

# *Face-to-Face Environment on Social Conformity*

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**Abstract:** According to Oh Se Hyung, the difference between Collectivism culture and Individualist culture have been greatly diverted. In this paper, the experiment will prove this view and explore new factors leading to the difference of Collectivism and Individualism on Social Conformity, by testing the influences of face-to-face environment on the level of social conformity across culture.

**Keywords:** Social Conformity, Face-to-Face Environment, Individualist and Collectivism.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Background

It is commonly known that Western and Eastern cultures are widely diverse. In China, people have been taught to respect our authorities and to maintain a peaceful and harmonic environment above all, yet “harmonic but not uniformity” [1]. When Chinese students are faced with a conflicting situation, they tend to keep thoughts in secret in order to maintain a peaceful environment. In American culture, this is not the case. A famous quote from William Faulkner, “Never be afraid to lift your voice for honesty and truth and compassion against injustice and lying and greed.” It illustrates that in America, people are encouraged to lift their voices for inequality and declare their own thoughts in public.

A scientific study, entitled Conformity in Chinese and Americans by Huang, L., and Harris, M. reveals that the Chinese will be more likely to conform than Americans [2]. This study, expanded upon the previous study on Collectivism and Individualism, which focused on cultural values and their impact on society [3]. The study was arguing that societal differences influence an individual's tendency to conform. These differences were studied by looking at the differences between Chinese and American cultures. In Chinese culture, the Chinese value maintaining a peaceful society without outward diversity. In American culture, individualism is valued this is shown by the encouragement of sharing individual thoughts whether they are agreeable or not, accepted or unaccepted. When one examines the Culture diversity of self-identity between Chinese under the collectivist culture and American under the individualism culture, strong differences arise that can be attributed to the effects of individualism, a focus more on themselves, versus collectivism, a focus more on the role in their social network [4]. Researchers have found that individuals, where collectiveness is valued, are more easily influenced by the crowd.

Studies made by Jenness, Sherif, and Asch introduced the idea of conformity and showed this type of action may be seen across cultures [5-7]. Conformity was defined by measuring if people may change their original answers when exposed to social discomfort [8]. Kelman, expanded on this definition. According to Kelman conformity could be split into three different categories [9]: Compliance conformity, is the most common conformity type above all, where people agree with others to avoid social discomfort; Internalization conformity occurs more in academic research, where people are convinced by others to agree both outwardly and inwardly on different ideas; the last type of conformity, Identification, take place in group members, where people conform with each other to maintain a relationship with group members.

Conformity can not only be measured by verbal communication; it can also be identified through analyzing body language. Affective Eye Contact: An Integrative Review was another study that explored the idea that attention is given through eye-contact [10]. Giving eye contact is one way that individuals give support and endorse the ideas of others. However, in a social crowd when people are receiving attention at a period of disagreement, they may feel a need of social conformity to escape from social pressure. This type of conformity can be identified as internalization. Individuals will conform to society by refusing to show eye contact when challenged with a contrary position. In extreme cases, individuals will also retract or remove themselves in order to eliminate confrontation.

Little has been studied regarding the face-to-face effects of conformity. When individuals are forced into a situation where they are able to view each other fully, ie. sitting in a circle, the effects of conformity can directly be seen by watching for direct eye contact. In this situation, studying if participants across cultures will react differently to face-to-face effects can give insight into social conformity pressures between Collectivistic vs Individualistic cultures.

## **1.2. Proposed Study: The influence of Eastern and Western Cultures on Social Conformity**

The proposed study explored (i.) which types of people are more likely to succumb to social conformity in collectivism and individualism, (ii.) whether people are more likely to succumb in face-to-face situations, and (iii.) which type of people are more likely to be influenced by face-to-face environment. In the context of collectivism and individualism, our study will recruit qualified participants in public high schools in China and the United States. In this experiment, 20 calculation questions will be done by the participants. A group of seven people (6 actors who act as participants and a real subject) will sit in a column for the first 10 questions, and then they will form a circle for the next 10 questions. With this qualification, allows the participants to experience both with and without face-to-face effect. During the total 20 questions, all the actors will deliberately choose the wrong answers to specified questions. After each question is completed, the interviewer will ask participants to speak out their answers one by one. The real subject will be the last one to give an answer. The researchers will observe and record the number of times each participant succumbed when sitting in a circle and column, and how many participants in various countries succumbed. Due to participants are placed in a group of strangers according to the subjects. In a manner of speaking, the possibility of Identification can be ruled out. Also, since this study will not be heavily based on academic discussion, there should not be any Internalization conformity occurring. Which provide the last possibility of Compliance conformity.

## **1.3. Hypothesis**

For the first part of the experiment, it holds the hypothesis that the social conformity level of people who are influenced by collectivism will be higher than people who are influenced by individualism. For the second part of the experiment, it holds the hypothesis that the social conformity of people

who are influenced by collectivism will be more affected by face-to-face environment than those who are influenced by individualism.

## **2. Method**

### **2.1. Participants**

One group from both Eastern and Western culture are selected as participants. The group of participants from the Eastern culture who are influenced by collectivism are native Mandarin speakers from China. The group of participants from the Western culture who are influenced by individualism are native English speakers from the United States. All of them are 10th-grade students from public schools in the above countries, regardless of gender. Each group contains 20 students with a gender ratio of 1:1.

### **2.2. Materials**

The materials in the experiment include the experimental information and calculation questions in the pre-post online survey and the calculation questions in the real task. All information will be presented in the subject's native language, and the calculation questions will include addition, subtraction, multiplication and division calculations within ten and calculations in parentheses, e.g.,  $3 \times (1+3) + 4 \times 2$ .

### **2.3. Layout**

The experiment will be set up in a classroom with a column of seats (containing desks, chairs, draft paper and pens) in the left part of the classroom, consisting of seven seats labelled from 1 to 7 in order from the front to the back. Each subject will not be able to have face-to-face contact. The seven seats labelled 1 to 7 on the right side of the classroom are arranged in a circle with the seats facing the center of the circle so that the subjects will be in an environment conducive to face-to-face communication.

### **2.4. Process**

There will be a pre-post online survey before the task. Each alternate participant will be asked to complete an online material that includes information about the task (time, address, and date, but without the real aim of the task) and five computational questions of the same type as in the real task. To enroll in real task, participants must answer all questions correctly.

In the real task, each participant will be assigned to a group that includes, in addition to a real subject, a researcher who develop the questions and six actors who played the subjects (All researchers and actors are native speakers of the same language as the real participant).

The task is divided into two parts. In the first part of the task, the subjects and the six actors will be asked to sit in a column, and the real subject will be placed in the last seat, number 7. After the researcher asks the questions, each subject has one minute to calculate and write the answer on the draft paper, and after the time is up, they need to speak out their answers publicly in the order of their seat number, and they are allowed to change their answers on the draft paper before their turn to announce the answers. During the task, all reaction to others' answer is forbidden, such as facial expression, sounds, and turning heads. The experiment will be conducted 10 times, with actors giving incorrect answers together on the 3rd, 6th, 7th, and 9th times, and correct answers on the remaining times. The answer calculated by the real subject and the answer the real subject give in front of others will be recorded.

In the second part of the experiment, all steps are as same as in part one. There are two differences in this term. Participants will sit in a circle face to face, and they are allowed to react on other's answer. The task is also conducted 10 times, where all actors give the wrong answer on the 4th, 5th, 8th, and 10th times, and the correct answer on the remaining times. However, in the fourth time, the actor whose number is five will give the different answer to the other actors, and then receive some doubtful feedback such as glance and doubtful sound.

## 2.5. Measurement

Subjects will be considered submissive if their own results are different from those stated in front of the crowd. Incorrect Answers calculated by the subjects themselves will be excluded. The average number of submissive answers and the average number of participants who give submissive answers will be recorded as data to draw final conclusions.

## 3. Analysis

For the first part of the task, the average amount of participants who give submissive answer and the average number of the given submissive answer for both Chinese participants and American participants will be compared to see which group of participants are more influenced by social conformity.

For the second part of the task, the data within group and between groups will be contained together. Between the two groups for face-to-face condition, the average number of submissive answer and the average amount of participants who hold submissive answer of both Chinese participants and American participants will be compared to see which group of participants are more influenced by social conformity in face-to-face condition. Within the Chinese participant group and American participant group, the average number of their submissive answer and the average amount of participants who give submissive answer in the two conditions will be compared to see the change in different conditions in order to know which group of people will be more affected by face-to-face environment.

### 3.1. Predictions

For the first part of the task, Chinese participants who are influenced by collectivism will be easier to succumb to social conformity, which is reflected in detail that more Chinese participants tend to give more submissive answers when sit in a column than American participants. More specifically, Chinese participants should have more submissive answers than American participants. The number of Chinese participants who succumbed should be also more than that of American participants.

For the second part of the task, face to face environment has a bigger influence on Chinese participants who are influenced by collectivism. It reflects in the following aspects: The number of both Chinese and American participants who give more submissive answers increases when sitting in a circle than sitting in a column. More specifically, participants should have more submissive answers when they are in a circle than when they are in a column. The number of participants and the number of submissive answers of Chinese participants in a circle should have more significant changes than those of American participants.

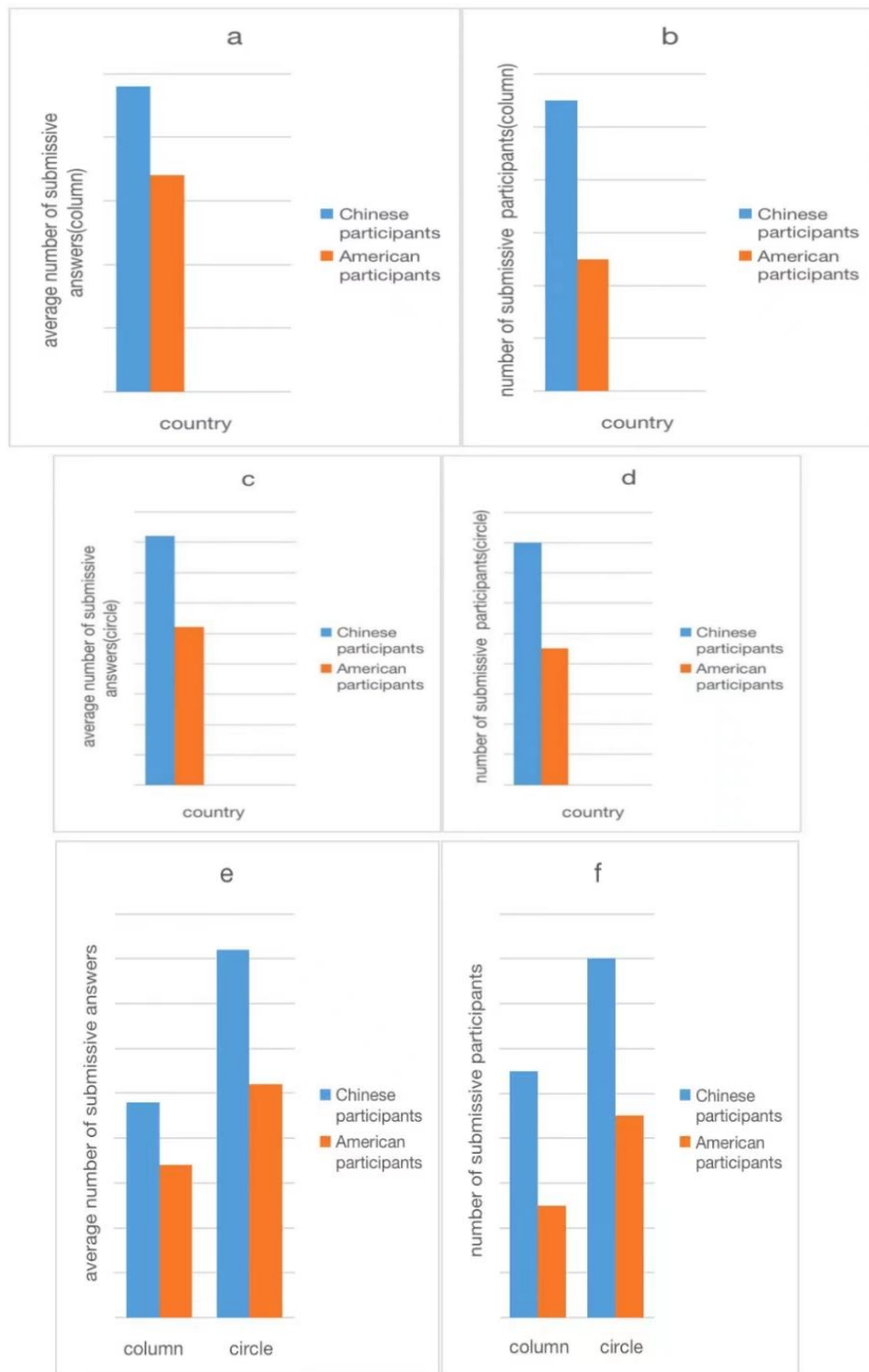


Figure 1: Prediction.

As shown in Figure 1(a) prediction of the average number of submissive answers of participants in different countries for column condition. Figure 1(b) shows prediction of the average amount of submissive participants in different countries for column condition. In Figure 1(c) reveals prediction of the average number of submissive answers of participants in different countries for circle condition. Figure 1(d) expresses the prediction of the average amount of submissive participants in different

countries for circle condition. Graphs (a, d) are used to support the hypothesis that Chinese people will be more influenced by social conformity. Figure 1(e) shows the prediction of the average submissive answers of Chinese and American participants in different seating patterns (column and circle). What is in Figure 1(f) is the prediction of the amount of submissiveness of Chinese and American participants in different seating modes (column and circle). Graphs (e, f) are used to support the hypothesis that Chinese people will be more affected by social conformity face-to-face environment.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study dispels some doubts raised by Oh (2013), that is, it affirms that people affected by collectivism are more submissive than those affected by individualism. Based on the original theory (that is, when people become the focus, they will use the submissive response to reduce pressure) this study puts forward the face-to-face effect, verifies whether the face-to-face situation will aggravate the phenomenon of submissiveness through experiments, and obtains a positive conclusion, that is, the face-to-face effect will increase people's submissiveness and is a cross-cultural factor. People affected by collectivism are more affected by the face-to-face effect than those affected by individualism.

However, there are some experimental problems in the research that will influence the results differently. First, the number of experimental countries and the number of experimental people as the basic base of the experiment are not large enough to give a positive conclusion across cultures, that is, whether people in all countries affected by collectivism are more obedient than those in all countries affected by individualism. The second is the limitation of experimental age, which can only prove people's obedience at the established age of the experiment, but whether it can be generally applicable to all age groups has not been determined. Third, the reasons leading to the obedience of participants cannot be excluded in the study, which may be caused by multiple factors, such as personal internal personality, family, education, psychological trauma and so on.

The act of social conformity may also influence social performance in different occupations, students may choose to avoid social judgment to refuse to share their terrific ideas or workers would remain silent due to different thoughts between colleagues. The results of this study will be helpful for teachers or administration, that they would have a deeper understanding of the effect of social conformity and would use the above method to help students and employees to decrease the chances of conformity as well as help individual students to lift out different ideas for topics. However, this only solved the conformation part of the problem, the result of this study could not help leaders to eliminate the possibility of conformity that caused by the shyness or inward personality.

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If any, should be placed before the references section without numbering.

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