

8-2015

# The Representation of the Individualism-Collectivism Cultural Value Dimension In Film Portrayals of Intercultural Communication

Courtney J. McMullan

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The University of Southern Mississippi

THE REPRESENTATION OF THE INDIVIDUALISM-COLLECTIVISM CULTURAL  
VALUE DIMENSION IN FILM PORTRAYALS OF INTERCULTURAL  
COMMUNICATION

by

Courtney McMullan

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Honors College of  
The University of Southern Mississippi  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Bachelor of Arts  
in the Department of Communication Studies

August 2015



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## Abstract

Globalization and modernization have changed the world in which we live, bringing intercultural communication to the forefront in our daily lives. Cultural values vary around the world, and these values impact the way people communicate with one another. This study focused on the cultural value of individualism-collectivism and how it impacts intercultural, interpersonal communication and the way it is presented in film. The aim of this study was to conduct quantitative analyses of data gathered from intercultural films to identify the way in which nations' individualism-collectivism tendencies are displayed in film in comparison to a cultural value dimension scale and in relation to intercultural conflict and miscommunication. A sample was created of nations and films by using a country comparison scale of individualism-collectivism and an intercultural film database. The data were analyzed quantitatively. Ultimately, films were shown to portray nations in alignment with their cultural value dimension of individualism-collectivism, and interpersonal, intercultural interactions were shown to most often highlight the differing views on the value dimension. As a result, this study contributes to the field of intercultural communication by contributing to the way we understand how films portray cultures and how individualism-collectivism plays a role in intercultural interactions.

**Key Terms:** intercultural communication, cultural value dimensions, individualism-collectivism, intercultural film studies

## Dedication

Mom, Dad, and Matthew:

Thank you for your constant encouragement. I could not have made it nearly this far without your love, optimism, and inspiration.

Stephen, Katherine, Josh, Amy, Craig, and the rest of my Honors College classmates:

Your unwavering support, inspiring intelligence, and beautiful humor have made the past four years the best possible experience. Thanks for being you.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to take a moment to thank my thesis advisor, Dr. Charles Tardy, for his diligent efforts in directing and mentoring me during the process of completing this study. This piece of work was only possible due to his patience, kindness, and guidance. Thank you for everything.

Additionally, I would also like to pay special thanks to the faculty of the Department of Communication Studies and The Honors College. During my four years at The University of Southern Mississippi, I was blessed with their encouragement, guidance, and wisdom. I will forever be grateful.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Our world continues to change and develop constantly. Globalization is expanding, integrating and enhancing our lives. Travel has become much more of the norm in people's lives, making international trade and business reach an all-time high and immigration become a very pressing topic. With these developments comes the necessity for effective intercultural communication. Intercultural conversations and interactions play a large role in our lives, whether we realize it or not. Effectively being able to communicate across cultural boundaries is a valuable trait in the modern world, yet many overlook its importance.

An integral part of communication lies in its relationship with culture. Culture clearly impacts and defines how behaviors take place in interpersonal interactions, both verbally and nonverbally. A culture's norms cause people accustomed to its values to communicate uniquely with one another and with people from another culture.

Observation of intercultural, interpersonal behavior is difficult to produce, and alternatives other than direct social observation can be useful resources. Recreating interpersonal interactions for study can alter the communication that takes place. Outside interference affects the interaction depending on the situation. Natural observation of intercultural interpersonal interaction can also present a problem due to the specific nature of the situation being studied. Films, however, help eliminate some of these issues while providing unique windows into cultures and personal lives that, though unnatural through scripting, allow observation to be conducted. The cultures of the participants are easy to determine and clear, and the interpersonal interactions that take place are easy to

observe. Films and cameras can get up-close and personal with interpersonal interactions in a way that research observation often cannot.

There are various aspects of culture that influence or dictate the way individuals in each culture communicate. The analysis of intercultural films provided in this study provides insight to important aspects of communication. Various frameworks, theories, and previous studies regarding cultural values, intercultural/cross-cultural communication, verbal and nonverbal behavior, conflict styles, and individualism-collectivism tendencies are summarized and examined in the review of existing literature in order to frame their research histories. Each individual subject has been often investigated in distant and recent past, but few studies thoroughly integrate the ideas connected with intercultural communication through film. This study will attempt to incorporate the various aspects of specific cultural values' influence on behavior in intercultural interactions by means of the observation and examination of film.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Intercultural Competence Importance

Samovar & Porter (2003) stated the following:

“Our mobility, increased contact among cultures, a global marketplace, and the emergence of multicultural organizations and workforces require the development of communication skills and abilities that are appropriate to a multicultural society and to life in a global village” (p. 1).

Modern globalization has entirely altered the amount of exposure we have to intercultural interaction. As increased travel allows the crossing of cultural boundaries and technology eliminates the boundaries between cultures, the concept of the “world around us” has completely changed, both professionally and personally. International trade and business are at an all-time high, and globalization has been extremely influential in shaping the business and professional arenas (Hannerz, 1996). As societies around the world intersect, so do the individuals within each culture. As individuals from different parts of the world cross paths, intercultural communication occurs. With the developments of the modern world comes a need for effective intercultural communication. Begley (2003) describes the importance of sojourner adaptation and the ability to cross over cultural boundaries within communication in order to meet the many challenges of the developing world. Because people are raised within their cultures to speak a certain language, use certain customs, and understand communication and interact a certain way, bridging the gap is a difficult task. The ability to cross these cultural boundaries and have effective communication is invaluable in the business, professional, and social world.

Even in the daily lives of individuals around the world, intercultural conversations and interactions play a very large role. Cultural dimensions encompass much more than just the language a person speaks. Around the world and in the United States, cultural diversity is everywhere. According to Chen and Starosta (1996), cultural diversity has become the norm instead of the exception, especially in the United States, because of changing cultural characteristics of social and political life. With these adapting characteristics all around, it is essential to be able to effectively communicate across cultural boundaries. In order to be interculturally competent, cross-cultural communication boundaries must be examined and understood.

The first step toward achieving this competence involves consciousness and recognition - being cognizant of cultural differences. Cultural distance and lack of cultural awareness greatly increase the probability of miscommunication. Therefore, effective intercultural communication involves three interrelated and crucial concepts: intercultural sensitivity, intercultural awareness, and intercultural adroitness (Chen & Starosta, 1996). One must be sensitive to cultural differences, aware of their importance, and skillful in adaptation to them in order to create the cleverness and competence essential to successful communication. Aptitude within these three areas is key to understanding culture and intercultural communication.

There are differing approaches in the appropriate strategies for reaching this level of intercultural communication competence. Kim (2003) asserts that the key to avoiding divisions and conflict regarding intercultural communication is for individuals to accept the idea of intercultural personhood, which involves developing a sense of self while integrating with humanity. Kim's study suggests ideas for getting past the various

traditions around the world in order to incorporate diversity and communal values into personal identity. In other words, Kim suggests adapting the differing aspects of culture into one's own personal cultural identity and harmonizing them together. However, Xu (2013) argues a diverging perspective, saying that special attention should be paid to the dissimilarities in cultures instead. He says that intercultural dialogue is about celebrating the difference, otherness, and plurality of communication. One should appreciate the differences of others instead of molding them into a personal identity. Regardless of how scholars stand on the issue of integrating various cultures or celebrating the uniqueness of each, awareness of cultural traits and traditions is important in successful intercultural communication.

#### Intercultural Communication Models and Frameworks

Intercultural communication has occurred as long as people from varying cultures have encountered one another. During the last 30 years, however, people have begun “serious and systematic study of exactly what happens in intercultural contacts” in order to better comprehend cultural diversity (Samovar & Porter, 2003, p. 1). Until the 1900s, components of culture and intercultural communication were not quantified. In order to comprehend intercultural communication, a culture's individual communication patterns must be evaluated precisely. The most effective way to understand a culture's communication and its customs is to analyze the codes of behavior it values. Cultural value analysis allows for quantifying the similarities and differences between cultural groups and provides a better understanding of cultures themselves as well as intercultural interactions.

There have been various strategies and models for analyzing cultural values and making cultures easier to understand. Hall (1976) provided two dimensions of cultural variation, claiming that human interaction could be divided into low/high-context patterns and immediacy. Context refers to whether communication in a culture is implicit or explicit. High context cultures rely on situational understanding, while low context cultures rely more on what is actually said in an interaction. For example, Japan is considered a high-context culture and demonstrates this through their culture's respect for long silences. The United States is considered low context, on the other hand. Members of these cultures tend to explain things more, which can sometimes stem from racial diversity in a country; people elaborate in order to help others relate and eliminate misunderstanding. Immediacy refers to the level of intimacy and contact within relationships in a culture, which is often shown in smiling, touching, and affectionate communication. Many cultures in Northeast Asia, for example, are considered low immediacy and do not communicate in a very expressive manner. The US, however, is considered to have a high-immediacy culture. Therefore in business situations or classroom settings, eye contact and other nonverbal behaviors help build trust and establish a connection. These two aspects of culture provided great understanding into cultural values and communication, but gaps in Hall's approach remained.

Another dimension of culture that relates to a culture's immediacy is often classified as high-, moderate- and low-contact (Ting-Toomey, 1999). This refers to the intimacy between members and the comfort with physical contact. Members of high-contact cultures often make direct eye contact, face each other, touch each other, and speak with a higher volume. Cultures in Italy, France, and Latin America are considered

high-contact. For example, in France, greetings are often accompanied with kisses on each cheek, demonstrating comfort with physical contact. However, low-contact cultures, such as the UK, China, and Japan, rarely engage in touching or direct eye contact and speak in a lower tone. In Japan, when a woman averts her eyes, it is not seen as rude or dismissive but as respectful and kind, demonstrating its low-contact tendencies.

Moderate-contact cultures, such as the United States, represent a blend of both ends of the spectrum.

In 1991, Hofstede originated four dimensions of cultural variability patterns: individualism-collectivism; uncertainty avoidance; power distance and masculinity-femininity. Individualism and collectivism refer to how people in a society think in terms of “I” or in terms of “we”. Uncertainty avoidance involves a culture’s emphasis on norms and traditions. Power distance refers to the distribution of power between individuals vs. equality. Finally a culture’s masculinity vs. femininity references its emphasis on power or on compassion, task orientation vs. person orientation. Both Hall’s and Hofstede’s approaches to cultural dimensions improve our ability to understand culture and encompass the ideals which direct a culture’s communication tendencies.

In 1994, Peter Andersen provided another model for examining communication in various cultures by adapting four of Hofstede's and two of Hall's categories. He identifies six dimensions of cultural variation: high/low context, individualism/collectivism, high/low power distance, high/low uncertainty avoidance, immediacy, and masculine/feminine. All of these aspects of culture affect intercultural communication and clearly differentiate cultures. Andersen’s book discusses numerous studies that have been performed across the world that show the variations in each of the different



dimensions of cultures. Numerous studies since 1994 have been influenced by or improved upon Andersen's model, for example regarding cultural variations' influence on interclass relationships, nonverbal behavior, emotional affectivity, etc. (Andersen, Hecht, Hoobler, & Smallwood, 2003).

Cultural behaviors and norms are impacted by cultural values significantly. Feminine/Masculine value patterns rely on differences in social gender rules. Feminine societies, such as Thailand, the Netherlands, and Chile, have fluid boundaries that might overlap, and life focuses more on the quality of life and the relationships. Masculine societies, including Japan, USA, and Nigeria, have clearly distinct and complementary gender roles with emphasis on task-based accomplishment and material success (Hofstede, 2001). These opposing standpoints create a very different society to be examined and analyzed. Weak-strong uncertainty avoidance (UA) value patterns influence communication and could dictate nonverbal behavior. Low UA cultures encourage acceptance of uncertainty, risk-taking and conflict-approaching modes. High UA cultures, including Greece, Italy, and Russia, prefer to prevent uncertainty with clear procedures and explicit communication. The desire to avoid ambiguity by strong UA cultures, could present a need for nonverbal communication to clarify and reinforce verbal communication. For example, in Italy is common for people to spend much more on designer clothing and overdress for situations to avoid any uncertainty or embarrassment. On the other hand, the dynamic, risk-taking style of weak UA cultures, such as the United States, the UK, and India, could provide a tendency to be more affectionate and free with communication, ignoring the risk that comes with such openness. Low UA cultures also allow their nonverbal communication to remain

ambiguous instead of explicit, as shown in the UK where it is common to present a stiff upper lip in order to remain calm, cool, and collected. All of these cultural value patterns and their importance in cultures could greatly impact and influence the way intercultural communication takes place and provide for a vast arena for study and analytical observation.

There are many practical benefits to understanding the differences in dimensions of culture. The knowledge can bring to light different aspects of our own behavior and challenge them in a beneficial way. Understanding these various cultural dimensions will make it much easier to understand the communication behaviors that others show. Cultural values must be recognized within one's own culture and differing cultures in order to effectively communicate in the modern world.

#### Previous Interpersonal, Intercultural Communication Studies

A great deal of intercultural communication studies rely on interpersonal interactions. A key facet of interpersonal, intercultural interaction is the nonverbal communication that is taking place, and it is a common area of previous study. A great deal of the message and meaning of communication relies less on what is said than on how it is said. Low- and high-context interaction patterns depend upon where the emphasis is placed in communication. In LCC, emphasis is on the explicit verbal messages, while in HCC meaning is best conveyed through embedded contexts, such as nonverbal channels. Nonverbal communication involves not only the way in which a message is presented but also the location, tone, movements, expressions, and much more. Nonverbal behavior has been studied in the context of intercultural communication in a variety of ways. Self (2009) says that including nonverbal communication

observation when researching intercultural communication has given communication studies “a broader range of cross-cultural application and eliminated some ‘blind spots’ in intercultural communication” (p. 232). There have been various studies examining specific aspects of nonverbal intercultural and cross-cultural communication, and previous research has shown that many organizational frameworks can be effective.

Several studies have shown significant variations in the way “contact cultures” use touch and proxemics. In “high contact cultures,” such as several South American countries, Arabian cultures, and in southern and eastern Europe, people talking in dyads display immediacy manners like touch, open body positions, and intimate conversational distance (Dodd, 1997). However, these contact preferences may also vary due to the place or the context in which the interaction occurs (Anderson, 1988). For example, one study showed that among the male-male and female-female interactions in contact cultures many males interacted farther apart than females (Shuter, 1977). However, few explanations for this difference were provided. Additionally, it must be considered that contact preferences among members of contact cultures are likely to vary from the behaviors shown in communication between members of differing contact cultures.

Some theories examine the connection between discrimination in intercultural contexts and nonverbal behavior and determine that a collective view of intercultural communication is only made achievable by the inclusion of nonverbal behavior examination (Self, 2009). According to Cohen (1991), nonverbal behaviors can constrain negotiations in intercultural communication before the interactions even begin. Many researchers, such as LaBarre (1947), have found that nonverbal greeting behaviors and gestures differ noticeably from culture to culture. Others report that people in different

cultures have very opposite reactions when their personal space is violated (Gudykunst & TingToorney, 1988). Similarly, the appropriate space between conversation partners and groups differs greatly from one culture to another (Holtgraves and Yang, 1992). One area that can be concentrated on in the field of nonverbal communication is that of physical touch and space. Interpersonal touch has been characterized as our earliest form of communication (DeThomas, 1971). Hall called touch “the most personally experienced of all sensations” (1990, p. 62). Past research says that touch can be used for the purpose of fulfilling five purposes in communication: greeting someone, expressing affection, being playful, exhibiting domineering behavior, and serving a task-related purpose (Andersen, 2007). Tactile behavior has been studied in an intercultural aspect many times. There has been a great deal of literature showing the wide cultural variation of tactile behavior. However there is a need for more empirical research in the field.

One study that effectively observes the concept of tactile behavior variations was conducted by McDaniel and Andersen in 1998. This study examined cross-sex, interpersonal, public touch in order to determine how touch varied. It sought to discover if body areas touched depended on whether or not people came from different cultures, if the nature of the couple’s relationship influenced the physical behavior and if the total amount of touching correlated with the location of the country from which the dyad came. The study was conducted at an international airport where cross-sex dyads were observed as one member of the pair was departing. Body areas were counted on a chart and later analyzed. The remaining member of the pair was then asked a series of questions to determine the type of relationship between the two and the country of origin. The study found a significant variation of nonverbal communication as a function of

nationality. There was also an effect on the touch by the type of relationship, with the friends/lovers being the most affectionate. The study provided insight into the cultural variations of tactile behavior. The impact of nonverbal communication is important to examine when studying interpersonal communication, which is an essential part of intercultural communication studies.

### Individualism/Collectivism

While all aspects of cultural variability can influence communication differences, the individualism-collectivism dimension has received consistent attention from communication researchers and psychologists around the world (Ting-Toomey, 2003). There have been innumerable cross-cultural studies providing theoretical and empirical substantiation that this dimension pervasively impacts a range of cultures. One psychological study examined the way psychologists and anthropologists from all over the world view the terms of “individualism” and “collectivism.” The study used a questionnaire, which asked participants to respond the way they believed an individualist and a collectivist would react to specific situations. According to the results from the survey, there was a consensus regarding the definition of the cultural dimension. It was generally agreed upon that collectivism demonstrates more concern about the effects of actions on others, sharing of benefits and resources, willingness to accept the views of others, concern with loss of face, and a feeling of interest in others’ lives. Individualism refers to less concern, sharing, and involvement by an individual. The approach showed the agreement by researchers from various fields on the definitions tied to the cultural dimension. (Hui & Triandis, 1986).

A social psychological study used the Rochester Interaction Record in order to compare cross-cultural individualism-collectivism tendencies. The study evaluated two weeks of interactions by United States university students in comparison with Hong Kong university students. Its results demonstrated the dimension predictions when Hong Kong students, coming from a much more collectivistic culture, had longer interactions with fewer amounts of people, participated in more group and task interactions, and indicated greater disclosure during communication (Wheeler, Reis, & Bond, 1989). Other research explains the personal alterations that individuals interacting with someone outside of their individualism-collectivism cultural norms tend to make. For example, after extensive interaction with individualists, collectivists develop the ability to create short-term relationships, to discuss personal accomplishment, and communicate to others the way that certain collective behaviors are necessary and provide self-worth. On the other hand, individualists who intermingle considerably with collectivists discover the importance of being sensitive to hierarchies, developing long-term, trusting relationships, paying attention to people's group memberships, and only criticize cautiously and when essential. These adjustments were found to allow for more successful cross-cultural communication. (Triandis, Brislin, & Hui, 1988).

Some research has connected individualism-collectivism to conflict styles, demonstrating its influence on cross-cultural negotiation processes. In conflict situations, individualists and collectivists typically respond in opposite communication styles. Individualists tend to rely on direct requests, direct verbal justifications, and upfront clarifications in order to justify or defend a decision. On the other hand, collectivists tend to use qualifiers, tag questions, disclaimers, indirect responses and entreaties to subtly

convey their point-of-view in a disagreement that could embarrass them. Collectivists use fewer direct verbal messages and rely on the interpreter of the message to decipher the intention of the message and respond. Individualists view silence in a conflict situation as a sign of guilt or incompetence, while collectivists see it as a demonstration of self-discipline. Individualists demonstrate competitive control conflict styles and employ verbal offensive and defensive measures to justify, clarify, articulate emotions, raise objections, and build credibility. Collectivists tend to integrate, compromise, and avoid contact by using ambiguous verbal messages paired with subtle nonverbal signals to save mutual, group, and individual face. Cultural tendencies toward direct or indirect conflict management often display a direct reflection on a culture's individualistic or collectivistic styles (Ting-Toomey, 2003, p. 373).

Throughout the realm of cultural value study, there are many dimensions by which one can analyze intercultural communication. Cultures display endless differences and variations on norms and styles. However, individualism-collectivism, specifically, as existing on a continuing scale of value tendency variances, can serve as a "beginning point to understand some of the basic differences and similarities in individualistic-based or group-based cultures" (Ting-Toomey, 2003). Therefore, it makes an excellent central value for examination in this study.

Professor Geert Hofstede defines culture as "the collective programming of the mind distinguishing the members of one group or category of people from others". Hofstede provided an excellent framework for individualism-collectivism when he directed one of the most complete, wide-ranging studies of the way culture influences the general standards in the workplace. The comprehensive research done by Professor Geert

Hofstede, Gert Jan Hofstede, Michael Minkov and their teams of researchers created the grounds for the Hofstede Culture Center's six dimensions of national culture, including individualism-collectivism. In order to create this collection of scores, Hofstede analyzed a database with an extensive amount of scores of employee values. These scores were collected between 1967 and 1973 and contain data from over 70 countries. Consequent studies authenticating Hofstede's earlier results use data analysis from other respondent groups, including students, pilots, civil service managers, and the 'elite.' These studies and research have contributed to the commonly used Hofstede classification, which is outlined on the Hofstede Culture Center website (<http://www.Geert-Hofstede.com>).

This study is based on Hofstede's individualism-collectivism, or IC, dimension. Individualism is the high side of Hofstede's IC dimension and represents a partiality to a social framework that is loosely-knit, while collectivism, the low side of Hofstede's IC, leans more toward a tightly-knit societal structure. The issue the IC dimension addresses is interdependence in society; a society's score on this dimension is shown by the way people construct their personal self-images, centralized around the idea of "I" or "we." In Individualist societies, such as USA, the UK, and Australia, a person is only obligated to provide for and look after himself and possibly members of his direct family. In Collectivist societies, including Guatemala, China, and Iraq, people are attached to broader 'in groups' that care for and watch over them in exchange for devotion and dependability (Hofstede, 1991). Hofstede's classifications and examples from extensive study provide an excellent framework for this study of individualism-collectivism.



## Intercultural Communication and Film

As modernization exponentially increases the amount of intercultural interactions that take place in our lives it also heightens the ability of the media to permeate our lives. Just as culture controls our view, there is no doubt that media influences the way we see the world. Film, television, and other media can shape the way an audience views an idea, place, person, or culture. Movies can broaden our knowledge and place us in a new perspective previously unknown to us. Films create the opportunity to present an audience with the picture of a culture that could be entirely foreign to us. A film's images of a culture can influence, negatively or positively, the audience's perception of that culture's characteristics, norms, values, and patterns, and its individual members. This creates a burden of accuracy and legitimacy that should impact the creation and portrayal of films in general. Cultural value accuracy within film can help provide intercultural awareness, sensitivity and understanding that is essential in today's globalized world.

One way to study and evaluate intercultural communication is through film. While the studies mentioned throughout the review of literature have effectively observed aspects of intercultural interaction, they often required a great deal of time and observation in order to gather enough data for conclusion. Movies, however, can display aspects of intercultural communication that could otherwise be hidden or difficult to procure. Nonfiction movies made within the realm of popular culture may seem an unlikely source for cultural studies, but films such as these can serve as a "uniquely rich medium for the purpose of studying culture" (Mallinger and Rossy, 2003). Cardon attributed the benefits of cultural studies through film to the ability of viewers to "observe plots and characters that can reveal communication processes, socially acceptable

behaviors, and underlying cultural values” (2010, p. 151). While film does not provide a natural environment for communication observation, movies do open a window by showing the lives, ideas, struggles, and dreams of ordinary characters. These representations bring to light specific characteristics of culture. Film can demonstrate cultural dimensions because “film scenes can offer a visual portrayal of abstract theories and concepts” (Champoux 1999, p. 206). Using film for the observation of interpersonal communication can illuminate communication theories and concepts that are ordinarily more abstract than concrete and visual.

The University of Hildesheim’s Institute of Intercultural Communication in Germany created an online project called the Intercultural Film Database. This database uses twenty cultural dimensions, including individualism-collectivism, which it explains in its glossary, to analyze various films. The film analyses on this website descend from the University of Hildesheim’s 10-year project seminar, which began in summer 2005 and continues today. The university’s students from various countries present their findings, which vary in style, range, and thoroughness, in class and upload them to the site. The cultural dimensions are meant to serve as a starting-point for cultural value discussion. While the welcome message of the database (<http://www.uni-hildesheim.de/interculturalfilm/index.php>) points out that films “mustn’t be mistaken for real life, but they lead us back to it more thoughtful about the people and cultures that we encounter,” it also refers to them as an excellent intercultural communication studies resource (Jarman, p. 1). The convenience and importance of cultural portrayals in film provide an opportunity to critically examine of intercultural communication. The database also allows for searching for films based on their portrayal of individualism-

collectivism interactions, which is convenient and useful for its examination of film's displays of the value dimension.

### Hypothesis and Research Question

This study seeks to examine the way in which intercultural films portray the cultural values of individualism and collectivism. Because of the role that this cultural value dimension plays in conflict situations, it contains great importance within cross- and intercultural communication. The use of an intercultural film database provides a display of individualism and collectivism in an interpersonal, intercultural communication situation. By recording the individualistic and collectivistic demonstrations laid out on this database, the research seeks to answer the question: How do films portray the cultural value systems that affect a country's intercultural communicative behaviors?

Hypothesis 1: Films portray the individualistic and collectivistic values of nations in alignment with the nations' value systems in Hofstede's classification.

Research Question 1: Do films portray nations' individualism and collectivism tendencies in a contrasting manner, alone, or in corresponding with other nations?

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

### Nations in Hofstede's Individualism-Collectivism Classification

This study will rely on Hofstede's classification of the cultural value of individualism-collectivism, outlined in Chapter Two. The analysis will compare film portrayals of cultural values to Hofstede's portrayals. In order to determine the cultures eligible for study within this project, the availability of individualism scores of a given country was determined by cross-referencing between Hofstede's rankings and the intercultural film database. On Hofstede's website for cultural value comparisons, scores for 100 countries were available. First, Hofstede's cultural value dimension score for each nation will be identified using the Hofstede Center website's Country Comparison Cultural Tools, on which scores range from 0 to 100. Countries will be organized alphabetically. They will be assigned the score from Hofstede's value dimension scale, with 100 representing absolute individualism and 0 representing absolute collectivism (<http://www.Geert-Hofstede.com>)

### Intercultural Films Used

The films used in observation and data collection will come only from the online project created by the University of Hildesheim's Institute of Intercultural Communication in Germany (<http://www.uni-hildesheim.de/interculturalfilm>). The intercultural film database uses cultural dimensions to analyze various films and allows searches based on cultures portrayed and cultural values demonstrated. Each nation on Hofstede's classification will be searched for its portrayals of individualism-collectivism on the film database. If these countries are found by the database analyses to be shown in

films which contain portrayals of individualism-collectivism, they will be considered for analysis in this study.

Of Hofstede's 100 countries, thirty-one countries were represented in the film database as films containing portrayals of individualism-collectivism. These thirty-one countries were the only ones used to collect data for this study. Films will only be included in the data if they represent a culture classified by the intercultural film database as demonstrating individualism-collectivism. Each applicable film will be studied and its scenes recorded. Each scene will be coded in two separate ways in order to test the hypothesis and to answer the research question

### Hypothesis Testing

In order to answer H1, I will compare Hofstede's Cultural Value scores and analysis of the film portrayals of individualism-collectivism. First, I will record each nation's I-C score on Hofstede's 0 to 100 scale. The countries will then be given an I-C film score based on the individualism-collectivism tendencies displayed in each film. First, each film scene will be analyzed and scored based on whether each culture displays individualism or collectivism tendencies with the scene. Each nation will be scored individually and scored as a "1" for collectivism and "2" for individualism tendencies. After all scenes in a film have been tabulated, each nation's scene scores will be averaged together for the nation's film score. For example, Film X has one scene which shows an interaction between Country Y and Country Z, with Y demonstrating its culture's individualistic tendencies and value for an individual while Z demonstrates its collectivistic tendencies and value for family. Country Y will have a scene and film score of "2" and Z a "1." After every film has been recorded and averaged, each nation's film

scores will be averaged together to constitute the country's overall I-C film portrayal score. Country Y would have its score of "2" averaged with each other film score it had been given. If it shows individualistic tendencies in every scene in which it is portrayed, it will have an overall I-C film portrayal score of "2" as well. If Country Z is shown in only one other film with individualistic tendencies, it will have an overall I-C film portrayal score of "1.5." Finally, I will examine the correlation between countries' Hofstede's individualism-collectivism scores and the countries' I-C film portrayal score. The data analysis seeks to recognize a trend or pattern between these variables and to see a directly proportional relationship between them.

#### Answering Research Question

RQ1 seeks to more specifically describe the way in which individualism-collectivism tendencies are shown in comparison with one another. It aims to discover how countries' individualistic-collectivistic behaviors tend to look when shown in interaction with other countries. The study hopes to find if countries are often shown having conflicting I-C values which create disagreement or discord. On the other hand, similar individualism-collectivism tendencies could contribute to more agreement and understanding in intercultural communication. For example, the scene in Film X would show Country Y and Z interacting in accordance with their opposite I-C value tendencies. In order to answer RQ1, each film will be organized alphabetically, then each scene will be classified as "O," "S," or "A." "O" represents when cultures are shown in opposition, "S" represents cultures shown with similar individualism-collectivism tendencies, and "A" represents a culture being shown alone. The scene from Film X would be classified as "O." If another film shows Country Y alone demonstrating individualistic tendencies,

for example, with a person showing extreme personal value placed on personal success, the scene would be given an “A.” The percentage of each category’s occurrence will be calculated once each scene in every film has been classified.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

First, the one-tailed statistical test shows the relationship between these two scores to be significant. Results recorded  $r = .81$ ,  $p < .001$ , indicating strong support for H1. Next, 138 scenes were recorded in order to answer RQ1. Of 138 scenes, 76 scenes (55%) portrayed nations with opposing individualistic-collectivistic tendencies. Fifty-nine scenes portrayed nations alone, representing 43% of the sample. Finally, 3 scenes (2%) portrayed nations having similar individualistic-collectivistic tendencies.

The results for the quantitative, correlation study between the Hofstede value dimension scale and the individualist-collectivistic scores from the films show a highly significant correlation and statistical support. This indicates that films do portray I-C tendencies in close accordance with Hofstede's ranking of the culture's value system. These results are further displayed in Figure 1 and Figure 2. Figure 1 shows a graph of the comparison between the two. Figure 2 shows the score from each country's averaged film score and its ranking on the Hofstede individualism-collectivism score.

The results for RQ1 and the analysis examining the frequencies of opposing, singular, and similar displays of individualism-collectivism tendencies between nations show that the research question is answered with a strong tendency toward opposing views, followed by alone displays, and very few similar tendencies. This shows that I-C tendencies are likely to be shown in a disagreement or discord rather than agreement or singularity, indicating a possibility for its contribution to intercultural miscommunication or differences. The cultures shown in each film along with the number of scenes in each film showing each of the types of I-C interactions are shown in Figure 3.



Figure 1:

*Graph: Hofstede IC Score v. IC Film Portrayal Score*

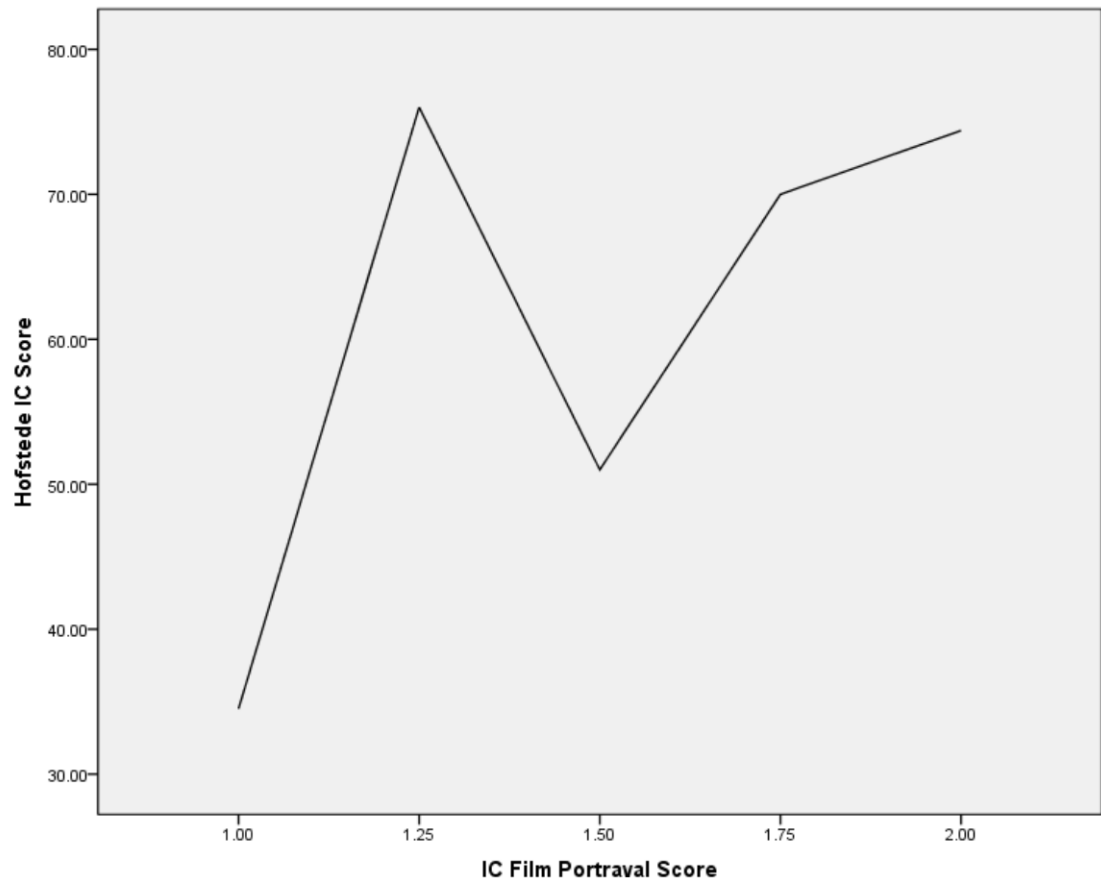


Figure 1

Figure 2		
<i>Comparison of Nations' I-C (Individualism-Collectivism) Film Portrayal Score with Hofstede's I-C Score</i>		
Nation	I-C Film Portrayal	I-C Hofstede
Australia	2	90
Bangladesh	1	20
Belgium	2	74
Canada	2	80
China	1	20
Czech Republic	1	58
Denmark	2	67
Egypt	1	25
France	2	71
Germany	2	67
Greece	1	35
India	1	48
Iran	1	41
Ireland	1.75	70
Italy	1.25	76
Japan	1	46
Lebanon	1	40
Mexico	1	30
Morocco	1	46
Nigeria	1	30
Pakistan	1	14
Russia	2	39
Spain	1.5	51
Syria	1	35
Switzerland	2	68
Thailand	1	20
Turkey	1	37
UK	2	89
USA	2	91
Figure 2		

Figure 3

*Films: Cultures Portrayed and Number of “O, S, A” (Opposing, Similar, Alone) Occurrences in Scenes*

Film	Cultures Portrayed	O	S	A
Ae Fond Kiss	Pakistan, Ireland	2	7	0
Almanya	Turkey, Germany	2	0	0
Babel	Mexico, Morocco, Japan	1	0	2
Best Exotic Marigold Hotel	India, UK	1	0	0
Bhaji on the Beach	India, UK	1	0	2
Black Rain	Japan, USA	3	0	0
Britz	Pakistan, UK	1	0	3
Cairo Time	Canada, Egypt	4	0	0
Chinamen	Denmark, China	2	0	0
Cotton Mary	UK, India	2	0	0
Crossing Over	Bangladesh, Iran	0	2	0
Das Lied in Mir	Argentina	1	0	0
Edge of Heaven	Turkey, Germany	1	0	0
English Vinglish	India, USA	1	0	0
Flags of Four Fathers	USA	0	0	1
Green Zone	Iraq, USA	1	0	1
Gung Ho	Japan, USA	2	0	0
Head-On	Turkey, Germany	2	0	0
Hideous Kinky	Morocco, UK	1	0	1
Jalla! Jalla!	Lebanon	0	0	1
Japaner sind die besseren Liebhaber	Japan	1	0	0
Japanese Story	Japan, Australia	1	0	0
Joy Luck Club	China, USA	1	0	0
Karate Kid	China	0	0	1
Kebab Connection	Turkey	0	0	1
The King and I	Thailand	1	0	0
L'auberge espagnole	Germany, Italy, Spain, UK, Denmark, Belgium	0	1	0
Le the au harem d'Archimede	France	1	0	0
Leap Year	Ireland	1	0	0
Letters from Iwo Jima	Japan	0	0	1

Lost in Translation	USA, Japan	1	0	2
Maria, ihm schmeckt's nicht!	Italy, Germany	2	0	0
Meine verrückte türkische Hochzeit	Turkey	1	0	4
Mao's Last Dancer	China, USA	1	0	0
My Big Fat Greek Wedding	Greece	0	0	3
The Namesake	India, USA	1	0	0
Not Without My Daughter	USA, Iran	2	0	1
Other End of the Line	India, USA	3	0	2
Outsourced	India, USA	3	0	0
Partition	India	2	0	1
Passage to India	India, UK	2	0	0
Pushing Hands	China, USA	1	0	1
Ramen Girl	Japan	0	0	1
Rising Sun	Japan	0	0	3
Romuald et Juliette	France	1	0	0
A Room With a View	Italy	0	0	1
Sabah - A Love Story	Canada, Syria	2	0	1
same same but different	Germany	1	0	0
Sayonara	USA, Japan	1	0	0
Schultze Gets the Blues	Czech Republic	0	0	1
Shahada	Germany, Nigeria	2	0	0
Shangai Kiss	China, USA	1	0	0
Shogun	Japan	1	0	2
Shouf Shouf Habibi	Morocco, UK	0	0	2
Snow Falling on Cedars	Japan, USA	1	0	0
A Thousand Years of Good Prayers	China, USA	2	0	1
Türkisch für Anfänger	Germany, Turkey	1	0	1
Un France, 14 Pesetas	Spain, Switzerland	1	0	0
Urga	Russia	2	0	0
Walkabout	Australia	0	0	1
Wedding Banquet	China	0	0	5
West is West	Pakistan	1	0	0
When We Leave	Germany, Turkey	4	0	0
Where Angels Fear to Tread	Italy	0	0	3
Zorba the Greek	Greece	1	0	2
Figure 3				

## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

### Significance of Results

For this study, I examined various communication frameworks and models. Communication studies encompass numerous aspects of interaction, such as verbal and nonverbal communication, interpersonal communication, and intercultural communication. This study focused on culture and its impact on interpersonal communication situations. Hofstede's classification of individualism-collectivism tendencies within a culture was the concentration of this study because of the value's impact on intercultural differences and conflict in communication. Studying films provided a window into the way intercultural communication is presented in the modern, media-saturated world. While interpersonal and nonverbal studies, including those mentioned in the Chapter Two, have often been done involving intercultural communication, there is little to link the importance of film with cultural value classification and the way culture can be studied quantitatively.

In order to observe the individualism-collectivism film portrayals of intercultural communication, I utilized the Intercultural Film Database as a basis for recording film scenes displaying I-C interactions. The analysis of film depictions of nations' individualism-collectivism tendencies reveals several trends. Overall, nations' film depictions were shown to align closely with Hofstede's individualism-collectivism classification. The magnitude of the correlation between the two differing variables is a very note-worthy finding of this study. The relationship between Hofstede's classification and the film portrayals reveals the importance of both of the variables. It demonstrates

the relevance of Hofstede's country classifications in daily communication as well as the relevance of film's presentations of cultural values.

In addition to the accuracy or to Hofstede's ratings, film portrayals also showed significant tendencies for cultures to demonstrate opposing individualism-collectivism value system in interpersonal communications. As discussed in Chapter Two, individualism and collectivism play an important role in communication between cultures throughout the world, and this value can have impact on intercultural conflict. Because individualism-collectivism can play a significant role in intercultural communication conflict, it served as an excellent dimension for this study. The study revealed that the nations were most often shown in conflicting situations due to opposite individualism-collectivism tendencies. Nations very rarely were portrayed having a similar view to another nation in a communication situation. This demonstrates the impact that I-C value tendencies can have on individual's interpersonal conflict and miscommunication due to their cultural value systems. However, considering the role that conflict plays in creating a plot and keeping a story interesting, this could contribute to the frequency of opposing view demonstrations.

The findings of this study are noteworthy due to their relevance in the fields of culture, communication, and film. Examining the accuracies of nations' film portrayals in comparison to their cultural patterns helps to determine the validity of film's cultural presentations. Because film portrayals can be taken for reality by audiences, the way film and media portray a culture can affect the way other cultures around the world view the portrayed culture. Therefore, it is important for films to reflect accurate cultural tendencies and not enforce false stereotypes.

### Limitations and Future Research

However, there were several limitations to the study. First, the sample was limited to thirty-one countries and the films represented on the film database. When examining the film database, as well as the intercultural films present in the major film industries throughout the world, generally Western cultures represented a large majority of the nations portrayed. This, along with Hofstede's representation of only 100 nations, excluded numerous countries from the study. Being able to include smaller nations and cultures less represented in the large film industries would provide a more thorough examination of the way individualism-collectivism plays a role in all cultures, instead of only those shown commonly in film. Ignoring sub-cultures to concentrate on nation's majority cultures also narrowed the range of cultures studied. An examination of the way sub-cultures in a nation interact with the majority culture due to individualism-collectivism tendencies would provide interesting future research.

The use of the film database also provided limitations. The film database presented a limited perspective, as the study relied on the individualism-collectivism scene analysis done by the creators of the database. Only specific scenes were used for the study instead of the film as a whole. Examining films in their entirety would provide a broader look at the general impact of individualism-collectivism on intercultural communication. Also, the accuracy of the study would be significantly increased if more films and scenes were available for each nation. Countries such as the UK, the United States, Germany, and India had numerous examples and portrayals, while countries such as Argentina, the Czech Republic, Iraq, and several others were shown only in one or two movies. However, several smaller nations were included, providing a wide range of films.

Having more films to create a film score for each nation would be useful in any future studies. The film database was extremely beneficial in locating and determining which films and film scenes to use for the study, but it also limited the sample.

The study was also restricted to Hofstede's individualism-collectivism dimension, ignoring the other value dimensions he presented as well as other researcher's cultural frameworks. Future study could be done by expanding this model to include other cultural values. More specific research could also be done to study more specifically the way individualism-collectivism intercultural communication, i.e. romantic interpersonal relationships, business and professional communication, etc. The way cultural value dimensions affect interpersonal, intercultural interactions and communication as a whole is a field that provides unlimited opportunity for future research.



## CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

Overall, this study's findings provided an interesting look into culture and its role of communication. The two ways in which the films were coded and analyzed in the research provides several implication for individualism-collectivism and its role in film portrayals of culture. Examining Hofstede's scale in comparison to film portrayal showed an extremely significant correlation, revealing their relationship with cultural views. With film continuing to reflect society and cultural values, the accuracy of these portrayals is important to examine. With intercultural communication competence becoming ever more important in the modern world, cultural understanding and accuracy is essential. Intercultural films will likely become more common and relevant in the coming years, and studies surrounding it should evolve in a similar way. Research based on such cultural dimensions and film is relevant and important, and this study seeks to examine their connection.

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