

JOHN G. OETZEL<sup>1</sup>  
STELLA TING-TOOMEY

## Face Concerns in Interpersonal Conflict

### *A Cross-Cultural Empirical Test of the Face Negotiation Theory*

*This study sought to test the underlying assumption of the face-negotiation theory that face is an explanatory mechanism for culture's influence on conflict behavior. A questionnaire was administered to 768 participants in 4 national cultures (China, Germany, Japan, and the United States) asking them to describe interpersonal conflict. The major findings of this study are as follows: (a) cultural individualism-collectivism had direct and indirect effects on conflict styles, (b) independent self-construal related positively with self-face and interdependent self-construal related positively with other-face, (c) self-face related positively with dominating conflict styles and other-face related positively with avoiding and integrating styles, and (d) face accounted for all of the total variance explained (100% of 19% total explained) in dominating, most of the total variance explained in integrating (70% of 20% total explained), and some of the total variance explained in avoiding (38% of 21% total explained) when considering face concerns, cultural individualism-collectivism, and self-construals.*

**Keywords:** *interpersonal conflict; cross-cultural communication; conflict styles; self-construals; face theory*

The study of cross-cultural conflict is important in a diversified U.S. workforce and an increasingly globalized world, in which conflicts appear to be occurring frequently. *Conflict* is "the perceived and/or actual incompatibility of values, expectations, processes, or outcomes between two or more parties over substantive and/or relational issues" (Ting-Toomey, 1994, p. 360).

A number of investigations on cross-cultural conflict (e.g., Ting-Toomey et al., 1991) utilize the face-negotiation theory. Ting-Toomey's (1988; Ting-

Toomey & Kurogi, 1998) face-negotiation theory argues that face is an explanatory mechanism for different conflict management styles in different cultural groups. *Face* represents an individual's claimed sense of positive image in the context of social interaction. *Conflict management style* refers to general tendencies of patterned responses to conflict in a variety of antagonistic interactive situations (Putnam & Poole, 1987; Sternberg & Dobson, 1987; Ting-Toomey, 1997). The strength of the face-negotiation theory is that it provides an organizing and explanatory framework for conflict behaviors. However, the underlying assumption that face is an explanatory mechanism for conflict behavior has not been tested previously. Prior investigations have not directly measured face but rather have used face post hoc to explain relationships between conflict styles and cultural variables. For example, Oetzel (1998) found that the avoiding-conflict style was associated positively with interdependence and made the assumption that this relationship is due to a strong concern for the other person's face. Thus, the purpose of this study is to test the assumption that face is the explanatory mechanism for the relationship between culture and conflict-management style.

### Face-Negotiation Theory

Ting-Toomey (1988) drew on the work of Goffman (1955) and Brown and Levinson (1987) to develop the face-negotiation theory. The face-negotiation theory provides a sound explanatory framework for explaining differences and similarities in face and facework during conflict. In a nutshell, the face-negotiation theory argues that: (a) people in all cultures try to maintain and negotiate face in all communication situations; (b) the concept of face becomes especially problematic in uncertainty situations (such as embarrassment and conflict situations) when the situated identities of the communicators are called into question; (c) cultural variability, individual-level variables, and situational variables influence cultural members' selection of one set of face concerns over others (such as self-oriented face-saving vs. other-oriented face-saving); and (d) subsequently, face concerns influence the use of various facework and conflict strategies in intergroup and interpersonal encounters. The current version of face-negotiation theory (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998) has 32 propositions. These propositions focus on comparisons of conflict behavior between cultural variables such as individualism-collectivism (1-20) or posit the relationship between individual-level variables (e.g., self-construal) and conflict styles (21-32). These propositions have been tested and largely supported in prior research (e.g., Oetzel et al., 2001; Ting-Toomey et al., 1991). In this study, we test the underlying assumption that face mediates the relationship between cultural- or individual-level

variables and conflict styles. In this section, we review conflict styles and then discuss the explanatory variables, while referring to specific assumptions and propositions of the face-negotiation theory (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998).

### *Conflict Styles*

Conflict styles provide an overall picture of a person's communication orientation toward conflict. Individuals have a predominant conflict style, but it is possible to alter conflict styles in regards to a specific situation (Cupach & Canary, 1997; Wilmot & Hocker, 2001). Thus, conflict style is a combination of traits (e.g., cultural background and personality) and states (e.g., situation).

There are numerous approaches for explaining conflict styles, but the primary approaches are the five-style and three-style models. The five-style model is based on the dual-concern model of concern for own outcomes and concern for other's outcomes (Blake & Mouton, 1964; Pruitt & Rubin, 1986; Rahim, 1983; Ruble & Thomas, 1976; Thomas & Kilmann, 1974). The two dimensions combine for the following five styles of handling interpersonal conflict: integrating (high on both concern for self and other), compromising (moderate on both concern for self and other), dominating (high self concern and low other concern), obliging (low self concern and high other concern), and avoiding (low on both concern for self and other) (Pruitt & Carnevale, 1993; Rahim, 1983).

Proponents of the three-style model explained that these five styles can be reduced to the following three primary conflict styles: (a) control, forcing, or dominating; (b) solution-oriented, issue-oriented, or integrating; and (c) nonconfrontational, smoothing, or avoiding (Putnam & Wilson, 1982). Oetzel, Ting-Toomey, Yokochi, Masumoto, and Takai (2000) demonstrated the existence of three underlying factors for conflict behavior via two methodological procedures. First, through a *Q*-sort technique, they identified the following 13 different types of facework behavior during conflicts with best friends or relative strangers: (a) aggression, (b) apologize, (c) avoid, (d) compromise, (e) consider the other, (f) defend self, (g) express feelings, (h) give in, (i) involve a third party, (j) pretend, (k) private discussion, (l) remain calm, and (m) talk about the problem. Second, Oetzel et al. asked participants to rate the appropriateness and effectiveness of three messages within each of the categories. Factor analysis of these ratings revealed the following three underlying categories: dominating, integrating, and avoiding. Although Oetzel et al. focused on facework specifically and not necessarily conflict styles (some of the categories are consistent with conflict styles), we utilize these three styles given

that a variety of distinct conflict or facework styles (e.g., 5 or 13) can be reduced to three underlying factors.

### *Cultural Individualism-Collectivism*

Individualism-collectivism (I-C) is one of the key cultural variables integrated into the face-negotiation theory. *Individualism* is a social pattern that consists of loosely linked individuals who view themselves as independent of collectives and who give priority to their personal goals over the goals of others (Triandis, 1995). *Collectivism* is a social pattern consisting of closely linked individuals who see themselves as part of one or more collectives (family, coworkers, tribe, nation) and are willing to give priority to the goals of these collectives over their own personal goals (Triandis, 1995). This research project examines four national cultures: China, Germany, Japan, and the United States. Hofstede's (1991, 2001) study of national cultures revealed the following information about these four cultures under study: (a) China (Hong Kong) is classified as collectivistic; (b) Germany is classified as moderately individualistic; (c) Japan is classified as moderately collectivistic; and (d) the United States is classified as individualistic.

Drawing from the face-negotiation theory, Propositions 15 to 17 posit the relationship between cultural I-C and conflict styles. Specifically, members of individualistic cultures tend to use more dominating conflict strategies (15), more substantive, outcome-oriented strategies (i.e., integrating; 17), and fewer avoiding conflict strategies (16) than members of collectivistic cultures (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). Previous research (e.g., Elsayed-Ekhouly & Buda, 1996; Gabrielidis, Stephan, Ybarra, Dos Santos Pearson, & Villareal, 1997; Ohbuchi, Fukushima, & Tedeschi, 1999; Ting-Toomey et al., 1991) demonstrated support for these propositions. For example, Ohbuchi et al. (1999) found that U.S. American students self-reported using direct confrontation of the conflict more and avoiding of the conflict less than Japanese students.

### *Individual-Level: Self-Construal*

The relationship between cultural-level variables and conflict styles is mediated by individual-level factors (Gudykunst et al., 1996). Conflict behavior is learned within the primary socialization process of one's cultural or ethnic group. Individuals learn the norms and scripts for appropriate and effective conflict conduct in their immediate cultural environment. In addition, these tendencies, in turn, also influence individual-level factors such as the way individuals conceive of themselves. Thus, individuals can vary from the predominant cultural framework of a society (e.g., being interdependent in an

individualistic culture). Essentially, cultural values have a direct effect on conflict behaviors and an indirect effect on conflict behaviors that is mediated through individual-level factors (Gudykunst et al., 1996; Kim et al., 1996; Singelis & Brown, 1995).

Self-construal is a key individual factor that focuses on individual variation within and between cultures (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). *Self-construal* is one's self-image and is composed of an independent and an interdependent self. The independent construal of self involves the view that an individual is a unique entity with an individuated repertoire of feelings, cognitions, and motivations. In contrast, the interdependent construal of self involves an emphasis on the importance of relational connectedness (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

Propositions 27 through 30 focus on the relationship between self-construal and conflict style. Specifically, independence is associated positively with dominating (27) and substantive conflict styles (29), whereas interdependence is associated positively with avoiding (28) and relational conflict modes (30) (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). Thus, integrating (both substantive and relational modes) is associated with both self-construals. A recent study supported these links among self-construals and conflict styles. Oetzel (1998) asked 349 Latina(o) Americans and European Americans about their self-construals and conflict styles during a hypothetical work group conflict. He found that dominating styles were associated positively with independence, whereas avoiding, obliging, and compromising styles were associated positively with interdependence. Integrating was associated positively with both self-construals, but more strongly with interdependence.

### *Face Concerns*

Face-negotiation theory emphasizes three face concerns. *Self-face* is the concern for one's own image, *other-face* is the concern for another's image, and *mutual-face* is concern for both parties' images and/or the "image" of the relationship (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). However, the majority of the assumptions and propositions of the current theory focus on self- and other-face. Thus, we focus only on these two loci of face. In this section, we describe how cultural I-C and self-construals relate to face concerns and, consequently, how face concerns relate to conflict styles.

Cultural I-C influences face concerns. Propositions 1 through 6 focus on the differences between members of individualistic and collectivistic cultures in regards to self- and other-face. In sum, members of individualistic cultures have a greater concern for self-face and lesser concern for other-face than members of collectivistic cultures (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). A review of

the extant literature (e.g., Cocroft & Ting-Toomey, 1994; Gao, 1998; Oetzel et al., 2001; Ting-Toomey et al., 1991) supports this summary. For example, Ting-Toomey et al. (1991) studied the face concerns of 965 students in a hypothetical conflict episode involving a student group project across five national cultures: China, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and United States. The United States represented individualism and the other four cultures represented collectivism. The authors found that members of collectivistic cultures (i.e., Chinese, South Korean, and Taiwanese) reported a higher degree of other-face than members of the individualistic culture (U.S. Americans), whereas U.S. Americans had a higher degree of self-face than the South Koreans. The results for the Japanese sample were contrary to expectations, but research since that study demonstrated that Japanese tend to have low self-face and high other-face relative to other national cultures (Cocroft & Ting-Toomey, 1994; Oetzel et al., 2001).

Similarly, self-construals influence face concerns. The revised face-negotiation theory does not have specific propositions focusing on these relationships, but we can extrapolate that a similar relationship for self-construal and face concerns to that of cultural I-C and face concerns. Specifically, independence is associated positively with self-face, whereas interdependence is associated positively with other-face. A recent study supports this assumption. Oetzel et al. (2003) examined the face concerns in 449 participants in a recalled conflict with a parent or sibling in Germany, Japan, Mexico, and the United States. The authors found that the independent self-construal correlated positively with self-face and interdependent self-construal positively correlated with other-face.

Face concerns, in turn, influence conflict styles. Propositions 23 through 26 describe these relationships. Self-face is associated positively with dominating conflict styles (23), whereas other-face is associated positively with avoiding conflict styles (24). Furthermore, integrating (substantive and relational conflict modes) are associated positively with both self- (25) and other-face (26) (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). Two studies largely support these propositions. Ting-Toomey et al.'s (1991) study of students from China, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and the United States examined the relationships among face concerns and conflict styles. The authors found a positive relationship between self-face and dominating conflict styles and positive relationships between other-face and avoiding, obliging, integrating, and compromising conflict styles. Oetzel, Myers, Meares, and Lara (in press) examined self-reported conflict between managers and subordinates of 184 organizational members in the United States. They found that self-face concern was associated positively with dominating styles and other-face concern was associated positively with integrating, obliging, and compromising styles

(contradicting Proposition 25, but supporting the other propositions). Specifically, Proposition 25 posits that there should be a positive association between self-face concern and integrating.

### *Hypotheses*

The underlying assumption of the face-negotiation theory is that face is the explanatory mechanism between cultural- and individual-level variables and conflict styles. Ting-Toomey and Oetzel (2001) further described the causal paths of the face-negotiation theory. They explained that cultural socialization provides the foundation for individual orientations (i.e., self-construals) and conflict behavior. Cultural orientations influence the degree of people's self-construals; self-construals then influence the level of face concerns that individuals have in a conflict situation. Finally, these face concerns then impact our conflict behavior. Cultural socialization also directly impacts conflict behavior because it is in our culture that we learn appropriate and effective conflict behavior. Thus, culture has a direct effect and a mediated effect on conflict behavior. Based on the review of literature, we test the model in Figure 1 as providing an adequate representation of the relationships among the variables. This model summarizes the various propositions in the face-negotiation theory and based on this summary, we posit the following hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 1:* Cultural I-C has a direct path, and a mediated path through self-construal and face concerns, to conflict styles.

*Hypothesis 2:* Independent self-construal is associated positively with self-face, whereas interdependent self-construal is associated positively with other-face.

*Hypothesis 3:* Self-face is associated positively with dominating conflict styles, whereas other-face is associated positively with avoiding and integrating conflict styles.

*Hypothesis 4:* Face concerns mediate the relationship between cultural I-C and conflict styles.

### **Methods**

#### *Participants*

The sample included 768 participants and was drawn from another study on cross-cultural conflict (Oetzel et al., 2001). That previous study involved a cross-cultural comparison of the four national cultures, whereas this study tests the face-negotiation theory panculturally. There were 450 females, 300

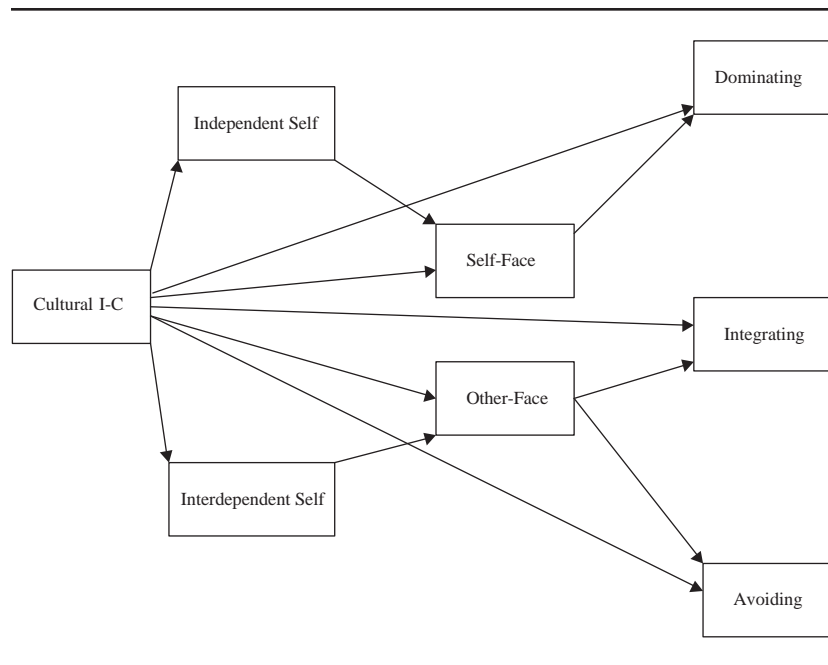


Figure 1. Face-Negotiation Model

males, and 18 unidentified (mean age = 21.54,  $SD = 3.76$ ). The respondents were 208 students from a medium-sized engineering university in China, 169 students from a small technical university in Germany, 206 students from a large university in Japan, and 185 students from a large university in the southwestern United States. There were 132 females and 75 males (mean age = 19.82,  $SD = 1.12$ ) in the Chinese sample, 93 females and 74 males (mean age = 23.50,  $SD = 2.95$ ) in the German sample, 128 females and 67 males (mean age = 19.96,  $SD = 1.97$ ) in the Japanese sample, and 116 females and 65 males (mean age = 23.55,  $SD = 5.58$ ) in the U.S. sample. The ethnic backgrounds in the U.S. sample included 86 European Americans, 45 Latin Americans, 18 of mixed ancestry, 17 Asian Americans, 5 Native Americans, and 3 African Americans.

### *Instrument*

A questionnaire format was utilized to investigate the objective of this study. The respondents were asked to recall a conflict with a person of the same



gender and same ethnic/cultural group. As part of the larger study, the participants were asked to recall people of varying status and relational closeness. For status, participants were asked to recall a conflict with “someone who is equal status or higher status.” For relational closeness, the respondents were asked to recall a conflict with “someone with whom you are very close or not very close.” The larger study indicated that these situational characteristics had very little impact on conflict behavior. For this reason, the data were collapsed across the situational variables.

The independent (or mediating) variables were cultural I-C, self-construal, and face concerns. National culture was measured with a single item (i.e., “What is your country of permanent residence?”) and categorized into individualism (Germany and United States) or collectivism (China or Japan). We measured self-construal with 20 items from a previously validated 29-item instrument of self-construal (Gudykunst et al., 1996). Ten items measured independent self-construal and 10 items measured interdependent self-construal. The items were reworded to apply specifically to the recalled conflict situation. Nine items (e.g., “I act as fellow group members prefer I act” and “I try to abide by customs and conventions at work”) were dropped from the original scale because of the difficulty in rewriting the items to be relevant to a recalled interpersonal conflict. The validity of the self-construal scales is based on findings that the independence items correlate with individualistic values, whereas the interdependence items correlate with collectivistic values. These findings provided validity for the scales in that Gudykunst et al. hypothesized that independence is more predominant and interdependence is less predominant in individualistic cultures than collectivistic cultures.

We measured face concerns with 34 items (Oetzel et al., 2001). The results of a principal components factor analysis on the current data found 11 items measuring other-face, 7 items measuring self-face, and 4 items measuring mutual-face. These factors had high internal consistency and had strong face and content validity as they were created based on a series of open-ended questions about facework during conflict.

The dependent variables were avoiding, integrating, and dominating conflict styles.<sup>2</sup> We used 23 items from previous scales to measure these variables (e.g., Rahim, 1983; Ting-Toomey et al., 2000).<sup>3</sup> These items have been shown to be internally consistent (Ting-Toomey et al., 2000) and have construct and criterion validity (Rahim, 1983). All of the items were measured with a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 5 (*strongly agree*) to 1 (*strongly disagree*).

### *Procedures*

The questionnaire asked the participants to recall a recent conflict and respond to a series of items about the conflict. Conflict was defined for the participants as any “intense disagreement between two parties that involves incompatible goals, needs, or viewpoints.” The questionnaire was laid out in the following format: (a) self-construal items, (b) face concern items, (c) conflict behavior items, and (d) demographics.

We wrote the questionnaire in English and then translated and backtranslated it into Chinese, Japanese, and German to ensure conceptual equivalence. All participants completed the questionnaire in their native language. Participants were recruited via undergraduate courses, and many were given extra credit for participating. The questionnaire was self-administered and required approximately 30 minutes to complete. Participants completed the questionnaire on their own time and returned it to the researchers or assistants.

### **Results**

#### *Preliminary Data Analysis: Confirmatory Factor Analysis*

There is potential overlap in the items for the variables (e.g., independent self-construal, self-face, and dominating). To ensure distinct measures of the concepts, we completed a confirmatory factor analysis of the self-construal, face concern, and conflict style items. We randomly split the data set in half to complete analyses with the measurement model (first half of the data set) and then the latent/structural model (second half of the data set) because modifications were made to the measurement model (Maruyama, 1998). The AMOS version 3.62 structural equation modeling package (Arbuckle, 1997) with maximum likelihood estimation of the covariances of the items was utilized to test the model. We utilized several criteria to determine the inclusion of the items and model fit. First, items had to have a factor loading of .40. Second, items had to be unidimensional demonstrated by the tests of internal consistency and parallelism (Hunter & Gerbing, 1982). Internal consistency requires that the items of a scale have a similar statistical relationship to the primary factor. Parallelism requires that the items of a scale have a similar statistical relationship to the other factors. Because AMOS does not directly test for internal consistency or parallelism, we removed items from the model that the modification option of AMOS suggested had a direct path to another factor (e.g., a path was suggested for an other-face item to the independent self-construal factor to improve model fit). Essentially, this procedure

ensured that an item only loads on one factor. Third, the items had to have homogeneous content. Fourth, the items needed to have adequate reliability (Cronbach's alpha).

After removing items from the model because of the first two criteria, the final model confirmed seven of the original factors (all but mutual-face),  $\chi^2(338, N = 386) = 567.67, p < .001$ , Incremental Fit Index = .93, Comparative Fit Index = .93, Goodness-of-Fit Index = .90. Because the chi-square test statistic and  $p$  value is biased by sample size and model size (see Marsh & Hocevar, 1985; Maruyama, 1998), the chi-square-to-degrees-of-freedom ratio is considered a more meaningful summary than chi-square alone (Marsh & Hocevar, 1985). The expected ratio of chi-square to degrees of freedom is 1, and the smaller the ratio, the better the fit. Researchers suggest that a ratio as high as 3 to 1 indicates good fit (Kline, 1998). The ratio in the current model is 1.68, suggesting an adequate fit. The model fit indices are also at or above the recommended .90 (Hoyle & Panter, 1995). In addition, the 7-factor model was vastly superior to a 1-factor solution,  $\chi^2(350, N = 386) = 2,149.95, p < .001$ , IFI = .42, CFI = .41, GFI = .67, or a 2-factor solution (independence/self-face/dominating and interdependence/other-face/avoiding/integrating),  $\chi^2(338, N = 386) = 1,592.28, p < .001$ , IFI = .58, CFI = .58, GFI = .74. Finally, the items demonstrate homogeneous item content, and the reliability is adequate to good. The appendix displays the items and factor loadings and Table 1 displays the Cronbach's alphas across the national cultures and the overall sample.<sup>4</sup>

### *Hypotheses 1 Through 3: Structural Equation Model*

The items for each variable were summed and averaged. The analysis of the model in Figure 1 involved the latent variable model. Table 2 displays the correlation matrix, means, and standard deviations for each variable. AMOS was utilized to test the model. The analysis of the model in Figure 1 revealed a good fit to the data,  $\chi^2(366, N = 382) = 641.73, p < .001$ , IFI = .91, CFI = .91, GFI = .90. The model fit indices are at or above the recommended .90, and the chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio is 1.75. Figure 2 displays the standardized parameter estimates of this model, whereas the appendix displays the standardized parameter estimates for the items to the latent variables.

This model was compared to two other models to help determine adequacy of fit. The first comparison model reversed the paths for self-construal and face concerns so that cultural I-C led to face concerns, which led to self-construal, which led to conflict styles. The resulting model was a slightly poorer fit than hypothesized model,  $\chi^2(366, N = 386) = 701.92, p < .001$ , IFI = .90, CFI = .89, GFI = .88. The second comparison model eliminated the paths

Table 1  
Cronbach's Alphas for Variables in Each Culture

Variable	United States	Japan	Germany	China	Overall
Independence	.64	.56	.41	.73	.65
Interdependence	.63	.61	.63	.53	.61
Self-face	.76	.75	.78	.67	.78
Other-face	.86	.83	.79	.64	.80
Avoiding	.84	.85	.78	.69	.84
Dominating	.72	.81	.65	.64	.78
Integrating	.81	.78	.84	.63	.75

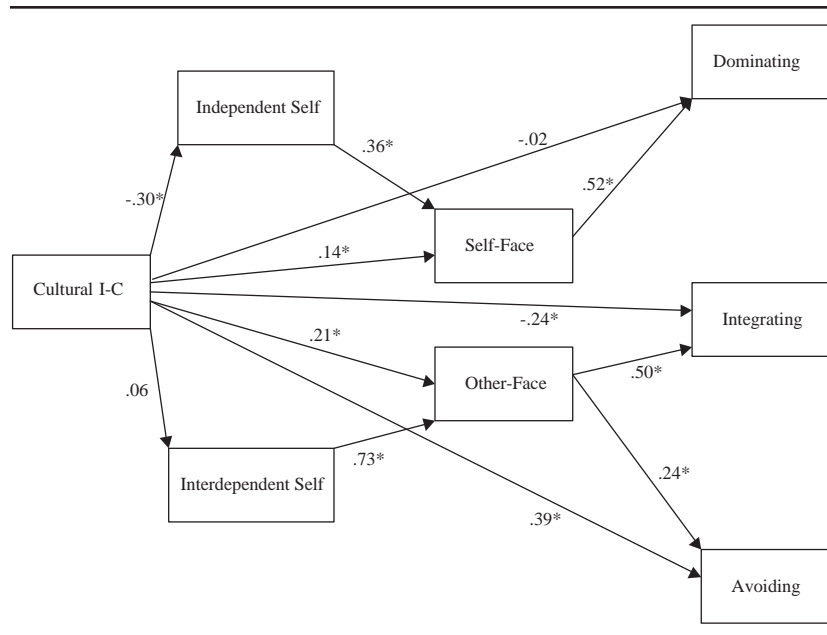
Table 2  
Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations of Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Independent	1.00							
2. Interdependent	-.08*	1.00						
3. Other-face	-.05	.57**	1.00					
4. Self-face	.23**	-.02	.11**	1.00				
5. Avoiding	-.11**	.12**	.27**	.10**	1.00			
6. Dominating	.14**	-.14**	-.12**	.40**	-.01	1.00		
7. Integrating	.07	.32**	.38**	.07	.02	-.04	1.00	
8. Cultural individualism-collectivism	-.27**	.06	.19**	.06	.41**	.01	-.14**	1.00
<i>M</i>	4.01	3.20	3.30	3.61	2.63	3.06	3.08	—
<i>SD</i>	0.73	0.70	0.72	0.82	1.06	0.93	0.85	—

\**p* < .05. \*\**p* < .01.

from self-construals to face concerns, and from face concerns to conflict styles, and added paths from self-construals to conflict styles. This model is consistent with Griffin's (2000) suggestion that the face-negotiation model would be more parsimonious without face concerns. The resulting model was a poorer fit than the hypothesized model,  $\chi^2(368, N = 386) = 856.07, p < .001$ , IFI = .84, CFI = .84, GFI = .87. As a result of these analyses, the hypothesized model was accepted as providing a good fit to the data.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that cultural I-C would have direct and mediated paths to conflict styles. Five of the seven direct paths (independence, self-face, other-face, integrating, and avoiding) were significant. Table 3 displays the means and standard deviations for these relationships. In addition, the mediated paths via self-construal and face concerns were significant. Thus, the first hypothesis was supported.



**Figure 2. Results of the SEM Testing of the Face-Negotiation Model**  
 Note. Standardized regression weights; \* $p < .05$ .

Hypothesis 2 posited that independent self-construal is associated positively with self-face, whereas interdependent self-construal is associated positively with other-face. This hypothesis was supported, as both paths were statistically significant and in the predicted direction.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that self-face is associated positively with dominating conflict styles, whereas other-face is associated positively with avoiding and integrating conflict styles. This hypothesis was supported, as all three paths were statistically significant and in the predicted direction.

*Hypothesis 4: Mediated Regression Analysis*

Hypothesis 4 proffered that face concerns mediate the relationship between cultural I-C and conflict styles. The SEM analysis demonstrates the model provides a fit to the data but does not directly test this hypothesis. A series of hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to test this hypothesis. For each of the conflict styles, the following five regression models were conducted: (Model 1) cultural I-C only, (Model 2) self-construals only, (Model 3) face concerns only, (Model 4) self-construals and face concerns, and (Model 5) cultural I-C, self-construals, and face concerns. The beta coefficients for each

Table 3  
*Means and Standard Deviations of Variables by Individualistic and Collectivistic Cultures*

Variable	Individualistic Cultures		Collectivistic Cultures	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Self-construal				
Independent	4.22	0.62	3.83	.77
Interdependent	3.15	0.76	3.23	.64
Face concerns				
Other	3.15	0.74	3.43	.67
Self	3.55	0.79	3.65	.84
Conflict styles				
Avoiding	2.16	1.02	3.03	.92
Dominating	3.05	0.92	3.07	.94
Integrating	3.22	0.90	2.97	.78

of these models are listed in Table 4. The models were compared to test the degree to which face mediated the relationship between cultural I-C and conflict styles and self-construals and conflicts. Table 5 includes the  $R^2$  change and  $F$  change statistics for each of these comparisons.

The critical comparisons in Table 5 are that between Model 3 and Model 4 (face vs. self-construal) and between Model 3 and Model 5 (face vs. self-construal and cultural I-C). The other comparisons are displayed to help show the impact of cultural I-C and self-construals relative to the other factors. In the comparison of Models 3 and 4, face concerns accounted for 80% of the total variance explained in avoiding (8% explained by face concerns, 10% explained by face concerns and self-construals), 100% of the total variance explained in dominating (19% explained by face concerns, 19% explained by face concerns and self-construals), and 88% of the total variance explained in integrating (14% explained by face concerns, 16% explained by face concerns and self-construals). In the comparison of Models 3 and 5, face concerns accounted for 38% of the total variance explained in avoiding (8% explained by face concerns, 21% explained by face concerns, self-construals, and cultural I-C), 100% of the total variance explained in dominating (19% explained by face concerns, 19% explained by face concerns, self-construals, and cultural I-C), and 70% of the total variance explained in integrating (14% explained by face concerns, 20% explained by face concerns and self-construals). Thus, Hypothesis 4 is supported for dominating and partially supported for integrating and avoiding. All of the variance in the dominating, most of the variance in integrating, and some of the variance in avoiding is explained by face concerns.

Table 4  
*Betas for Independent Variables in Each Regression Equation*

Model/Variable	Avoiding	Dominating	Integrating
Model 1			
Cultural individualism-collectivism	.41**	.01	-.14**
Model 2			
Independence	-.10**	.13**	.09*
Interdependence	.12**	-.13**	.32**
Model 3			
Self-face	.07*	.42**	.03
Other-face	.27**	-.17**	.37**
Model 4			
Independence	-.12**	.04	.09*
Interdependence	-.05	-.05	.16**
Self-face	.10**	.40**	.02
Other-face	.28**	-.13**	.28**
Model 5			
Independence	-.02	.04	.03
Interdependence	-.01	-.05	.14**
Self-face	.06	.40**	.04
Other-face	.21**	-.14**	.33**
Cultural individualism-collectivism	.36**	.03	-.21**

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to test the underlying assumption of the face-negotiation theory that face is an explanatory mechanism for culture's influence on conflict behavior. The major findings of this study are as follows: (a) cultural individualism-collectivism had direct effects on conflict styles, as well as mediated effects through self-construal and face concerns; (b) independent self-construal was associated positively with self-face concern and interdependent self-construal was associated positively with other-face concern; (c) self-face concern was associated positively with dominating conflict styles and other-face concern was associated positively with avoiding and integrating conflict styles; and (d) face concerns accounted for all of the total variance explained (100% of 19% total explained) in dominating, most of the total variance explained in integrating (70% of 20% total explained), and some of the total variance explained in avoiding (38% of 21% total explained) when considering face concerns, cultural I-C, and self-construals. In this section, we discuss the implications and limitations of the study.

Table 5  
*Comparison of R and F Change Statistics Between Regression Models*

Model Comparison	df	Avoiding		Dominating		Integrating	
		R <sup>2</sup> Δ	F Δ	R <sup>2</sup> Δ	F Δ	R <sup>2</sup> Δ	F Δ
Model 1 versus Model 5	1,766	.17	153.58**	.00	.10	.02	16.20**
Model 2 versus Model 5	2,765	.03	9.74**	.04	14.30**	.11	46.70**
Model 3 versus Model 5	2,765	.08	33.27**	.19	88.00**	.14	62.85**
Model 4 versus Model 5	2,763	.07	29.37**	.15	72.67**	.06	25.70**
Model 2 versus Model 4	2,765	.03	9.74**	.04	14.30**	.11	46.70**
Model 3 versus Model 4	2,765	.08	33.27**	.19	88.00**	.14	62.85**
Model 1 versus Model 4	1,766	.17	153.58**	.00	1.53	.02	10.93**

\*\* $p < .01$ .



*Implications for Face-Negotiation Theory*

The findings empirically validated the face-negotiation theory (Ting-Toomey, 1988; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). The findings lend support for most of the relationships among cultural I-C, self-construals, face, and conflict styles posited by this theory. However, they also help to illuminate the relationships among the propositions. In this section, we review the support for the specific propositions and underlying premise of the theory and suggest revisions to the theory.

Although the majority of the propositions in the theory were largely supported, some revisions also appear warranted. Propositions 15 through 17 and 27 through 30 focus on the relationship between cultural I-C or self-construals and conflict styles. The results indicate that cultural I-C has a direct effect on avoiding and integrating conflict styles but not dominating conflict styles. Specifically, members of collectivistic cultures used more avoiding and less integrating than members of individualistic cultures. Self-construals did not have a direct effect on conflict styles but rather had an indirect effect mediated through face concerns. Thus, Propositions 27 through 30 may need to be revised to reflect this mediating relationship.

Propositions 1 through 6 describe the relationships between cultural I-C and face concerns. The data illustrate that members of collectivistic cultures have higher other- and self-face concerns than members of individualistic cultures. The difference in self-face was slight but may be due to the strong emphasis on face and maintaining face (for all parties) in Chinese and Japanese cultures (Gao, 1998; Morisaki & Gudykunst, 1994). It is important for future research to determine whether this finding about self-face is an artifact of this study given the tendency of prior research to find that members of individualistic cultures have higher self-face concerns than members of collectivistic cultures (Cocroft & Ting-Toomey, 1994; Ting-Toomey et al., 1991).

Ting-Toomey and Kurogi (1998) do not provide propositions for the relationships among self-construals and face concerns. The findings of this study suggest that independence is associated positively with self-face, whereas interdependence is associated positively with other-face and negatively with self-face. These findings are consistent with prior studies (e.g., Ting-Toomey et al., 1991) but also demonstrate that the relationship between self-construal and face concerns is part of the larger face-negotiation model. Propositions about the self-construal/face concern relationships should be provided in future revisions.

Propositions 23 through 26 posit the relationships among face concerns and conflict. The current findings demonstrate that self-face is associated

positively with dominating conflict styles, whereas other-face is associated positively with avoiding and integrating styles. These findings support all of these propositions except number 25. Proposition 25 predicts a positive relationship between self-face and substantive conflict modes (i.e., integrating conflict style), but this relationship was not supported. It appears that integrating conflict style is the result of other-face concern and interdependence (Oetzel, 1998) rather than self-face. However, we did not attempt to distinguish between the relational and substantive components of the integrating style or in the types of the conflict that were addressed.

Of particular significance is the clear evidence that face concerns are mediating variables between cultural I-C/self-construal and conflict styles. The mediated regression analyses demonstrated that face concerns explain all (dominating), most (integrating), or some (avoiding) of the total variance explained by face concerns, cultural I-C, and self-construal. This evidence is important as previous scholars (Griffin, 2000; West & Turner, 2000) have raised questions about the importance of face concerns for the explanatory model. For example, Griffin (2000) suggested that the parsimony of the model may be improved by eliminating face concerns if they were not demonstrated to be necessary (i.e., self-construal and cultural I-C adequately explain conflict behavior). Future revisions of the face-negotiation theory should include propositions about the mediating relationship of face concerns for cultural I-C/self-construals and conflict styles. This mediating relationship is captured in the core assumptions of the theory (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998) but not specifically addressed in the propositions. Furthermore, the findings suggest a more parsimonious list of propositions regarding conflict styles than is currently provided.

One final implication for face-negotiation theory may be the need to examine within-culture differences for conflict models other than the three-style model. In this study, we tested the model panculturally rather than examining within-culture differences (e.g., United States vs. Germany). Tinsley (1998) provided an alternative conflict model for investigating conflict resolution in Japan, Germany, and the United States. She found that Japanese preferred a “deferring to status power” model more than other two cultures, Germans preferred an “applying regulations” model more than the other two cultures, and U.S. Americans preferred an “integrating interests” model more than the other two cultures. These models are distinct from conflict styles with the exception of the integrating interests model, which is consistent with the integrating conflict style. Her findings demonstrate that these three national cultures have different approaches to conflict, which we also illustrated in the larger study (Oetzel et al., 2001). Tinsley’s research suggests

that face-negotiation theory can be developed to include conflict models other than the three-style model and within culture differences.

### *Implications for Practice and Research*

On a more practical level, understanding that face concerns are mediating variables between cultural I-C/self-construal and conflict styles redirect our attention to the important role of face-identity management during a conflict negotiation process. As intercultural teachers or trainers, we can train our students to be more attuned to face-identity respect and other-face issues in the conflict dialogue process. Although cultural group membership and self-construal features take longer time to change, face concerns are fundamentally communication phenomena that can be learned and displayed in a mindful manner (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001). The findings of the study, for example, demonstrate that the display of other-face concern (e.g., maintaining the poise or pride of the other person, being sensitive to the other person's self-worth) can lead to a collaborative, win-win integrative approach or an avoiding approach. In contrast, individuals who are more concerned with maintaining self-pride or self-image during a conflict episode would devote effort into defending their conflict position to the neglect of other-face validation issue.

In addition to the implications for face-negotiation theory, some of the findings of this study contradict findings of previous research particularly for collectivistic cultures (e.g., Gudykunst et al., 1996; Kim et al., 1996; Ting-Toomey et al., 1991). The patterns of means displayed in Table 3 are consistent with prior research on individualistic cultures: independence was greater than interdependence, self-face was greater than other-face, and integrating and dominating styles were greater than avoiding styles. However, for collectivistic cultures, these patterns were opposite those found and posited in prior research: interdependence was less than independence, other-face was less than self-face, and dominating style was about the same as integrating and avoiding styles. Thus, both individualistic and collectivistic samples had more independence and self-face tendencies than interdependence and other-face tendencies. One possible explanation for these contradictory findings is that college students may not be the best representatives for collectivistic cultures. For example, the sample in China was collected from an engineering university. Future research is needed to better understand whether the hypothesized within cultural differences of collectivistic cultures are supported when samples include cultural members other than college students. Despite these contradictory findings, the patterned relationships among cultural I-C, self-construals, face concerns, and conflict

styles did support the majority of propositions of the face-negotiation theory as we noted in the previous section.

A final research implication of this study is the operational measurement of face. The scales for self- and other-face capture the dynamic variety of concepts associated with face such as credibility, embarrassment, shame, poise, dignity, and relational harmony. These scales demonstrated strong reliabilities and distinct measurement from other similar concepts (i.e., self-construals) and thus are useful for future researchers interested in investigating face concerns.

### *Limitations, Future Directions, and Conclusions*

Although the measures used in this study are beneficial for intercultural research from an etic perspective, recent research helps to demonstrate a concern with etic measurements that may also apply to this study (Cai & Fink, 2002). Cai and Fink investigated the assumption of the validity of the dual-concern model (i.e., self- and other-concern) and the assumption that individualists and collectivists interpret conflict styles in a similar manner. They found that the five conflict styles of the dual-concern model were subsumed under four types, but that the items measuring the styles could not be generated from the dual-concern model. Cai and Fink also found that individualists and collectivists interpret the meaning of four of the conflict styles (except dominating) differently. We did not investigate the assumption of equivalent meaning and instead used derived etic scales. An indication that participants in our sample did not interpret the scales similarly is found in low reliabilities in independence (Germany and Japan) and interdependence (China). Further research will be needed to investigate the degree to which these scales have similar meanings across cultures and the applicability of the dual concern model.

The structural equation model demonstrated that the hypothesized model provided a good fit to the data. This evidence supports the importance of face concerns for the face-negotiation model. One caveat about the structural model needs to be offered. Often, a structural model posits causal relationships, and this is the case for the face-negotiation theory. The model explains that cultural I-C impacts individuals' self-construals. The self-construals result in specific face concerns, which ultimately impact conflict styles. However, the data collected in this study were cross-sectional. Thus, it is impossible to determine if the variables are causally related or simply associated. Future research using a different design will be necessary to test the causal relationships of the face-negotiation theory.

There are two additional limitations about the present study. First, this study relied on self-report responses of participants. The nature of the study as a cross-cultural investigation into national culture makes it difficult to employ methods other than self-report measures. It is important to corroborate the current findings with studies of actual facework discourse and non-verbal facework emotions. Relatedly, this study also utilized a recalled conflict situation. As a result, the findings relate to the perception of a past event and may not be actually what happened in the actual conflict situation. However, the use of a recalled situation has certain strengths in addition to these weaknesses. Specifically, if people recall a conflict, they have spent some time to make sense of the interaction. During this sense making, they would understand their concerns and how they reacted as a result of these concerns. Thus, it is likely that the relationships among the variables are consistent with an actual situation, but future research is needed to further substantiate the findings.

In sum, this study provides a further step in understanding the complex nature of face and conflict behavior. The findings provide supportive evidence of the face-negotiation theory, especially that face concerns provide a mediating link between cultural values and conflict behavior. These findings are particularly significant given the relatively large sample size across four national cultures. Face-negotiation theory is a popular theoretical framework for research and practice, and this test of the theory further substantiates the usefulness of the theory. Despite this support, future research is needed to better understand how face is negotiated in cross-cultural and intercultural conflicts to create more harmonious multicultural relationships.

*Appendix*  
*Items and Primary Factor Loadings for Each Scale*

Item	Factor Loading
Independent	
3. It was important for me to be able to act as a free and independent person.	.53
5. I preferred to be self-reliant rather than depend on others.	.57
13. I tried not to depend on others.	.72
Interdependent	
4. I respected the decisions made by the other person.	.51
6. I was sensitive to the wishes of the other person.	.47
11. My relationship with the other person is more important than winning the conflict.	.52
15. My satisfaction would depend on the satisfaction of the other person.	.45
18. I sacrificed my self-interest for the benefits of our relationship.	.55

Other-face	
8. I was concerned with maintaining the poise of the other person.	.65
9. Maintaining humbleness to preserve the relationship was important to me.	.65
11. Helping to maintain the other person's pride was important to me.	.73
20. Maintaining peace in our interaction was important to me.	.51
21. I tried to be sensitive to the other person's self-worth.	.61
30. I was concerned with helping the other person to maintain his/her credibility.	.62
Self-face	
10. I was concerned with not bringing shame to myself.	.64
12. I was concerned with protecting my self-image.	.62
32. I was concerned with not appearing weak in front of the other person.	.64
34. I was concerned with protecting my personal pride.	.86
Avoiding	
51. I tried to ignore the conflict and behaved as if nothing happened.	.66
63. I tried to pretend that the conflict didn't happen.	.85
76. I pretended as if the conflict didn't exist.	.83
Dominating	
55. I tried to persuade the other person that my way was the best way.	.65
81. I dominated the argument until the other person understood my position.	.76
82. I insisted my position be accepted during the conflict.	.78
Integrating	
15. I tried to meet the other person halfway.	.62
20. I tried to use "give and take" so that a compromise could be made.	.64
28. I proposed a middle ground for breaking the deadlock.	.64
59. I tried to find a middle course to resolve the situation.	.79

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## Notes

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2. In the larger study (Oetzel et al., 2001), we had 11 categories of facework. *Facework* refers to the communicative strategies one uses to enact self-face and to uphold, support, or challenge another person's face (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). In that study, we argued that facework is a larger classification of conflict behavior that includes conflict style. In this study, we isolated only those items that focused on avoiding, dominating, and integrating conflict styles.

3. Rahim (2001) argued that his instrument measures five conflict styles rather than three as we proposed in this study. We used only a handful of items from his instrument (9 of 28) and only 2 of his items were included in the final scales (20 and 28).

We do want to clearly note, however, that we used his scale in a different manner than he intended.

4. There were fewer items found for each scale in this study than those in the larger study. We calculated the correlations between the scales in the current and larger study and found an average correlation of .90 overall, .92 United States, .92 Japan, .89 Germany, and .88 China. Thus, there is a very strong correspondence between the scales in this study and those in the larger study.

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**John G. Oetzel** (Ph.D., University of Iowa, 1995) is an associate professor in the Department of Communication and Journalism at the University of New Mexico. His research interests focus on the impact of culture on conflict

*communication in work groups, organizations, and health settings. His work has appeared in journals such as Human Communication Research, Communication Monographs, and the International Journal of Intercultural Relations. He is coauthor (with Stella Ting-Toomey) of Managing Intercultural Conflict Effectively (Sage, 2001) and is coediting (with Stella Ting-Toomey) The Sage Handbook of Conflict Communication: Integrating Theory, Research, and Practice (forthcoming).*

***Stella Ting-Toomey*** (Ph.D., University of Washington, 1981) is a professor of Speech Communication at California State University, Fullerton. Her research interests focus on fine-tuning the conflict face-negotiation theory and testing the impact of ethnic identity on conflict styles. She also holds a keen interest in linking intercultural theories with training practice. Her work has appeared in the International Journal of Intercultural Relations, Human Communication Research, and Communication Monographs, among others. She is the author and editor of 13 books, most recently *Managing Intercultural Conflict Effectively* (with John Oetzel), *Communicating Effectively with the Chinese* (with Ge Gao), and *Communicating Across Cultures*.