# An Investigation Into Food Neophobia and Cultural Intelligence: Evidence From Business Classes

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*This study investigated the relationship between food neophobia, the tendency to avoid new foods, and cultural intelligence (CQ). A questionnaire was administered to undergraduate students at a university in the Northwestern United States. Survey administration occurred during the 2018-2019 academic year. The questionnaire included a combination of demographic questions along with two validated survey instruments, the Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS) (Ang & Dyne, 2008) and the Food Neophobia Scale (FNS) (Pliner & Hobden, 1992). CQS was used to measure cultural intelligence and FNS gauged food neophobia. Results indicated a strong correlation between CQ and food neophobia. An analysis of CQ's components showed that the significant drivers of the results were metacognitive/strategy and motivational/drive CQ subconstructs.*

*Keywords: cultural intelligence, food-neophobia, diversity and inclusion, higher education, business*

## INTRODUCTION

When countries and cultures were isolated from one another, they could remain untouched and somewhat pure from the world's influence and needs. They could act more removed in their practices, beliefs, and expectations of their members and how they viewed other ethnicities. Today, due to the ease of travel and technology, as well as the more rapid rate of immigration than in the past, isolation between different cultures is becoming less and less the norm. As a result, the need to recognize, understand, and interact with other cultures has become critical to both individuals and organizations (Moran, Harris, & Moran, 2007).

One way in which cultures interact is through travel, including expatriate employment opportunities. Multinational corporations (MNC) rely on advantages obtained through expatriate activity to thrive in the international business arena (Collings, Scullion, & Morley, 2007). U.S. employees assigned positions abroad or who choose to participate in self-initiated foreign work experiences (SFE) must be able to fluently work among the culture(s) found in their new countries to be successful and seen as an asset within their organizations. Unfortunately, this immersion process can be complicated due to cultural differences

between countries (Hofstede, 2001). Adjustment to the foreign culture and the distance from the employees' home culture have been identified as two major factors leading to poor performance, limited success, and high turnover of ex-pat employees (Cascio, 2006) (Oddou & Mendenhall, 2000). With the growing needs for and the increased shortages of expatriate workers in today's global staffing environment, organizations with even the smallest international scope should focus on choosing, developing, and retaining such employees (Caligiuri & Cascio 1998; Collins et al., 2007; Dowling & Welch, 2004; Evans et al., 2002; Quelch & Bloom, 1999; Scullion, 1994; Scullion & Collings, 2006).

Another way two or more cultures come together is through immigration from one country to another. Historically, most individuals in the U.S. have identified with the Non-Hispanic White population group (U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, 2009). According to a U.S. Census 2010 Special Report (U.S. Census Bureau, United States Census 2010, Special Report #CB11-CN.125, 2011), the proportion of the U.S. total population consisting of Non-Hispanic White Alone individuals remains the largest racial and ethnic group, even though its numbers declined from 69% 2000 to 64% in 2010. Between 2010 and 2020, the Hispanic population grew 2.2 percentage points and now makes up 18.6% of the population. In addition, the Asian alone population grew from 4.8% to 5.9% of the total U.S. population. These same trends are expected to continue with projections for the year 2050 showing the decrease in the Non-Hispanic White Alone population to 46.3% and the growth of both the Asian Alone and Hispanic groups to 7.8% and 30.2%, respectively (U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, 2009; USAFACTS, 2022).

Food is undeniably linked to culture. According to the American Dietetic Association (2002), these demographic shifts will continue to produce changes in the U.S. culture, values, lifestyles, and food choices. Usinger (1998) related 'positive' oral pleasure, derived from proficiency in liking a host country's food and drinks, to satisfaction in the country and a longer anticipated duration of foreign stay. If an individual is willing to try different foods, they may not be as orally deprived as early in a foreign county. They may be more able to incorporate new ethnic foods into their home diet seamlessly. Following this reasoning, an individual with a high CQ may be more willing to try new foods (with low food neophobia). More specifically, this study examined the relationship between food neophobia, the tendency to avoid new foods, and Cultural Intelligence (CQ).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Food Neophobia

Pliner and Hobden (1992) developed the Food Neophobia Scale (FNS) to measure food neophobia. The FNS consists of ten questions rated on a seven-point Likert scale. FNS was validated in Canada using a sample of undergraduate students. Since its development, it has been used in research studies for thirty years. Using the *Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses* guidelines, Rabandan and Bernabeu (2021) conducted a systematic review of studies using the Food Neophobia Scale. With the requirement that the paper report FNS data in English, 102 papers were reviewed. Following this, they concluded that studies could be classified into four groups. The first group focused on the development and validity of the scale. A second group was studies on the use of the scale to explore consumer acceptance of food products or processes created using novel technologies. The third group explored the origin of food neophobia according to genetic and cultural inheritance and physiologic factors. The last group focused on socioeconomic variables such as age, income, and education. This last group is of particular interest for the current study.

According to Rabandan and Bernabeu (2021), there is consensus on the influence of income and education with a negative association between an individual's food neophobia score and higher education and income. For example, Predier et al. (2020) confirmed the association between food neophobia and demographic factors by finding a significant relationship between age and gender with the FNS for a sample from Italy. Using a sample of Australian high school students from remote rural and cosmopolitan locations, Flight et al. (2003) found that city students were less neophobic and had a greater exposure to cultural diversity. They concluded that a greater exposure to cultural diversity influenced students' response to unfamiliar food.

**Cultural Intelligence (CQ)**

The concept of cultural intelligence (CQ) has been developed specifically for the area of business and introduced to better handle the slippery cultural competency concept in that arena. Cultural Intelligence is a theory developed by Early and Ang (Early, 2003; Early & Ang, 2003) that uses a measurement known as Cultural Quotient (CQ), also referred to as Cultural Intelligence, to allow a better understanding of the cultural ability of an individual, complex person and how to prepare that person for new cultural experiences. Stemming from the literature on cultural competency training, Early and Ang (Early, 2003; Early & Ang, 2003) theorize that managers with a higher CQ (the real measure being the cultural quotient of the person or CQ) would be more trainable and a better choice, and therefore more successful, for specific culture-based assignments such as dealing with a multicultural business setting.

CQ (Early & Peterson, 2004) consists of four core elements: a) metacognition (the process individuals use to acquire and understand knowledge); b) cognition (thinking, learning, and strategizing); c) motivation (efficacy, confidence, persistence, value congruence, and affect for new culture); and d) behavior (social mimicry, and behavioral repertoire). Each one of these core elements is described in more detail.

Metacognitive CQ is an individual's cultural consciousness and awareness during interactions from different cultural backgrounds. Ang and Dyne (2008, p. 17) offer three reasons why this is an essential component of CQ. "First, it promotes active thinking about people and situations when cultural backgrounds differ. Second, it triggers critical thinking about habits, assumptions, and cultural bound thinking. Third, it allows individuals to evaluate and revise their mental maps, consequently increasing the accuracy of their thinking."

Cognitive CQ is an individual's cultural knowledge of norms, practices, and expectations in different cultural experiences. "Given the wide variety of cultures in the contemporary world, cognitive CQ indicates knowledge of cultural universals as well as knowledge of cultural differences" (Ang & Dyne, 2008, p. 17).

Motivational CQ is an individual's capability to direct attention and energy toward cultural differences. Described as a combined formation of self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation resulting in a basic sense of confidence and interest in novel settings, motivational CQ results in successful intercultural interactions when used in cross-cultural situations.

Behavioral CQ is an individual's capability to exhibit appropriate verbal and nonverbal actions when interacting with people from different cultures. Ang and Dyne (2008, p. 17) state that Behavioral CQ is very important because it is often the most visible characteristic of social interactions and that a "broad repertoire or range of behaviors" is necessary. They continue by quoting Hall (1959) as saying that "nonverbal behaviors are especially critical because they function as a 'silent language' that conveys meaning in subtle and covert ways."

The measure of CQ is affected by the training and education an individual would have had throughout their life. These life experiences, or cultural training opportunities, are, according to this theory, valuable (adding to a person's overall cultural abilities) only to the extent that they meet certain threshold levels of the intercultural setting demands of the situation. These demands include: a) intensity of the cultural experience (i.e., whether a person was alone in a new culture or in a mixed team at home); b) duration of the cultural experience (i.e., a week or a year); and c) nature/type of cultural experience (i.e., whether the experience was more work-related or in a social context).

Ott and Michailova (2018) provide the most recent literature review of cultural intelligence (CQ) studies. Their process resulted in a review of 73 studies that were either conceptual or empirical in nature. Since 2008, CQ has been used increasingly in empirical research. Ott and Michailova (2018) further divided these studies based on how CQ was used. They divided them into studies where CQ was used as a dependent, an independent, and a mediating or moderating variable. This resulted in 40 papers published in top-tier journals that used CQ as an independent variable. These papers were divided into three categories: 1) those that investigated the relationship between cultural adjustment and adaptation; 2) those that studied the relationship between performance and effectiveness; and 3) those that looked at cross-cultural leadership and other outcomes. Chen et al. (2014) found that overall, CQ had a positive relationship to cultural adjustment, with it being more relevant for general and interactive adjustments and less suitable for work adjustments. Malek and Budhwar (2013) demonstrated that cognitive and metacognitive CQ

influence all adjustment forms. Motivational CQ has been shown to be associated with general and work adjustment (Huff et al., 2014).

Using the 20-item CQ self-reported scale, Lee et al. 2013 found that CQ directly impacts job performance and cross-cultural effectiveness. However, studies on performance and effectiveness have found that the individual components of CQ are important (Ott & Michailova, 2018). For example, metacognitive and behavioral CQ predict task performance (Ang et al., 2007). Malek and Budhwar (2013) found that motivational and behavioral CQ directly influenced contextual performance.

Recently, CQ has been studied to establish its relationship with different areas in the tourism industry. For example, Lam et al. (2022) examined the relationship between CQ and job satisfaction. The study found that cognitive CQ and motivational CQ influenced the job satisfaction of frontline employees of luxury hotels. Li et al. (2022) investigated the relationship between CQ and positive behaviors such as helping and tolerance among residents. The study found a positive relationship between CQ and helping behavior. Finally, Coves-Martinez et al. (2022) found that a tourist's CQ influenced their satisfaction with a travel app and the tourism experience. Johns et al. (2001) suggested a need for further research into the effects of ethnic culture on food neophobia. This study examines the relationship between food neophobia, measured by the food neophobia scale, and cultural intelligence.

## HYPOTHESES

Flight et al. (2003) reported a weak or moderate association between the food neophobia scale and cultural diversity exposure for the city and rural students. Macarello et al. (2020) confirmed a relationship between food neophobia and the openness to a different culture. In a qualitative study on the cultural intelligence of international students studying in the United States, Thompson (2018) reported that several students cited food as one of the cultural differences that stood out. Therefore, it is hypothesized that individuals with a high CQ are more likely to measure lower on the food neophobia scale. This resulted in the first hypothesis stated in the alternative form.

***$H_{A1}$:*** *Cultural Intelligence (CQ) will be negatively related to Food Neophobia.*

CQ (Ang et al., 2007) consists of four core elements: a) metacognition/strategy (the process individuals use to acquire and understand knowledge); b) cognition/knowledge (knowing norms, practices, and conventions in different cultures); c) motivation/drive (capability to direct attention energy toward learning about cultural differences); and d) behavior/action (capability to interact with people from different cultures using appropriate verbal and nonverbal actions). Research has shown that CQ elements are differentially associated with adjustments and adaptation. For example, Ang et al. (2007) found that metacognitive and cognitive CQ were positively related to cultural judgment and decision making, while metacognitive and behavioral CQ was positively related to task performance. Malek and Budhwar (2013) discovered that motivational and behavioral CQ indirectly increase task performance. They also determined that cognitive and metacognitive CQ positively influence all forms of cultural adjustment (general, interaction, and work). These separate elements of CQ being associated with food neophobia result in the following four hypotheses stated in the alternative form.

***$H_{A2}$:*** *Metacognitive/Strategy CQ will be negatively related to Food Neophobia.*

***$H_{A3}$:*** *Cognitive/Knowledge CQ will be negatively related to Food Neophobia.*

***$H_{A4}$:*** *Motivational/Drive CQ will be negatively related to Food Neophobia.*

***$H_{A5}$:*** *Behavioral/Action CQ will be negatively related to Food Neophobia.*

## STUDY METHODOLOGY

### Sample Collection

A questionnaire was administered to undergraduate students at a university in the Northwestern United States. Survey administration occurred during the 2018-2019 academic year. The survey administration occurred mainly in business courses; however, several of these courses were highly enrolled by non-business majors as the courses fulfilled general education requirements at the given institution. Students were assured of anonymity and were given class time to complete the survey in person. The survey took participants about 15 minutes to complete and was administered and collected by the course instructor. There was no incentive for participants to complete the survey. In total, 172 complete surveys were collected.

### Measures

**Food neophobia** (FN), the tendency to avoid new foods, was measured using the original food neophobia scale (FNS) developed by Pliner and Hobden (1992). The FNS is composed of ten questions, each item rated on a 7-point Likert scale. FNS consists of five positively worded questions and five negatively worded questions. To make the interpretation of the results easier, the five negative questions were reversed scored. After the reverse scoring of these questions, all questions were then averaged to obtain an aggregate food neophobia (FN) score.

**Cultural intelligence (CQ)** was measured using the self-reported Cultural Intelligence Scale (Ang & Dyne, 2008). The questionnaire consisted of 20 questions scored on a 7-point Likert scale. The analysis used the average of the 20-item scale as the measure for overall CQ. The scale was further divided into its four subcomponents: metacognitive/strategy, cognitive/knowledge, motivational/ drive, and behavioral/ action CQ. The average of the first four questions was used for metacognitive/strategy CQ. The average of questions five through ten (six questions) was used as the measure for cognitive/knowledge CQ. The following five questions were used to measure motivational/drive CQ, and the average of the last five questions was used to measure behavioral/action CQ.

### Regression Design

The research methodology consisted of estimating two regression models using a sample of students. Regression Model 1 was used to test the first hypothesis. It was estimated as follows:

$$NF_i = \alpha + \beta_2 CQ + \in \tag{1}$$

The dependent variable was food neophobia (*NF*). The test variable in Model 1, used to test the first hypothesis, is cultural intelligence (*CQ*). If the coefficient ($\beta_2$) on CQ is significantly different from zero, then there is evidence supporting the first hypothesis. Model 2 was used to test the other four hypotheses. It was estimated as follows:

$$NF_i = \alpha + \beta_1 MET + \beta_2 COG_i + \beta_3 MOT_i + \beta_4 BEH_i + \in \tag{2}$$

Again, the dependent variable was food neophobia (*NF*). The test variables in Model 2, used to test the second, third, fourth, and fifth hypotheses, were metacognitive/strategy (MET) CQ, cognitive/knowledge (COG) CQ, motivational/drive (MOT) CQ, and behavioral/action (BEH) CQ, respectively. Coefficients for each test variable significantly differed from zero, indicating support for the hypothesis.

## ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

### Participants

Table 1 lists the frequency and percentages of dichotomous categorical demographic variables. The sample consists of 52 females and 120 males. Seventy percent were between 17 and 22 years old, while

another 16% were between the ages of 23 to 36. Finally, 92 were freshmen or sophomores, while the other 77 juniors, seniors, graduate students, and 3 reported as other.

**TABLE 1**
**FREQUENCY AND PERCENTAGES OF DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES**

| Gender | Quantity N=172 | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Female | 52 | 30.2% |
| Male | 120 | 69.8% |
|  |  |  |
| **AGE (in years)** |  |  |
| 17 to 22 | 120 | 69.8% |
| 23 to 26 | 28 | 16.3% |
| 27 o 30 | 8 | 4.7% |
| 31 to 34 | 5 | 2.9% |
| Greater than 34 | 11 | 6.4% |
|  |  |  |
| **College Level** |  |  |
| Freshman | 49 | 28.5% |
| Sophomore | 43 | 25.0% |
| Junior | 37 | 21.5% |
| Senior | 25 | 14.5% |
| Graduate | 15 | 8.7% |
| Other | 3 | 1.8% |

## RESULTS

Model 1 was used to test the first hypothesis. Using Model 1, a simple linear regression was run using cultural intelligence (CQ) to predict food neophobia (the tendency to avoid new foods), as shown in Table 2. A significant regression equation was found $R^2 = .13, F(1, 170) = 24.988, p < .01$, as CQ explained 13% of the variance. The analysis of Model 1 shows that the test variable, the overall measure of cultural intelligence CQ, was significant and negative related to the dependent variable food neophobia foods (FN) ($t = -5.00, p < .10$), and therefore, there was support for the first hypothesis. This can be interpreted to mean that the individuals with a low CQ would have a higher tendency to avoid new foods than those individuals with a high CQ.

Also shown in Table 2 are the results for Model 2. This model was used to test the second, third, fourth, and fifth hypotheses. A significant regression equation was found, $R^2 = .20, F(1, 167) = 10.414, p < .01$, as four predictors explained 20% of the variance. The analysis of Model 2 showed that Metacognitive/strategy CQ (MET) significantly predicted food neophobia ($t = -2.38, p < .01$), and thus there is support for the second hypothesis. Also, significantly predicting food neophobia ($t = -3.32, p < .01$), providing support for the fourth hypothesis, was motivation/drive CQ (MOT). The analysis of Model 2 did not show support for the third and fifth hypotheses as neither of the associated test variables, COG nor BEH, was significantly related to food neophobia.

**TABLE 2**
**REGRESSION ANALYSIS**

| Variable | Model 1 | | Model 2 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Coefficient | t-value | Coefficient | t-value |
| Intercept | 4.739 | 12.18*** | 5.368 | 13.08*** |
| CQ | -0.411 | -5.00*** | | |
| MET/Strategy | | | -0.271 | -2.87*** |
| COG/Knowledge | | | 0.043 | 0.55 |
| MOT/Drive | | | -0.304 | -3.32*** |
| BEH/Action | | | 0.072 | 0.92 |
| | | | | |
| R-Square | 0.128 | | 0.200 | |
| *Note. * p < .10, ** p < .05, *** p < .01.* | | | | |

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study support the conclusions of Mascarello et al. (2020) that emphasize a relationship between food neophobia and attitudes towards different cultures. As stated by Mascarello et al. (2020), the implication that can be drawn is that food has symbolic and cultural value. This work also supports using the four components of CQ when drawing conclusions. Other studies have found, for example, Huff et al. (2014), motivational CQ to be positively related to general adjustment. This study finds motivational/drive CQ negatively associated with food neophobia. Food could be considered a general adjustment; however, further research must be done before making this conclusion. In addition, Malek and Budhwar (2013) found that cognitive and metacognitive CQ influence all forms of adjustment while only metacognitive CQ influences food neophobia.

This study has both implications for future research as well as practical implications. First, any additional research using CQ must control for the concept of food neophobia. Second, the relationship between food neophobia and CQ must be studied further. Numerous variables could be drawn on to help improve the understanding of the relationship. For example, a more diverse sample would help investigate the interaction between variables such as age and income level with CQ and food neophobia. Also, Thomas et al. (2008) measure CQ by conceptualizing it as having three components: knowledge, cross-cultural skills, and metacognition, with the interaction between the three resulting in CQ. Finally, it is unclear from the findings whether CQ predicts food neophobia or food neophobia predicts CQ. Further understanding of this relationship would help with the interpretation of the results and with how they may be used.

From a practical standpoint, the results from the study provide exciting implications. First, when trying to be more inclusive when diversifying a population, the food those diverse cultures prefer and the availability of that food locally must be considered. This could affect the places potential employers and universities recruit from and influence how to spend available resources. On the flip side, it will be essential to consider when selecting individuals that will be entering a different culture to consider whether they have a low or high food neophobia rating.

While this study has several strengths and is a significant contribution to Cultural Intelligence and food neophobia research, the study's limitations must be discussed. The sample for the analysis could also be more diverse from an institutional perspective to better represent undergraduate educational institutions across the nation. Private institutions could be included in the study, and more non-business courses could be surveyed to represent the overall student population better. Additionally, many common biases exist with self-report surveys, such as selective memory, telescoping, attribution, and exaggeration.

## CONCLUSION

This study aimed to examine the relationship between food neophobia and cultural intelligence (CQ). Five hypotheses were tested using food neophobia, measured using Pliner and Hobden's (1992) Food Neophobia Scale as the dependent variable. The first hypothesis test whether CQ, as measured by The Cultural Intelligent Scale (CQS) Self Report (Ang & Dyne, 2008), significantly predicted food neophobia. Results indicated a significant negative relationship between CQ and food neophobia. This means the higher a person's CQ, the lower their food neophobia.

When using the CQS, CQ can be decomposed into four parts. The second set of hypotheses tested whether these four parts were individually related to food neophobia. Results indicated that two of the four parts, metacognitive/strategy, and motivation/drive, were negatively associated with food neophobia. There was no evidence to support a relationship between the other components of CQ, cognitive/knowledge and behavioral/action, and food neophobia.

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