# Fair Means or Foul?  Dilemmas in Group Assessment

An Overview of Qualitative Feedback

Seven Lecturers with Experience delivering Single Graded Group Assessment

Single Graded Group Assessment – where a single mark is awarded to a group of students for a shared group activity

Spot the
Difference

## Group Consciousness - Difficult to Pin Down Conceptually

Fundamental premise across all disciplines
Anthropology
Evolution
Psychology
Sociology
Political philosophy
Cultural Studies

But Even
Neurology
Linguistics

# Key Point

**Powerful Forces at work when we engage in Group Activity**
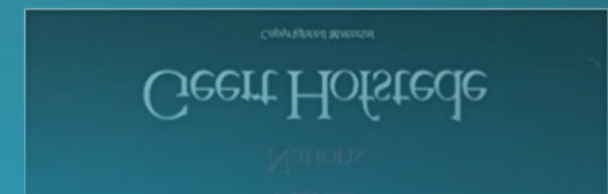
Obvious Question…

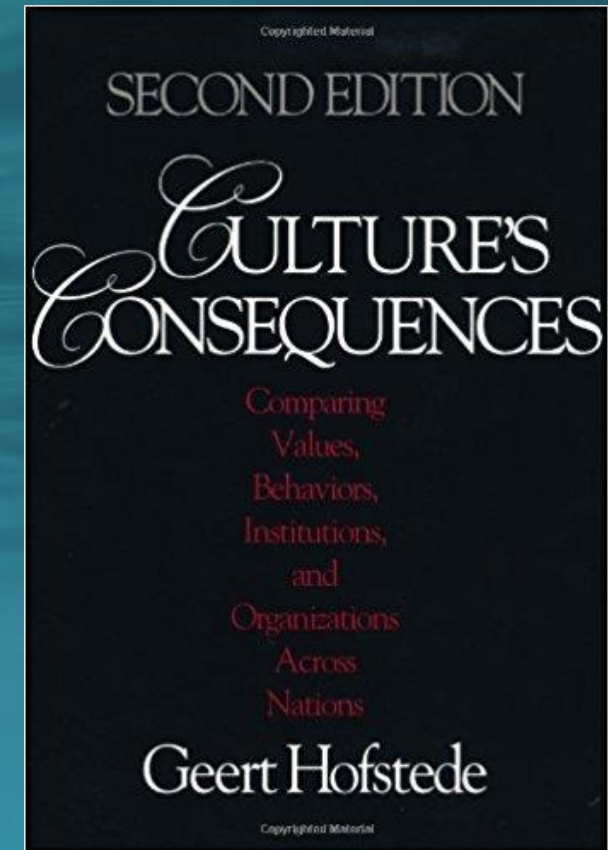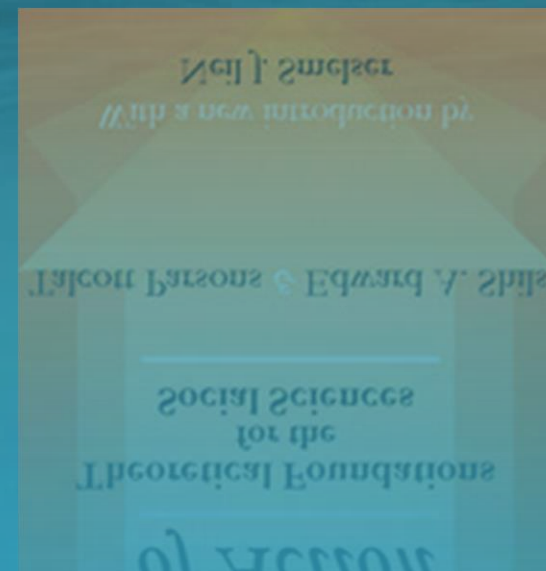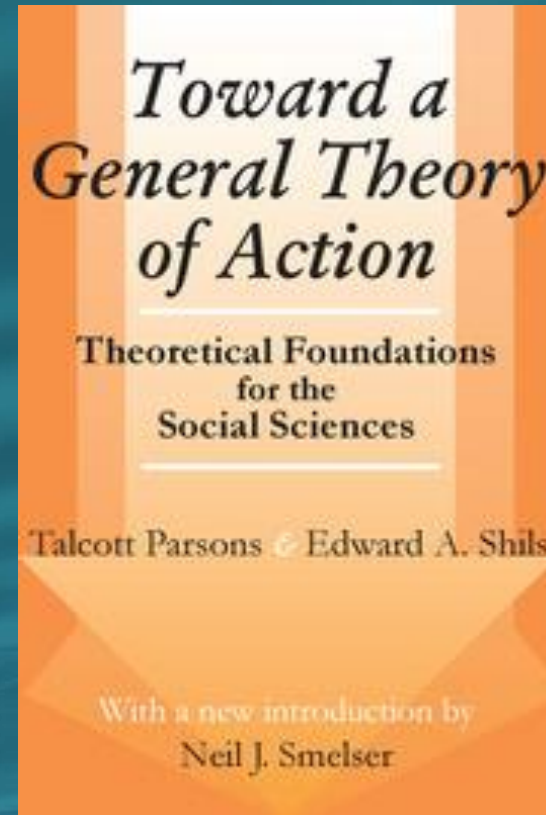Why then is there reluctance to engage in Group Activity
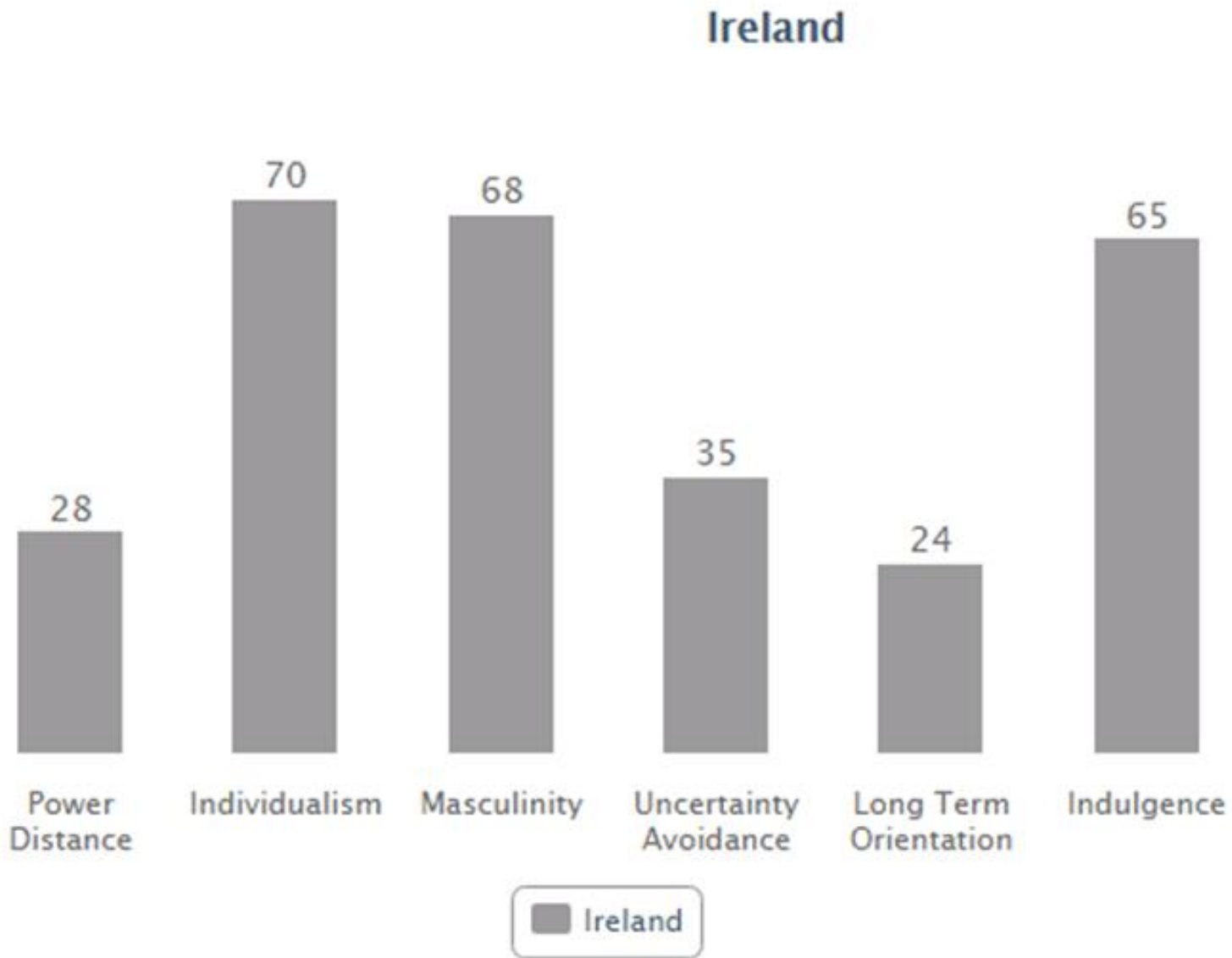
## Talcott Parsons and Shils –

U.S. sociologists Talcott Parsons and Edward Shils (1951, p. 77) suggested that all human action is determined by five pattern variables, choices between pairs of alternatives – one of which was: **Self-orientation versus collectivity-orientation**

## Geert Hofstede

Geert Hofstede attempted to measure cultural Convergence and Divergence based on five indices one of which :
**Individualism/collectivism** – Individualistic cultures are those in which people only care for themselves and their close relations. In collectivistic cultures, people belong to ingroups or collectives which care for them in return for loyalty.

## Ireland

Chart showing Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions scores for Ireland:
- Power Distance: 28
- Individualism: 70
- Masculinity: 68
- Uncertainty Avoidance: 35
- Long Term Orientation: 24
- Indulgence: 65

Legend: Ireland

# Hofstede's Culturel Dimensions

| Individualistic / Collectivistic | How personal needs and goals are prioritized vs. the needs and goals of the group/clan/organization. |
|---|---|
| Masculine / Feminine | Masculine societies have different rules for men and women, less so in feminine cultures. |
| Uncertainty Avoidance | How comfortable are people with changing the way they work or live (low UA) or prefer the known systems (high UA). |
| Power Distance | The degree people are comfortable with influencing upwards. Accept of inequality in distribution on power in society. |
| Time Perspective | Long-term perspective, planning for future, perseverance values vs. short time past and present oriented. |
| Indulgence / Restraint | Allowing gratification of basic drives related to enjoying life and having fun vs. regulating it through strict social norms. |
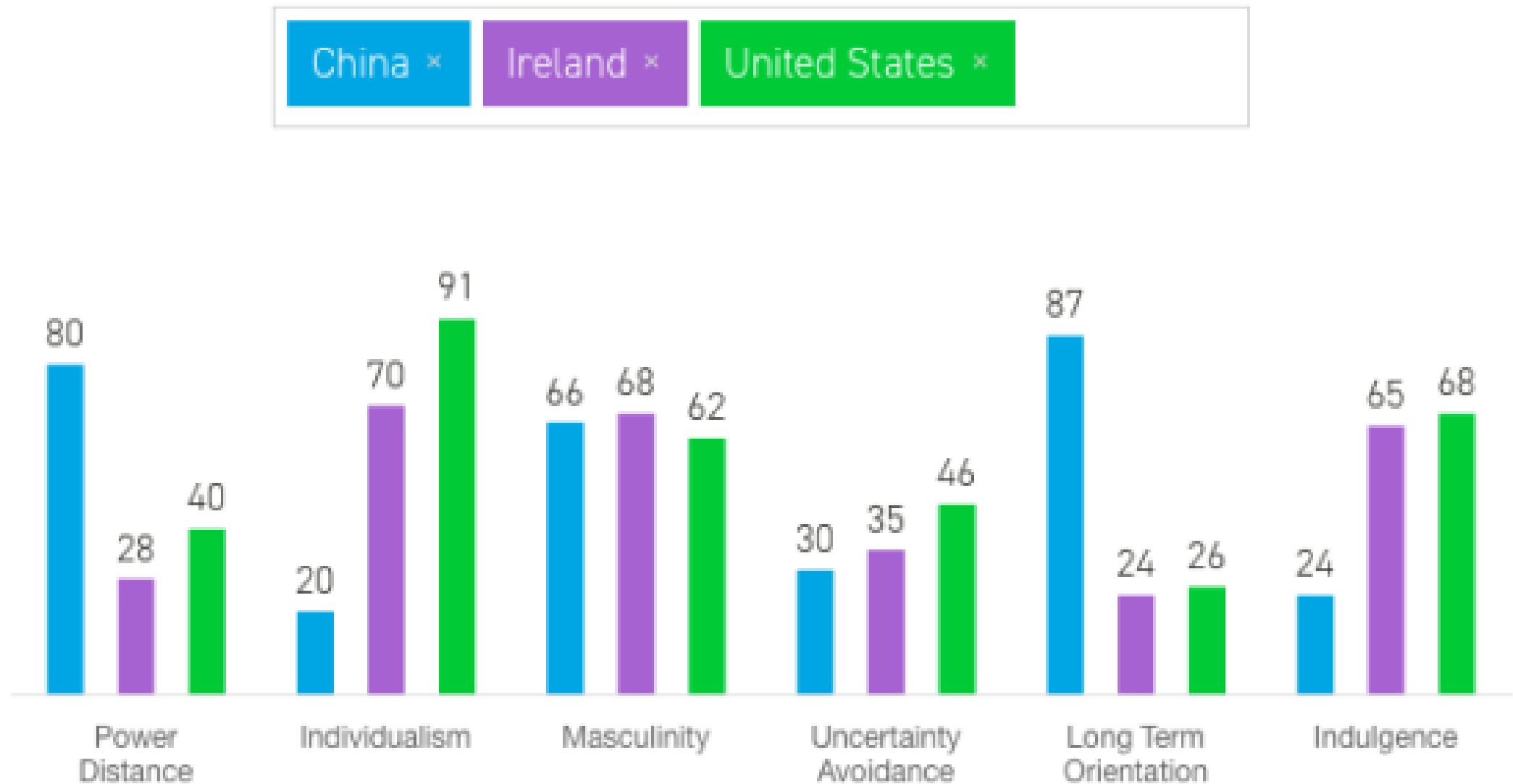
Figure 1: Culture Comparison of China, Ireland, and USA (Hofstede Insights, 2021)

In my experience as a lecturer it has been fantastic…With that kind of group work once you know where the pitfalls are you can usually head it off at the pass.  Also conflict isn't all bad -  i won't say we encourage it, but it is important that students and a counseling and psychotherapy program are introduced to it and that it is allowed to develop and mature and constructive way.

I think that group assignments enhance learning and assessment in terms of teamwork. They have to learn to work in teams.

It can also reveal the consequences of not participating and how it impacts on the group as a whole

The issue was some not putting in as much effort as others and also the fact that some wanted to begin sooner than others. communication and delegation basically.

If it's at award stage it tends to get really problematic.  Their grades are linked up with other students and it is particularly if they see other students as weaker.

# Findings

Students respond quite well never had any issues with it. I don't know what others experiences have been working with the larger groups i know that in the past that was always problematic

I think there is worth in these types of assignments particularly around students learning to work in teams and needing to take responsibility for their end of the bargain, but I also would have my reservations about damaging the group cohesion as a result of the above issues.

The disadvantages are that is introduces the potential for conflict within groups and uneven workloads.

I have never given a group assessment that did not result in problems in some case a deep seeded sense of grievance and unfairness

What I try to do is to sell the assignment not just as an academic exercise hard work they have to do but it's something that they can take out into the community. And I find when I pitch it that way they all buy into it and I have been doing that module for for about three or four years.

Also to have as low a part as possible assigned to the group part. So that's 60 or 70 percent is allocated to the individual component. However there is one module where 100% of the marks there's a lot of two the group component.

now the downside of that and you're grading four or five people giving the set very same grade that can possibly skew the overall award stage results.

I have solved some of the problems by removing the graded component of the group activity – they engage in a group activity but is marked through a reflective appraisal of the experience – the downside students resent not being graded on the work for the activity

# Findings

I pair off the groups intentionally because there is a bit of learning in that. it is really useful for them to get to know the different personalities and to learn from that.

There was another issue and that is whether they were allowed to choose their own groups or whether the groups were assigned. In one case Umm over two years of running the assessment the first year the groups were assigned and there was a lot of problems that year. Whereas the following year they were allowed to choose their own groups and there didn't seem to be the same level of issue being taken with the assessment.

The problem with letting students choose is that you end up with supergroups because they choose strategically.

No matter what I have tried and I have tried everything – from leadership to explaining the rationale and value of it – there is always a sense of unfairness

# Nothing New……

Earl, S. E. (1986). Staff and peer assessment: Measuring an individual's contribution to group performance. Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 11, 60–69. doi:10.1080/0260293860110105

# Emergent Feedback reflected in the Literature

- "Emulating real life." – Alden (2011) argues that group grading emulates real life whereby teams are assessed as teams regardless of individual effort and as such prepares students for the realties of working life.
- **"Free riding" and "free riders" (Brooks and Ammons, 2003, Dingel et al 2013) "social loafers" (Dommeyer, 2007)**
- **Techniques such as "Diarying" found "**at neither the group nor the individual level reduced social loafing in the groups"
- Similar issues arose with the use of peer assessment whereby participants evaluate each other's performance
- **Perceptions that Group work is "Unfair" (Alm & Colnerud, 2015)**
- **Grading actually  "hampers" cooperative information sharing (Hayek, 2015)**
- **Similarly Collaborating or fighting for the marks? (Orr, 2010)** - Students prefer to receive individual grades for their own contribution, and this means that individual assessment and/or structured peer assessment can ease their concerns about grade equity
- Achieving accountability is about the relationship between group work assessment and accountability (i.e., the degree to which each member of the group participates and does their fair share of the work

**What form grading takes** (Forsell et al , 2019)

(a) Reflective/self-assessment,
(b) Combined individual and group assessment
(c) Portfolio can even include electronic means of tracking contributions – "A computer-based portfolio to capture both collective and individual aspects of learning"
(d) Assessor observation, and
(e) Combinations of peer assessment – among the most widely used can involve within the group, and the students outside the group plus the assessor – the latter perceived as fair.  Can involve averages across a shared marking matrix. Several researchers have used and developed further methods based on IWF to improve fairness and reliability
(f) Keep the process of learning in groups separate from the assessment by using group work only as a way to structure learning.

**Responses to these assessments** (Forsell et al , 2019)
- The methods of recorded review and portfolio are perceived as the fairest and most valid methods for group work assessment, with the least preferred being peer assessment - prefer types of group work assessment where each group member's contribution is assessed, and these types of group work assessment are also perceived as being most fair and valid.
- Concerns regarding the possibility of bias and that they might experience a lack of training in using peer assessment Another concern is that they do not like to assess peers because it feels uncomfortable and intimidating
- That's stated - believe that students should play a part in assessment (Forsell et al , 2019)

**Effects** (Forsell et al , 2019)

- Individual – positive effects on students learning - such as generic skills that self-assessment in group work has a positive effect on students' self-regulation and promotes students' learning behaviour towards a meta-cognitive orientation Group work assessment can also have a positive effect on students' motivation.
- Giving individual feedback in group work assessment can increase students' achievement and motivation for learning group work assessment can reduce students' levels of anxiety and stress when cooperative tests are used,
- High-achieving students get lower grades in groups than they normally would have received when working alone, and lower-achieving students received higher grades in groups than they normally would have received individually
- A majority of students also prefer individual assessment over group assessment

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