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DECEPTION, CULTURAL DIFFERENCES, AND COMPUTER-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

Research indicates “that as much as one-third of daily conversations include some form of deception, broadly construed to include concealed, evasive, ambiguous, or exaggerated information as well as outright lies” (Burgoon Stoner Bonito and Dunbar 2003). As Klein, Tellefsen, and Herskovitz (2006) have noted, there is a growing body of research comparing deception in face-to-face communication to various types of computer-mediated communication (Hayne Pollard and Rice 2003; Zhou Burgoon Twitchell Qin and Nunamaker 2004); however, very few studies have investigated the role culture plays in this relationship. Therefore, this study proposes a framework for understanding the role culture plays in deceptive behavior for both face-to-face (FTF) and computer-mediated communication (CMC). The goal of this paper is to test theoretical explanations about the role of culture in deception by the development of a set of hypotheses predicting the conditions under which deception is likely to emerge. A research strategy and construct measures to test the hypotheses are also presented.

Keywords: **deception, culture, computer-mediated communication**

Introduction

Similar to the typical MySpace page, this one has a colorful background (including pictures of her favorite band, The Killers), several slideshows (detailing the typical college party), a hit song of the moment (“The Sweet Escape” by Gwen Stefani), and her profile details: “Dancing Queen”; female; 21 years old; student; from Auburn, AL; who enjoys dancing, trips to the beach, and Braves baseball. Social networking sites, such as MySpace, are social networking sites designed to allow users to converse through computer-mediated communication (CMC) while expressing their personalities through the creation of elaborate homepages, personalized with various backgrounds, graphics, music, and videos. For the purposes of this paper, CMC is defined as “synchronous [simultaneous] or asynchronous [delayed] electronic mail and computer conferencing, by which senders encode in-text messages that are relayed from senders' computers to receivers” (Walther 1992, p. 52). CMC has advanced far beyond the simple exchange of purely text-based information and has become extremely prevalent in the social lives of many individuals (Hian Chuan Trevor and Detenber 2004). Today, the Internet allows interpersonal communication via a variety of methods such as e-mails, instant messaging, chat rooms, and the latest craze, social networking sites. It is communication via social networking sites with which this study is primarily concerned.

Social networking sites are pervasive. For example, MySpace boasts more than 92 million users (Schonfeld 2006), and some suggest that its population is rising at staggering rates of up to 2 million new users per month (Dodero 2005). Additionally, the popularity of social networking sites is not restricted to Western cultures. One such occurrence is Cyworld, a South Korean social network which has penetrated more than a third of the entire country's population, making it even more popular per capita than MySpace in the United States (Schonfeld 2006). Because of the popularity of these social networking sites, it is important to investigate how much of this information being exchanged online is truthful. Research indicates that deception is part of everyday life (DePaulo Kashy Kirkendol Wyer and Epstein 1996; Turner Edgley and Olmstead 1975) and “that as much as one-third of daily conversations include some form of deception, broadly construed to include concealed, evasive, ambiguous, or exaggerated information as well as outright lies” (Burgoon et al. 2003).

As Klein, Tellefsen, and Herskovitz (2006) have noted, there is a growing body of research comparing deception in FTF communication to various types of CMC (Hayne et al. 2003; Zhou et al. 2004); however, very few studies have investigated the role culture plays in this relationship. Therefore, this study proposes a framework for understanding the role culture plays in deceptive behavior for both face-to-face (FTF) and computer mediated communication (CMC). Specifically, the following research questions are posited: *Are there differences between cultures in deceptive behavior? And, does the communication medium affect deceptive behavior?*

The rest of this paper is presented as follows: First, the theoretical framework used to test expectations about the role deception plays in Korean and American culture is described, and then a set of hypotheses are developed predicting the conditions under which deception is likely to emerge. A research strategy and construct measures to test the hypotheses are also presented, and the paper concludes with expected contributions, limitations, and opportunities for future research in this area.

Theoretical Framework

In this section, both the culture and deception literatures are reviewed to develop the research model and hypotheses.

Culture

Although there have been many definitions of national culture, Hofstede's is often the most dominantly cited (Srite and Karahanna 2006). He defined culture as “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another” (Hofstede 1980, p. 260). In his theory of cultural differences, Hofstede divided culture into four dimensions: individualism/collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity/femininity. Hofstede defined these dimensions through individual national culture values. Therefore, culture is heterogeneous in that it depends on the extent to which the individual is a believer of specific cultural values (Srite et al. 2006). Hofstede and Bond (1988) later added a fifth dimension entitled long-term orientation. Because there is controversy over the validity of this fifth dimension (e.g., Fang 2003), the focus of this paper will not include long-term orientation. Each of Hofstede's cultural dimensions will be discussed in greater detail in the hypotheses section.

Cross-cultural deception research remains understudied. Additional research would provide useful insights to government officials and world leaders that would be helpful in: trade negotiations, intelligence gatherings, and international conflicts. The ability to communicate electronically enables individuals to communicate easily with people from other cultures. Therefore, everyday citizens would also benefit from such research through an enhanced understanding of how different cultures perceive deceptive behavior. Of what has been done regarding cross-cultural deception, the findings suggest that the greatest differences between major cultural values occur between Western and Asian cultures (Samovar and Porter 1994). Korean culture is specifically of interest because of Korea's growth and use of the Internet and their pervasive use of social networking types of sites. South Korea's economic performance has changed rapidly over the past several years. Recently, much interest has been expressed in the reasons behind the exponential growth rate of Korea, resulting in its economic transformation (Yuhn and Kwon 2000). Therefore, to add to our understanding of this transforming country, this study is primarily concerned with a comparison of Korean and American culture.

Deception

Our knowledge of how culture influences the employment of deception is limited. Despite the abundance of deception studies in North America, there has been relatively little cross-cultural research on the phenomenon, with few exceptions. Specific exceptions are Aune and Waters (1994) and Seiter, Brusckie, and Bai (2002). Aune and Waters (1994) examined motivations for deception in collectivistic and individualistic cultures. Their sample included subjects from North America and American Samoa. Results indicated that the collectivistic Samoan culture was more likely to attempt deception for group or family concerns and authority-based concerns, whereas Americans were more apt to deceive others regarding a private issue or to protect someone's feelings. Seiter, Brusckie, and Bai (2002) also examined cross-cultural deception in their comparison of Chinese and American cultures. Their results suggested that cultural differences affect the perceived acceptability of deception. Specifically, subjects rated the degree to which they perceived deceptive acts depicted in several scenarios as being acceptable, and their results indicated that, in general, Chinese perceive deception to be more acceptable across all relationship types compared to Americans including: parent relationships, teacher relationships, stranger relationships, friendship relationships, and spousal relationships.

Although these two studies provide valuable insights into the role culture plays in deception, much work is still needed to have an appropriate understanding of Korean deception; however, the few studies that have been conducted suggest that Koreans are adept in deceiving others. For instance, Feldman (1979) conducted a study on detection of deception among Koreans. By measuring facial expressions and verbal responses to a taste test to detect deception, he concluded that Koreans were more skillful than Americans at controlling their nonverbal behavior. In essence, a majority of the Korean subjects in Feldman's study were able to conceal their deception. Although Tung (1994) did not conduct an empirical study, she supported Feldman's findings in her examination of ancient East Asian works influencing the area's business strategy. Using *The Book of the Five Rings* by Miyamoto Musashi as a source, she described the path to success as one where an individual conceals emotions and intentions and uses diversion to gain an advantage. According to Tung, East Asians think of deception as an acceptable maneuver to gain a competitive advantage.

A more recent study conducted by Triandis et al. (2001) looked at deception in culturally diverse business negotiations. They reported that collectivist countries such as Korea were more apt to be deceptive in business negotiations than countries scoring high on individualism. In addition, because collectivist countries had the greater propensity to lie, they experienced higher levels of guilt and shame over lying compared to more individualistic countries.

Because such limited research has been conducted in this area, the findings should be interpreted with caution. Clearly, additional research is required to better understand the perceptions and uses of deception in Korean culture; therefore, a purpose of this study is to provide needed additional research that would add to our understanding of cross-cultural deception. In the following section, hypotheses are developed based on Hofstede's conceptual framework.

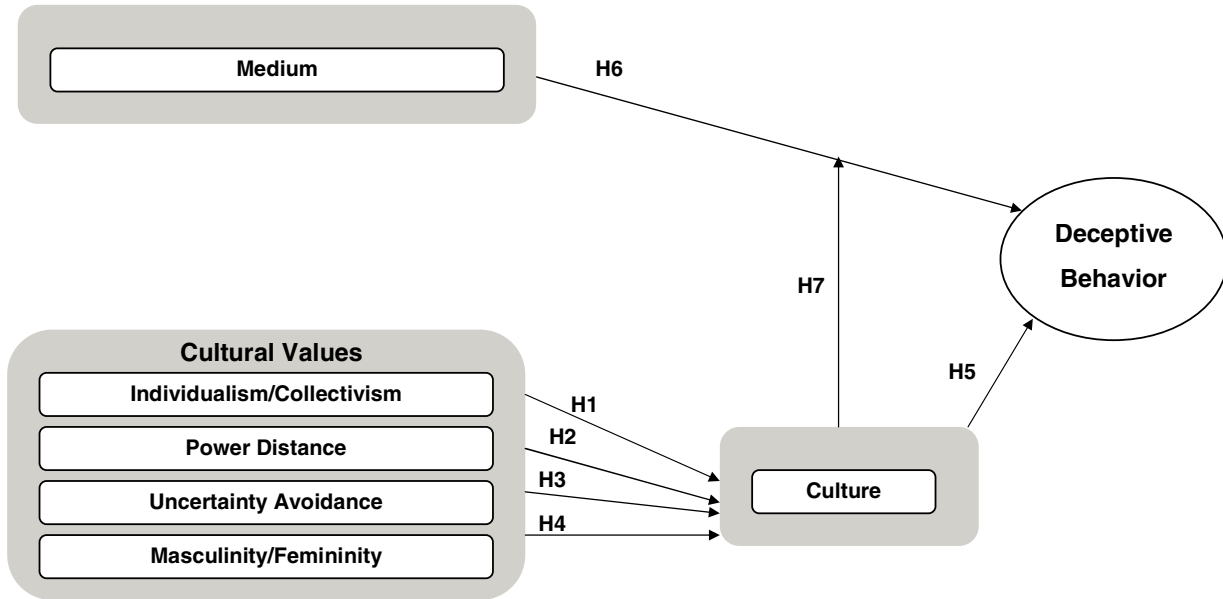


Figure 1. Measurement Model

Hypotheses

The research model, presented in Figure 1, integrates national cultural values and the communication medium to show their effect on deceptive behavior. Specifically, deceptive behavior refers to how often individuals lie and what topics the lies relate to. Hypotheses are presented in the following paragraphs.

Cultural Values

Individualism/Collectivism

Hofstede’s initial national culture study from 1980 did not include Korea in its sample; however, a later study (Hofstede 1984) expanded the sample to include Korea. Therefore, the first four hypotheses reflect Hofstede’s ratings for Koreans in his 1984 study. The first of Hofstede’s dimensions is individualism/collectivism. This dimension refers to the degree to which individuals are affiliated with groups. Individualism is characterized by loose group ties, whereas collectivism is characterized by individuals being integrated into strong, cohesive groups (Hofstede 1980). It is suggested that individualism prevails in Western countries, while collectivism dominates Eastern countries. Thus, Koreans should exhibit greater affiliations to groups, and emphasize group success and loyalty, whereas Americans should display looser group ties.

Hypothesis 1: Koreans will exhibit greater collectivist values than Americans.

Power Distance

Power distance is the extent to which less powerful individuals accept and expect an unequal distribution of power (Hofstede 1980). Subordinates who approve of power and inequality are typically associated with high power distance cultures. Specifically, Asian cultures are seen as scoring high on power distance values. In contrast, American culture is

characterized by the expectation of more equality between subordinates and leaders, indicating the importance of subordinates' opinions and decision making abilities.

Hypothesis 2: Koreans will exhibit higher levels of power distance than Americans.

Uncertainty Avoidance

Uncertainty avoidance is Hofstede's third cultural dimension. It refers to the extent to which individuals feel comfortable or uncomfortable in uncertain and ambiguous situations (Hofstede 1980). Korean culture has typically been referred to as a high uncertainty avoidance culture, characterized by resistance to change and risk indicating the society's low level of tolerance for uncertainty. Therefore, strict rules, policies, and laws are adopted to establish control and combat the unexpected. In contrast, the United States has been characterized as a low uncertainty avoidance culture, indicating a less rule-oriented society and more comfort with uncertainty and ambiguity.

Hypothesis 3: Koreans will exhibit higher levels of uncertainty avoidance than Americans.

Masculinity/Femininity

The final cultural dimension involves the extent of masculinity versus femininity a culture exhibits. Masculine cultures are characterized as assertive and competitive, while feminine cultures display more modest and caring values (Hofstede 1980). There is a smaller gap between the values of men and women in feminine countries, such as Korea, and a strong emphasis is placed on the development and fostering of relationships and improving the quality of life. Quite the opposite distinguishes masculine cultures. An emphasis on performance and growth characterize cultures such as the United States, which tend to score high on masculinity values. Therefore, the need for material wealth is often coupled with the need for recognition and advancement in masculine cultures.

Hypothesis 4: Koreans will exhibit higher levels of feminine values than Americans.

National Culture

Korean/American

Hofstede's theory of cultural differences highlights the distinctions that pervade American and Korean cultures. Therefore, from a theoretical perspective, it is expected that perceptions about deception and its use would differ from culture to culture. Although limited research has found Koreans to be more skilled deceivers, because very little work has been conducted regarding cultural differences in deception, an attempt will not be made to predict which culture tends to be more deceptive than the other; hence, the hypothesis will simply indicate that a difference exists.

Hypothesis 5: Deceptive behavior for Koreans will be different from that of Americans.

Medium

Face-to-Face/Computer-Mediated Communication

At least two people are needed for communication to occur, a sender and a receiver. In deceptive communication, the sender transmits a message to encourage a false belief or conclusion by the receiver (Buller and Burgoon 1996).

Research has indicated that the nature of computer-based media, with few social cues available to be observed by the receiver, is such that a deceiver can protect his or her behavior from being apparent to others through using CMC (George and Marett 2005). Thus, deceivers would be motivated to use CMC over FTF communication in an effort to reduce the chances of being caught in a deceptive act. On the other hand, previous research has also found deceivers to prefer synchronous media to asynchronous media for transmitting deceptive messages (Carlson and George 2004a). Synchronicity refers to the capability of the medium regarding speed of interaction and feedback (Carlson George Burgoon Adkins and White 2004b). FTF meetings and telephone conversations are considered synchronous media. They “offer participants the opportunity to communicate in real time, immediately observe the reactions and responses of others, and easily determine whether co-participants are fully engaged in the conversation” (Carlson et al. 2004a, p. 192). Therefore, deceivers have the opportunity to be proactive in their deception through the ability to study responses from the receiver while engaging in synchronous media communication. Thus, it is expected that both MySpace and Cyworld users will exhibit more deception in their FTF relationships than their cyber relationships.

Hypothesis 6: Deceptive behavior will be greater for face-to-face communication than for computer-mediated communication.

Medium and Culture Interaction

There is some evidence that different cultures use different media differently. For example, Lee and Lee (2003) conducted a study that compared media choice behaviors between a U.S. and a Korean organization. They found that many Asians preferred not to send electronic mail to their supervisors. Thus, there is the possibility of an interaction effect between the communication medium and national culture.

Hypothesis 7: Culture will moderate the relationship between communication medium and deceptive behavior such that Koreans will deceive more often using CMC than Americans.

A summary of the definitions for the operational measures is included in Table 1.

Table 1. Constructs and Definitions

Constructs	Definitions	Citations
<i>Culture</i>	National culture is “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another.”	(Hofstede 1980, p. 260)
<i>Cultural Values</i>		
1. Individualism/Collectivism	The degree to which individuals are affiliated with groups. Individualism is characterized by loose group ties, whereas collectivism is characterized by individuals being integrated into strong, cohesive groups.	(Hofstede 1980)
2. Power Distance	Power distance is the extent to which less powerful individuals accept and expect an unequal distribution of power.	(Hofstede 1980)
3. Uncertainty Avoidance	The extent to which individuals feel comfortable or uncomfortable in uncertain and ambiguous situations.	(Hofstede 1980)
4. Masculinity/Femininity	Masculine cultures are characterized as assertive and competitive, while feminine cultures display modest and caring values.	(Hofstede 1980)
<i>Computer-Mediated Communication</i>	CMC is defined as “synchronous [simultaneous] or asynchronous [delayed] electronic mail and computer conferencing, by which senders encode in-text messages that are relayed from senders' computers to receivers.”	(Walther 1992, p. 52)
<i>Dependent Variable</i>		
Deceptive Behavior	Deceptive behavior occurs when “a message is knowingly transmitted by a sender to foster a false belief or conclusion by the receiver.”	(Buller et al. 1996, p. 205)

Method

This study uses a survey research design. Respondents were asked a set of 36 questions via an online questionnaire. Because a purpose of this study is the comparison of CMC to FTF communication, subjects are needed who communicate with others via their computers. Therefore, the subjects used in this study are either members of MySpace or Cyworld, MySpace being the American social networking website and Cyworld the Korean version. On both MySpace and Cyworld, participation was solicited by posting a message to various members' webpages, along with a link to the survey instrument. A comparison of the two social networking sites can be found in Table 2.

Table 2. Cyworld versus MySpace

	Cyworld	MySpace
Home market	South Korea	United States
Best known for ...	Cutesy avatars	Unattractive page layouts
Status symbol	More “acorns”	More “friends”
Registered users	18 million	92 million
Portion of 20-somethings who use it	90%	23% (estimated)
Annual revenue per user (estimated)	\$7.78	\$2.17

Schonfeld 2006 sources: ComScore Media Metrix; Cyworld; MySpace; Pali Capital; U.S. Census Bureau; Business 2.0 analysis

A 2 x 2 factorial analysis will be used, crossing the communication medium with national culture. For the medium dimension, the first condition involves questions related to computer-mediated deception, whereas the second condition involves questions related to FTF deception. For the culture dimension, the first condition involves Koreans subjects, whereas the second condition involves American subjects. Therefore, there are four versions of the survey: (1) American, CMC, (2) American, face-to-face, (3) Korean, CMC, and (4) Korean, face-to-face. Subjects consist of both males and females who are at least 18 years old. Surveys were sent out to 500 individual MySpace users and 500 individual Cyworld users. A twenty percent response rate will yield a sample size of 200. A sample of the American surveys can be found in Appendix A. Sections 2 and 3 of the surveys are only listed once in Appendix A due to the fact that there were no differences in the two American versions for these questions. The Korean versions of the surveys were typed in the Korean language and were identical to the American versions of the surveys with one exception: question 36 was omitted from the Korean version.

Deceptive Behavior

Deceptive behavior is measured using scales developed by Cornwell and Lundgren (2001) and Whitty (2002). This measure consists of eight items and utilizes a 7-point Likert scale ranging from never to always. Subjects were asked eight questions regarding deception of individuals in either FTF or computer-mediated relationships. Subjects were asked whether they have lied about their interests, their age, their gender, where they lived, their education, their occupation, their income, their interests, or any physical characteristics. (Please see items 1-8 of Appendix A).

Independent Variables

Twenty-five questions, originated by Hofstede (1980) and later adapted by Srite et al. (2006), were used to assess the four cultural dimensions. Respondents were asked to rate their agreement with the following statements. Seven items were used to assess power distance. The extent to which managers should make isolated decisions, ask for advice, delegate mundane tasks, and receive benefits and privileges above subordinates measured the power distance dimension. (Please see items 9-15 of Appendix A). Six items were used to assess uncertainty avoidance. Questions from this dimension related to the importance of rules and regulations, order and structure, job requirements and instructions, and standardized work procedures. (Please see items 16-21 of Appendix A). Five items were used to assess masculinity/femininity. These items

measured an individual's preference to have men in high level positions and solving organizational problems. (Please see items 22-26 of Appendix A). The final dimension is individualism/collectivism. Six items assessed this cultural dimension. Individualism/collectivism was measured by questions relating to the importance of being accepted as a member of a group and the importance of group success, welfare, and loyalty. (Please see items 27-32 of Appendix A). The final four survey questions measured control variables, concerning gender, age, education level, and culture. (Please see items 33-36 of Appendix A).

ANOVA will be utilized to test whether there is a difference in how often and when deception occurs for the two populations. ANOVA will also be used to test whether there is a relationship between the communication medium and how often and when deception occurs for the two populations. If significant, the Scheffe' or Tukey test will be used to determine where the differences lie. The overall fit of the model will also be assessed using SEM.

Contributions and Limitations

There are several expected contributions of this study. First, this research provides valuable insights regarding social networking sites. One reason it is important to learn more about social networking sites is because they can be used by businesses to target international markets both easily and affordably. Thus, there is a large incentive for businesses to gain insight into these communities in order to profit from these untapped resources. An additional contribution of this study is the development of a framework for understanding the relationships between culture, deception, and CMC. The study will also provide much needed additional research that would add to our understanding of deceptive practices in different cultures. Although there are several contributions, the study is not without limitations. First, the Korean sample size will probably be smaller than the American sample size because of the difficulty of finding individuals on another continent to participate in a survey. An additional limitation of the study is absence of a truly random sample from the Cyworld and MySpace populations. Because a convenience sample was taken, the generalizability of the findings will be limited. Lastly, the potential for subjects to protect their personal data and be dishonest on the survey is also a risk; however, this is always a risk in any type of research that employs a survey. Given that the data being collected is subjective and there is not a way to collect it in an objective manner, the expectation is that the anonymity of the survey will mitigate this problem.

Conclusion

Results from this study will create several new research questions and directions for future research. First, as mentioned in earlier discussion, a contribution of this work is the development of a framework for understanding the relationship between culture, deception, and CMC. Future research should be directed toward extending the proposed framework to look at other cultures, leading to new insights regarding the relationship between culture and deception. Second, future research should investigate antecedents to the medium variable to determine what causes someone to choose one medium over another when conveying deceptive material. Third, additional research should also explore other contexts. Social networking sites comprise only a single method of electronic communication. Various other CMC mediums such as discussion boards, chat rooms, and text messaging should also be investigated to determine the role deception plays in each. Fourth, additional research is also needed to determine how cultures differ in their deception detection. In conclusion, the aim of this study was to investigate the differences between Americans and Koreans in deceptive behavior and better understand the role of the communication medium. The findings from this study will provide several potential areas for further investigation, providing a better understanding of deceptive American and Korean communication, in both face-to-face and computer-mediated contexts.

Appendix A

Section 1 (American, face-to-face):

Please complete the following survey by selecting one answer for each question listed.

Never A Little Sometimes Most of the Time Always

1. While speaking to another person face-to-face, have you lied about your age (somewhat older or younger than you really are)?
2. While speaking to another person face-to-face, have you lied about your gender?
3. While speaking to another person face-to-face, have you lied about where you live?
4. While speaking to another person face-to-face, have you lied about your education?
5. While speaking to another person face-to-face, have you lied about your job?
6. While speaking to another person face-to-face, have you lied about your income?
7. While speaking to another person face-to-face, have you lied about your interests (e.g. hobbies, religious orientation, musical preferences)?
8. While speaking to another person face-to-face, have you lied about your physical appearance (e.g. hair color, weight, state of health)?

Section 1 (American, CMC):

Please complete the following survey by selecting one answer for each question listed.

Never A Little Sometimes Most of the Time Always

1. While on Myspace, have you lied about your age (somewhat older or younger than you really are)?
2. While on Myspace, have you lied about your gender?
3. While on Myspace, have you lied about where you live?
4. While on Myspace, have you lied about your education?
5. While on Myspace, have you lied about your job?
6. While on Myspace, have you lied about your income?
7. While on Myspace, have you lied about your interests (e.g. hobbies, religious orientation, musical preferences)?
8. While on Myspace, have you lied about your physical appearance (e.g. hair color, weight, state of health)?

Section 2:

Please pick a number from the scale to show the extent of your agreement with the following statements.

I agree to a very small extent 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 I agree to a very great extent

9. Managers should make most decisions without consulting subordinates.
10. Managers should not ask subordinates for advice, because they might appear less powerful.
11. Decision making power should stay with top management in the organization and not be delegated to lower level employees.

12. Employees should not question their manager's decisions.
13. A manager should perform work which is difficult and important and delegate tasks which are repetitive and mundane to subordinates.
14. Higher level managers should receive more benefits and privileges than lower level managers and professional staff.
15. Managers should be careful not to ask the opinions of subordinates too frequently, otherwise the manager might appear to be weak and incompetent.
16. Rules and regulations are important because they inform workers what the organization expects of them.
17. Order and structure are very important in a work environment.
18. It is important to have job requirements and instructions spelled out in detail so that people always know what they are expected to do.
19. It is better to have a bad situation that you know about, than to have an uncertain situation which might be better.
20. Providing opportunities to be innovative is more important than requiring standardized work procedures.
21. People should avoid making changes because things could get worse.
22. It is preferable to have a man in high level position rather than a woman.
23. There are some jobs in which a man can always do better than a woman.
24. It is more important for men to have a professional career than it is for women to have a professional career.
25. Solving organizational problems requires the active forcible approach which is typical of men.
26. Women do not value recognition and promotion in their work as much as men do.
27. Being accepted as a member of a group is more important than having autonomy and independence.
28. Being accepted as a member of a group is more important than being independent.
29. Group success is more important than individual success.
30. Being loyal to a group is more important than individual gain.
31. Individual rewards are not as important as group welfare.
32. It is more important for a manager to encourage loyalty and a sense of duty in subordinates than it is to encourage individual ideas.

Section 3:

33. What is your gender?
 - male
 - female
34. What is your birthday?
35. What is your education level?
 - some high school
 - high school diploma or equivalent
 - some college
 - bachelor's degree
 - graduate level
36. How would you characterize your culture?
 - American
 - non-American

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