CHAPTER 31
FACE-NEGOTIATION THEORY

Outline

I. Introduction.
   A. Stella Ting-Toomey’s face-negotiation theory helps to explain cultural differences in response to conflict.
   B. A basic assumption is that all people negotiate “face.”
      1. Face is a metaphor for our public self-image.
      2. Facework refers to specific verbal and nonverbal messages that help to maintain and restore face loss, and to uphold and honor face gain.
   C. Our identity can always be called into question, which inevitably leads to conflict and vulnerability.
   D. Facework and corresponding styles of handling conflict vary from culture to culture.
   E. Ting-Toomey suggests that face maintenance is the crucial intervening variable that ties culture to people’s ways of handling conflict.

II. Collectivistic and individualistic cultures.
   A. Harry Triandis says that there are three important distinctions between collectivistic and individualistic cultures—the different ways members perceive self, goals, and duty.
   B. Japan and the U.S. represent collectivistic and individualistic cultures, respectively.
   C. Whereas Japanese value collective needs and goals (a we-identity), Americans value individualistic needs and goals (an I-identity).
   D. Whereas Japanese perceive others in us-them categories and attach little importance to pursuing outsiders’ attitudes or feelings, Americans assume that every person is unique and reduce uncertainty by asking questions.

III. Self-construal: Varied self-images within a culture
   A. Ting-Toomey recognizes that people within a culture differ on the relative emphasis they place on individual self-sufficiency or group solidarity.
   B. She discusses the dimension of self-construal (or self-image) in terms of the independent and interdependent self, or the degree to which people conceive of themselves as relatively autonomous from, or connected to, others. Hazel Markus and Shinobu Kitayama call this dimension self construal, otherwise known as self-image.
   C. The independent self is more self-face oriented and so this view of self is more prevalent within individualistic cultures, while the interdependent self is more concerned with other-face and is thus closely aligned with collectivistic cultures.
   D. However, individuals within a culture—particularly one that is ethnically diverse—differ in these images of self as well as varied views on the degree to which they give others face or restore their own face in conflict situations.
E. Ting-Toomey built her theory around the foundational idea that people from collectivistic/high-context cultures are different in the way they manage face and conflict situations than individualistic/low-context cultures.

F. Ting-Toomey now believes self-construal is a better predictor of face-concerns and conflict styles than ethnic/cultural background.

IV. The multiple faces of face.
   A. Face is a universal concern because it is an extension of self-concept.
      1. Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson define face as the public self-image that every member of society wants to claim for himself/herself.
      2. Ting-Toomey defines face as the projected image of one’s self in a relational situation.
   B. The meaning of face differs depending on differences in cultural and individual identities.
   C. Face concern focuses on whose face a person wants to save.
      1. One can save one’s own face or the face of others.
      2. Those in individualistic cultures tend to be more concerned with preserving their own face, whereas people in collectivistic cultures value maintaining the face of the other party.
   D. Mutual face is where there’s an equal concern for both parties’ image, as well as the public image or their relationship.
   E. Face-restoration is the facework strategy used to stake out a unique place in life, preserve autonomy, and defend against loss of personal freedom.
      1. It is the typical face strategy across individualistic cultures.
      2. It often involves justifying one’s actions or blaming the situation.
   F. Face-giving is the facework strategy used to defend and support another’s need for inclusion.
      1. It means taking care not to embarrass or humiliate the other in public.
      2. It is the characteristic face strategy across collectivist cultures.
      3. It often involves self-effacement.
   G. Although cultural difference is not absolute, people from collectivistic and individualistic cultures tend to privilege other-face and self-face, respectively.

V. Predictable styles of conflict management.
   A. Based on the work of M. Afzalur Rahim, Ting-Toomey identified five distinct responses to situations in which there is an incompatibility of needs, interests, or goals.
      1. Avoiding (withdrawal)
      2. Obliging (giving in)
      3. Compromising (negotiation)
      4. Integrating (problem solving)
      5. Dominating (competing)
   B. Ting-Toomey and John Oetzel identified three additional styles based on more ethnically diverse samples.
      1. Emotional expression
      2. Passive aggression
      3. Third-party help
C. The styles vary according to their culture-related face concern.
D. They predicted that different cultures would favor different conflict management styles.
   1. Collectivistic cultures would favor avoiding, obliging, compromising, third-party help and integrating.
   2. Individualistic cultures would favor emotional expression, passive aggression, and dominating.
E. Avoiding is now rated almost as high as obliging on concern for other person face.
F. Third-party help is used differently by collectivistic cultures than by individualistic cultures.
   1. In collectivistic cultures, parties voluntarily go to an admired person with whom they already have a relationship.
   2. In individualistic cultures, parties go to an independent mediator.
G. The model assumes that people from a given culture construe their self-image consistent with the collectivistic or individualistic nature of their society.
H. Integrating, when adopted by collectivists, focuses on relational-level collaboration whereas individualists concentrate on solving the task and bringing closure.

VI. Application: competent intercultural facework.
   A. Ting-Toomey believes there are three requirements for effectively communicating across cultures.
      1. Knowledge—one must be culturally sensitive.
      2. Mindfulness—one must choose to seek multiple perspectives on the same event.
      3. Interaction skill—one must be able to communicate appropriately, effectively, and adaptively in a given situation.

VII. Critique: passing the test with a good grade.
   A. Ting-Toomey and Oetzel are committed to objective social science research agenda that looks for measurable commonalities across cultures.
   B. Oetzel and Ting-Toomey tested the core of the theory in four nations using only the three primary conflict styles—dominating, integrating, and avoiding—with largely positive results.
   C. Results suggest that culture- self-construal- face-concern- conflict style was a better predictor path than culture- conflict style directly.
   D. Their results should be interpreted with caution, as they are based on self-reports that are often self-serving.
   E. Specific survey items may not tap into corresponding concepts as described in the theory.
**Key Names and Terms**

**Stella Ting-Toomey**
First introduced in Chapter 30, this California State University, Fullerton researcher created face-negotiation theory.

**Face**
A metaphor for our public self-image.

**Facework**
The enactment of specific verbal and nonverbal messages that help maintain and restore face loss, and to uphold and hold face gain.

**Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson**
Cambridge University linguists who define face as the public self-image that every member of society wants to claim for himself/herself.

**Harry Triandis**
University of Illinois psychologist who distinguishes between collectivism and individualism.

**Collectivistic Culture**
A core dimension of cultural variability; people identify with a larger group that is responsible for providing care in exchange for group loyalty, thus acting from a we-identity rather than the I-identity found in individualistic cultures.

**Individualistic Culture**
A core dimension of cultural variability, people look out for themselves and their immediate families, thus acting from an I-identity rather than the we-identity found in collectivistic cultures.

**Independent Self**
The self-construal of individuals who conceive of themselves as relatively autonomous from others; I-identity.

**Interdependent Self**
The self-construal of individuals who conceive of themselves as interconnected with many others; we-identity.

**Self-Construal**
Hazel Markus and Shinobu Kitayama’s term for the degree to which people conceive of themselves as relatively autonomous from, or connected to, others.

**Lin Yutang**
Taiwanese scholar who calls face a psychological image that can be granted and lost, and fought for and presented as a gift.

**Face-Restoration**
The self-concerned facework strategy used to preserve autonomy and defend against personal loss of freedom.

**Face-Giving**
The other-concerned facework strategy used to defend and support another person’s need for inclusion.

**Avoiding**
A method of conflict management whereby an individual withdraws from open discussion.

**Obliging**
A method of conflict management whereby an individual accommodates the wishes of the other.

**Compromising**
A method of conflict management whereby an individual bargains to establish a middle way.

**Dominating**
A method of conflict management whereby an individual competes to win.

**Integrating**
A method of conflict management whereby an individual seeks to integrate information to find a solution.

**Emotional Expression**
A method of conflict management whereby an individual lets his or her feelings show.

**Passive Aggression**
A method of conflict management whereby an individual tries to indirectly elicit a particular solution.

**Third-Party Help**
A method of conflict management whereby disputing parties seek the aid of a third party.

**Knowledge**
The most important dimension of facework competence, it involves being informed about individualistic and collectivistic cultures, self-construals, face-concerns, and conflict styles.

**Mindfulness**
A component of facework competence, it’s a recognition that things are not always what they seem, and the need to make a conscious choice to seek multiple perspectives on the same event.

**Interaction Skill**
A component of facework competence, interaction skill concerns one’s ability to communicate appropriately, effectively and adaptively in a given situation.

**John Oetzel**
A researcher from the University of New Mexico who has worked with Ting-Toomey to test, critique, and expand face-negotiation theory.

**Principal Changes**

The chapter has been reorganized with added emphasis on self-construal and its important mediating role between one’s culture and the types of face maintenance and conflict management a person is likely to use. Discussion of Ting-Toomey and Oetzel’s compelling research concerning the three additional styles of conflict management has been expanded, further clarifying the third-party help and avoiding styles. Figure 31.4 has also been added to illustrate their research findings related to the independent and interdependent selves. The chapter has been extensively edited for clarity and precision and Griffin has updated the Second Look section.
Suggestions for Discussion

Confucianism
To enrich this material, you may find it useful to introduce your class to the Confucianism that undergirds the collectivistic cultures of Japan, China, Korea, and other East Asian countries. The article by June Ock Yum cited below under “Further Resources” will be very helpful in this respect. The basic tenets of Confucianism will give students a way to ground several of Ting-Toomey’s concepts in broader cultural practices and beliefs. Students may also be interested in speculating about the ways in which Christianity—the formative religion of Western culture—or other key influences may have shaped America’s individualistic orientation. Max Weber’s work on the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism may be particularly relevant here.

Three additional conflict styles
The three new conflict styles identified by Ting-Toomey and Oetzel (page 446) may stimulate productive discussion with your students. However, you may need to provide some additional context about the research on these three styles. Students may be confused, for example, about why passive aggression and emotional expression tend to rank high on self-face concern, yet are still missed by scholarship focused on individualism. The key is that these styles surfaced in research with Americans from various ethnic groups (Griffin mentions an “ethnically diverse sample,” but he does not specify that the sample consists of Americans rather than of participants in different countries)—African Americans, Latina(o) Americans, Asian Americans, and European Americans. In this richer context, the three additional conflict management styles emerge. Thus the styles can still be consistent with high self-face concern and an individualistic perspective, but surface more often in samples that do not only use European-American participants (as has much communication research). The source by Ting-Toomey, Oetzel, and Yee-Jung listed in “Further Resources” may be helpful to you and your students.

Once your students have grasped the three styles, you may want to discuss their reactions to them. Emotional expression and passive aggression generally have a negative connotation for Americans; third-party help may also (although to a lesser extent) be considered problematic. Ask your students why we often have these perspectives—in particular, try to elicit from them the Western individualistic assumptions that support these judgments. You may also wish to try to reframe these views by asking them if these strategies might actually have positive outcomes in certain conflict situations. (See also Essay Question #25.)

Self-construal
You may also wish to discuss the notion of self-construal. Because it is an individual variable, intriguing questions may arise. Self-construal has broad connections to culture, but—as Ting-Toomey notes—it also varies among individuals within a culture (442). She connects this to our ethnic diversity, but might other factors also play a role? As a way into this issue, ask students to reflect on their own self-construal. Where do they think it originates—in the socialization of their families, from genetics?
Individualistic vs. collectivistic cultures

Griffin’s point that the ultimate usefulness of the mediation techniques catalogued in Figure 31.1 depends to a large extent upon the cultural assumptions of the participants cannot be overstated. Furthermore, the disclaimer applies to most of the models and strategies featured in undergraduate courses in interpersonal communication, group interaction, persuasion, and so forth. (For example, Ting-Toomey’s claims, as reported by Griffin on page 448, that “collectivists . . . focus on relational-level collaboration, whereas individualists concentrate on solving the task problem in a way that brings closure” and that the term “problem-solving” “has a distinctly impersonal tone” clearly exemplify how the “win/win” style of conflict resolution that many American communication textbooks present as revealed Truth is thoroughly problematized when one considers the consequences of cultural differences.) So often in such courses, the variable of culture is seen as an add-on or afterthought, usually brought in toward the end of the textbook, when in fact it should be seen as foundational, since virtually every assumption we make about effective communication depends upon it. It might be useful to bring in introductory textbooks from communication courses taught on your campus in order to discuss with your students the extent to which assumptions native to individualistic cultures become assumptions about communication in general. It would be particularly useful to focus the investigation on assumptions about conflict and negotiation.

Sample Application Log

Robyn

Although I’m sure I have a very high need for affiliation, I am a classic American who looks out for myself when the chips are down. As much as I hate to admit that, I’ve noticed as of late that it’s really true. I have a really close relationship with my best friend, and I put a lot of time and energy into him. But, try as I might to truly look out for his best interests first, I always end up getting in the way. He sees that I do give a lot, but only where it’s convenient for me to do so. When it really starts infringing on me, my tendency is to do what’s best for me and separate myself from the situation a little bit. Ting-Toomey would say that my face concern is for myself: in conflict I become much more aggressive than cooperative. My face need is negative as I strive for autonomy when I just can’t be bothered anymore. So, putting the two together, I spend time working on face-restoration by trying to give myself freedom and space.

Exercises and Activities

Facework in hypothetical situations

In order to put your students in the proper frame of mind for reading about this theory, we recommend asking them to begin by writing a brief response to the first part of item #4 under Questions to Sharpen Your Focus, which refers to the group assignment situation outlined in the chapter. During class discussion, ask students if their initial responses to the problem exemplify aspects of Ting-Toomey’s theory. Did their approaches to the conflict conform to her predictions? Turning next to the latter part of item #4 under Questions to Sharpen Your Focus, you can bring in the variables of gender, family background, and personal history, which may demonstrate that culture is not the only issue to consider when evaluating...
the nature of facework and its relationship with conflict negotiation. Your discussion of gender may form an intriguing bridge to the next section of the textbook. (See also Essay Question #27, below.)

**Facework in actual situations**

Another exercise for priming your students for this theory is to ask them to begin by writing about a real-life conflict that they have experienced or are currently experiencing. (Essay Question #24 below addresses this issue.) In class, then, have students discuss the facework and modes of conflict management employed in their actual experiences. Here, as with the contrived problem above, the latter part of item #4 under Questions to Sharpen Your Focus may prove valuable to augment your discussion.

**International business**

Depending on your students’ interests and experiences, international business may be a productive application of Ting-Toomey’s theory. Emphasizing specific elements of facework, speculate with your students about potential problems that could arise when representatives of American corporations seek to negotiate business deals with their counterparts in Japan or China. To focus the discussion, ask your students to imagine they are consultants hired by American business executives who know nothing about the negotiations into which they are about to enter. Scenes from the film *The Rising Sun* demonstrate relevant face needs and face concerns.

**Doing culturally sensitive research**

Item #1 in the Questions to Sharpen Your Focus section, which brings up the cultural characteristics of Afghanistan, provides students with an excellent opportunity to play both theorist and researcher. After speculating about the cultural structure of Saudi Arabia (and/or other countries if you wish to choose another country with which your students might be familiar), they need to come up with research strategies to test their assumptions. Strategies chosen should be sensitive to the particulars of the culture in question. If, for example, most of the population of the country in question is comprised of minimally educated laborers, then running tests on university students may not be particularly appropriate.

**Feature film illustrations**

For exploring face negotiation in interpersonal relationships, we highly recommend the Japanese film *Shall We Dance*, the sensitive story of a Japanese businessman’s initiation into the world of ballroom dancing. The film emphasizes the point that in Japan, ballroom dancing itself is an intercultural activity.

When Em Griffin teaches this chapter, he uses the scene from the *Joy Luck Club* we discuss in our treatment of speech codes theory, below, to demonstrate how one gives face and how foreign and unintuitive this concept may be to Westerners. Rich, the Anglo-American boyfriend, simply doesn’t understand the subtleties of Waverly’s mother’s messages, and his efforts to quell her ostensible anxieties about her cooking have the opposite effect of what is intended. The harder he tries, the worse it gets.
Further Resources

- For further discussion of Ting-Toomey’s face-negotiation theory, see:
Sample Examination Questions

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