



**Transcript of Em Griffin's interview with Stella Ting-Toomey,  
creator of Face Negotiation Theory**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bQJcMas\\_dnw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bQJcMas_dnw)

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Griffin: I'm talking with Stella Ting-Toomey of California State University at Fullerton, author of *Face-Negotiation Theory*. Stella, what is *Face*?

Ting-Toomey: *Face* is about communication respect issue. It's claimed sense of social self-worth that I believe every human being wants and needs. But it's definitely about communication identity, respect issue, and other consideration issue.

Griffin: Is it a private thing or a public thing?

Ting-Toomey: I think it's both. And depending on what culture we are talking about, for the collectivistic group-oriented type of culture like Japan or China, there's a distance between the public self-presentation of face and the private self; whereas in an individualistic culture such as the larger U.S. culture or the larger Australian culture, there might be a closer correspondence between the public self and the private self.

Griffin: Can you flesh out the differences between those two types of cultures.

Ting-Toomey: Basically, an individualist culture emphasizes the importance of an "I" identity more so than a "we" identity. It would emphasize taking on personal initiative; it would emphasize on personal achievement; whereas collectivistic cultures emphasize teamwork, group orientation, group harmony issues, that we should always be considerate of other people's face. Group harmony should always supersede our individual self-interests or self-needs. Broadly speaking, U.S. overall and Australia and many of the northern European cultures have been identified as more highly individualistic in comparison to many of the Asian cultures – Japanese cultures, Chinese cultures, Korean cultures – and many of the Latin-American cultures and also I think many African cultures. According to Triandis, overall speaking in terms of global level, almost seventy percent or so of the cultures subscribe to some forms of collectivistic values, in comparison to less than maybe thirty percent. So, to me it's very critical for us to really have a good grasp of the collectivistic values orientation.

Griffin: We are making a video, and it's going to be shown to students. What if it really turns out poorly and students are just bored out of their gourd – I mean, it's just not good? We've got some face work to do.

Ting-Toomey: Mm, hmm.

Griffin: What kind of face work as a child of a collectivistic culture would you do, and what kind of face work, if it holds true to form, do you think I would do?

Ting-Toomey: If we played out our own scripts, and we could do that, from a collectivistic angle, I would say, "Well, it seems like none of you are really paying attention. It must be really my fault. It's because I didn't really set up the context for you with a clear focus of what you should be watching for. So, therefore, you are all falling asleep on me. So maybe we'll try again next week." I would do a little bit of self-effacing statement. Alternatively, if you are playing your individualistic script, I'll say, "It is obvious you didn't read the book three times, and you're falling asleep. If you'd read the book three times and watched this video, you'd know this video is a brilliant video. So, I will ask you again to read the book three times and come prepared to meet those authors halfway. Goodbye." [laughter]

Griffin: That comes hard to you. You're laughing when you say it...

Ting-Toomey: Sometimes I've used that because, being a teacher now from 1981 until this point, I don't think human beings are trapped in the role of the culture. I think we're capable of changing, adapting.

Griffin: You've talked a lot recently about self-construal. This is not a household word. What does self-construal mean?

Ting-Toomey: Self-construal is really the idea of your construction of sense of self, whether you're constructing it from a more independent angle or interdependent angle. I think the term has gained currency because a lot of interpersonal and intercultural researchers are grappling with ways of how to un-package the colossal terms of individualism, collectivism to more specific directions. So, there's a difference between cultural-level analyses and individual-level analyses; and construal of self is the individual-level analyses – personality attributes and tendencies. Whereas independent self tends to emphasize more on personal initiative, personal accountability and achievement, in comparison interdependent self tends to emphasize more on relational harmony issues, co-operative issues, etc.

Griffin: What I hear you saying is that it could possibly be that, even though I was raised in an individualistic society, I could have a self-construal that was much more interdependent; and, so, maybe I would be self-effacing because within my culture, I'm way off to one side. Is that possible?

Ting-Toomey: That's a very accurate perception. While we talk about cultural patterns as central tendencies of a curve, you might be the outlier.

Griffin: Three standard deviations away.

Ting-Toomey: Exactly. Not to mention that insiders, especially the “western” or “U.S” insiders, always think that they’re not typical Americans. [laughter] So, they all want to claim that they’re a little bit different from the rest of the majority of the group norms. So, you’re right and [differences] and more diversity of personality-type attributes. So, you can be born and raised in an individualistic society, but your personality tendency and maybe your family upbringing could be fairly interdependent oriented.

Griffin: You and your colleagues recently have found that self-construal, this individual identity, is a better predictor of conflict style than culture. Does that bother you? Does that make it seem like, “Oh, my theory was wrong?”

Ting-Toomey: No, I’m very excited.

Griffin: Why?

Ting-Toomey: Because culture is not a static entity; it’s dynamic. I always believed that, on a broad level as a theorist, we have to start somewhere and say that, “all right, overall Australian culture tends to be this way, or the Korean culture tends to be this way, or Mexican cultures.” But we all know those are such broad labels that we can never capture the immense diversity of human behaviors in the broad label of this big colossal concept called “Mexican Culture” or the “U.S. Culture.” So, I was very pleased in finding there was in the [evidence] of the individual tremendous variations.