Communicating Disagreements among Malaysians: Verbal or Non-verbal?

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Abstract

Although Malaysia is a multiethnic society, not many studies have been conducted to examine the cultural differences of its three dominant ethnic groups. This study examines how Malay, Chinese and Indian Malaysians respond to disagreements. Three domains in which disagreements take place were identified: family (parents, siblings, spouses/partners), friendship...
Omar Khalidi, Ph.D.

A questionnaire was used to obtain data from 655 Malaysian respondents from the three main ethnic communities. SPSS was used to obtain quantitative results. The findings indicate that although Malaysians express themselves verbally in these three domains there are variations among the three ethnic groups. The findings will benefit researchers working on cross-cultural norms.

Key words: Malaysians, disagreements, family, friendship, workplace, words, silence.

1. Introduction

People behave differently due to cultural differences. Some come from the collectivist culture and others from the individualist culture. The former emphasizes family and group goals while the latter concentrates on personal accomplishments. Most North Americans and Western Europeans are from the individualistic culture while Asians like Koreans, Chinese, Japanese, Singaporeans and Malaysians, for the large part, fall into the collectivistic culture. Collectivists conform to the norms of the society they come from. Family interests, group goals and common good are more important than the rights of the individual. John Rawls (cited in Velasquez et al. 1992) defines common good as specific conditions which people follow for the sake of everyone’s benefit and advantage. In other words, collectivists are others-oriented (Wong 2010), behaving in ways that fall in line with the needs of a society. This is seen as a step towards
maintaining harmony and good relationship with others since group goals are all important. Asma and Gallagher (1994) state that harmony and maintaining good relationship is crucial in business communications in Malaysia.

This is only the beginning part of the article. PLEASE CLICK HERE TO READ THE ARTICLE IN PRINTER-FRIENDLY VERSION.

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