickson" dan anda perhatikan rakan-rakan sekelas memandang anda macam anda ganjil. Anda akan:

1. Ketawakan kesalahan anda sendiri
2. Mahu guru dan rakan-rakan sekelas untuk tidak perdulikan kesalahan anda
3. Mahu orang lain jadi fokus atau tumpuan perhatian kelas
4. Tukar topik
5. Salahkan masalah anda pada benda lain dengan menggunakan perkataan
6. Ceritakan pasal lain-lain kesalahan yang anda pernah lakukan
7. Lain (sila tulis): \_\_\_\_\_

Langsung tidak malu    1            2            3            4            5    Teramat Malu

- ☐ C. Anda bersendirian dalam lif dengan guru/profesor yang pernah memberi anda markah yang tidak baik dalam peperiksaan. Anda akan:

1. Mahu guru/profesor beri anda peluang untuk mencuba sekali lagi
2. Undur diri daripada situasi ini (keluar dari lif)
3. Mahu orang lain jadikan diri mereka tumpuan perhatian
4. Beritahu guru/profesor itu informasi yang positif pasal diri anda
5. Mahu guru/profesor menunjukkan perasaan simpati terhadap anda
6. Beritahu guru/profesor itu informasi yang negatif pasal diri anda
7. Lain (Sila tulis): \_\_\_\_\_

Langsung tidak malu    1            2            3            4            5    Teramat Malu

- ☐ D. Sekumpulan kawan-kawan sedang menyanyikan lagu "Selamat Hari Jadi" kepada anda di khalayak umum/ramai. Anda akan:

1. Mahu orang lain jadikan diri mereka tumpuan perhatian
2. Berpura-pura bahawa tiada apa-apa yang tidak sesuai telah berlaku
3. Mahu orang lain tidak memperdulikan situasi itu
4. Undur diri daripada situasi itu
5. Berpura-pura yang anda dalam kesakitan
6. Mahu orang lain berpura-pura bahawa mereka cuma main-main saja
7. Lain (Sila tulis): \_\_\_\_\_

Langsung tidak malu    1            2            3            4            5    Teramat Malu

**Tolong pilih kenyataan di bawah mengikut kesuaiannya terhadap diri anda:**

- 1) Adakah anda pernah melawat negara Amerika Syarikat?
 

☐ Pernah, untuk berapa lama? \_\_\_\_\_ ☐ Tidak Pernah
- 2) Saya adalah warganegara Malaysia daripada bangsa:
 

☐ Melayu    ☐ Cina    ☐ India    ☐ Ceylon    ☐ Lain \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) Saya adalah seorang:    ☐ Lelaki                      ☐ Perempuan
- 4) Saya berumur \_\_\_\_\_ tahun.
- 5) Kenyataan yang mana **PALING** sesuai untuk menjelaskan diri/budaya anda?
  - i) ☐ Identiti saya berdasar pada keluarga/kumpulan sosial saya
  - ☐ Identiti saya berdasar pada diri saya/individualiti saya

- ii) ☐ Sebagai kanak-kanak, saya belajar untuk berfikir sebagai unit “kami” (we)
- ☐ Sebagai kanak-kanak, saya belajar untuk berfikir sebagai unit “saya” (I)
- iii) ☐ Saya lebih suka pergi ke pertandingan bola sepak anak saya daripada bekerja lebih masa (overtime) untuk mendapat lebih duit
- ☐ Saya lebih suka bekerja lebih masa untuk mendapat lebih duit daripada pergi ke pertandingan bola sepak anak saya
- iv) ☐ Saya percaya bahawa hubungan majikan dengan pekerja mesti seperti keluarga
- ☐ Saya percaya bahawa hubungan majikan dengan pekerja mesti seperti kontrak di mana kedua-dua orang akan mendapat manfaat



Terima Kasih!

Appendix H  
**CODEBOOK**

VARIABLE	DESC	CODE	COLUMN
1. SUBJ.	Subject Identification No.	001-999	1 - 3
2. FORGOT	Forgot an appointment -defensive or protective	1. Give an excuse thus minimizing the incident=1 2. Want the person to indicate that nothing inappropriate happened=2 3. Laugh at the incident to deny failure=1 4. Want the others to become embarrassed too=2 5. Want others to leave the situation=2 6. Apologize and take responsibility=1 7. Other (fill in: )_____	4
3. EFORGOT	Level of embarrassment for forgetting scenario	Not at all 12345 Extremely High	5
4. BLUNDER	Say an obvious blunder to the whole class	1. Laugh at your own behavior=1 2. Want others to ignore the incident=2	

VARIABLE	DESC	CODE	COLUMN
		3. Want someone else as the focus of attention=2 4. Change the topic=1 5. Want others to verbally blame the incident on something else=2 6. Tell about other blunders/ crazy things you have done=1 7. Other (fill in):_____	6
5.EBLUNDER	Level of embarrassment for blunder scenario	Not at all 12345 Extremely High	7
6. BADGRAD	You are with a professor who gave you a bad grade	1. Want him/her to give you a chance to try again=2 2. Retreat from the situation=1 3. Want others to make themselves the center of attention=2 4. Tell him/her positive information about yourself=1 5. Want him/her to express sympathy for you=2 6. Criticize yourself=1 7. Other (fill in):_____	8
7. EBADGRAD	Level of embarrassment for blunder scenario	Not at all 12345 Extremely High	9

VARIABLE	DESC	CODE	COLUMN
8. SINGBIR	A group of friends sing "Happy Birthday to you" in public	1. Want others to make themselves the center of attention=2 2. Pretend nothing inappropriate happened=1 3. Want others to ignore the incident=2 4. Retreat from the situation=1 5. Pretend to be physically injured=1 6. Want others to pretend that he/she was only clowning around=2 7. Other (fill in):_____	10
9. ESINGBIR	Level of embarrassment -sing in public scenario	Not at all 12345 Extremely High	11
10. YEARS	Number of years in United States	01 - 99	12 - 13
11. BEENUS	Has a M'sian participant been to the U.S.?	1. Yes 2. No	14
12. ETHNIC1	Ethnicity in broad sense	1. American 2. Asian 3. Other (fill in):_____	15

VARIABLE	DESC	CODE	COLUMN
13. ETHNIC2	Ethnicity in specific sense	1. White 2. Black 3. Hispanic 4. Oriental 5. Other (fill in):_____	16 - 17
14. SEX	Biological sex	1. Male 2. Female	18
15. AGE	Participant's age	01 - 99	19 - 20
16. ORIENTA	Participant's culture based on:	1. Individualistic 2. Collectivistic	
i. CGPSELF	Group vs. self orientation	Collectivistic=1 Individualistic=2	21
ii. CWEI	We vs. I identity	Collectivistic=1 Individualistic=2	22
iii. CCHIMON	Child vs. money	Collectivistic=1 Individualistic=2	23
iv. CWORK	Family vs. contract	Collectivistic=1 Individualistic=2	24
16. CULTURE	CGPSELF+CWEI+CCHILMON+CWORK	Range = 4 - 8  4 = Individualists 8 = Collectivists	



VARIABLE	DESC	CODE	COLUMN
17.EMCOLIN	EFORGOT+EBLUNDER +EBADGRAD+ESINGBIR	Range = 1 - 5  1 = Individualists 5 = Collectivists	
18. ALLPD	FORGOT+BLUNDER+ BADGRAD+SINGBIR	Range 4 - 8  1+3+5+7 = Protective 2+4+6+8 = Defensive	

## Appendix I

**PROGRAM STATEMENT FOR SPSSX**

DATA LIST / SUBJ 1-3

FORGOT 4

EFORGOT 5

BLUNDER 6

EBLUNDER 7

BADGRAD 8

EBADGRAD 9

SINGBIR 10

ESINGBIR 11

YEARS 12-13

BEENUS 14

ETHNIC1 15

ETHNIC2 16-17

SEX 18

AGE 19-20

CGPSELF 21

CWEI 22

CCHIMON 23

CWORK 24

BEGIN DATA

[Enter data obtained from surveys here]

END DATA

RECODE FORGOT (1=1) (2=2) (3=1) (4=2) (5=2) (6=1)

RECODE BLUNDER (1=1) (2=2) (3=2) (4=1) (5=2) (6=1)

RECODE BADGRAD (1=2) (2=1) (3=2) (4=1) (5=2) (6=1)

RECODE SINGBIR (1=2) (2=1) (3=2) (4=1) (5=1) (6=2)

FREQUENCIES VARS= ALL/BARCHART

DESCRIPTIVES VARS= ALL

COMPUTE CULTURE=(CGPSELF+CWEI+CCHIMON+CWORK)

COMPUTE EMCOLIN=(EFORGOT+EBLUNDER+EBADGRAD+ESINGBIR)

COMPUTE ALLPD=(FORGOT+BLUNDER+BADGRAD+SINGBIR)

CROSSTABS TABLES=ALLPD BY CULTURE/

CELLS=COLUMN/

STATISTICS=ALL

CROSSTABS ALLPD BY ETHNIC1/

CELLS=COLUMN/

STATISTICS=CHISQ PHI

CROSSTABS ALLPD BY EMCOLIN/

CELLS=COLUMN/

STATISTICS=CHISQ

CORR ALLPD CULTURE EMCOLIN/

FORMAT SERIAL

RELIABILITY VARIABLE = EFORGOT EBLUNDER EBADGRAD ESINGBIR

/SCALE (EMBARRASS) = EFORGOT EBLUNDER EBADGRAD

ESINGBIR

/SUMMARY=MEANS VARIANCE COVARIANCE CORR TOTAL

T-TEST GROUPS SEX (1, 2) / VARIABLES = EMCOLIN ALLPD CULTURE

T-TEST GROUPS ETHNIC1 (1, 2) / VARIABLES=EMCOLIN ALLPD CULTURE

T-TEST PAIRS=EFORGOT WITH ESINGBIR/ EFORGOT WITH EBADGRADT-

T-TEST PAIRS=EFORGOT WITH EBLUNDER

T-TEST GROUPS SEX (1, 2) / VARIABLES = EFORGOT EBLUNDER

EBADGRAD ESINGBIR

## **VITA**

PUVANA GANESAN

### **■ Dept. Address:**

Institute of Humanities  
Old Dominion University  
Norfolk, VA 23529

Phone: (757) 683-3821

### **■ Education**

Old Dominion University (January 1997 - May 1998)

Major: Humanities--Communications Emphasis

Major GPA: 3.85 Cumulative GPA: 3.70

● Master of Arts in Humanities--Communication

Old Dominion University (January 1995 - December 1996)

Major: Communications

Minor: English

Major GPA: 3.98 Cumulative GPA: 3.58 (Dean's List)

● Bachelor of Arts in Communication (Cum Laude)

### **■ Computer Skills**

● Versatile on the Personal Computer

● WordPerfect 6.1, Microsoft Word, SPSSX, Spreadsheets etc.

### **■ Academic Societies/Clubs**

● Lambda Pi Eta (National Communication Honor Society)

● Golden Key Honor Society

● Rotaract Club of ODU

● Communication Club of ODU

### **■ References**

● Furnished upon request