

Nunchi

...how to read a room

Cindy J. Lahar, PhD



눈치
nunchi

눈치 (nunchi)

(n.) the subtle art of listening and gauging others' moods; the ability to know what not to say in a certain social situation

nunchi (눈치)

(n.) lit. “eye-measure”; the subtle art and ability to listen and gauge others’ moods; the awareness of your surrounding that allows you to read the atmosphere and react to it appropriately

Nunchi

눈치 - Korean

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THE OTTER WAY OF LIFE

Why Can't You Read The Room!?

Nunchi: The Korean secret to happiness and success.



@robert.the.otter

That's when I discovered a Korean concept called "nunchi". Nunchi roughly translates to "eye measure", a sizing-up of people, situations, and rooms.



In other words,
heightened social awareness.

"Quick nunchi"

means adapting your assumptions based on words, gestures, and expressions so you can respond tactfully.

- Notice who speaks/listen
- Who interrupts
- Who apologises
- Noticing silence
- Noticing avoidance
- Facial expressions
- Body language
- Focusing not only on the individuals, but the entire vibe/character of the room



눈치
nunchi

The Korean Secret to
Happiness and Success

THE
POWER
OF
NUNCHI

Euny Hong

Author of
THE BIRTH OF KOREAN COOL



눈치 nunchi

Class Lesson

Cultural Psychology Class

September 2024



CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY

ACTIVITY: NUNCHI

Four quick definitions of the Korean concept of **Nunchi** (pronounced “noon-chee”):

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Nunchi (Korean)

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눈치 (nunchi)

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(n.) the subtle art and ability to listen and gauge others’ moods.

Nunchi (눈치)

The art of understanding what people are thinking and feeling; sensitivity to the dynamics within a given group.



According to Keith Kim (2013), when someone has nunchi, they are perhaps “quick-witted and can understand the situation quickly”. They can act in accordance with the situation especially in terms of social roles and expectations. On the other hand, there is a term in the Korean language (*nunchi eopta*) that translates as *not* having nunchi. That refers to individuals who lack common sense and may be missing the skills that we may call “emotional intelligence”. It is important

Video Resources

- 2 ½-minute video: Korean-Australians explain the word nunchi, You Tube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oi8hZFHdHDk>
- 7-minute video interview with Euny Hong: The power of nunchi could change your life, You Tube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y0ImdHF3kZk>
- 20-minute podcast discussion: How to properly harness the power of nunchi. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bfn2p0uSzfM>
- 40-minute podcast discussion: What is nunchi, the Halfie Project Podcast. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bfn2p0uSzfM>
- 1-minute (Youtube shorts), The power of nunchi. <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/U2VXqLA4Spw>

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Class Lesson

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Thinking Further:

1. How would you describe your own nunchi? Do you have “quick nunchi” or are you more on the other end of the continuum?
2. Provide an example of quick nunchi. Explain how quick (or slow) nunchi may, or may not, promote success.
3. Describe how nunchi represents the Korean values inherent in a collective community and how it maintains harmony in relationships.
4. Do you watch K-dramas or listen to K-pop music? Search for some examples of nunchi in some popular Korean culture.

Discussion Prompt:

What are some benefits and costs of applying *nunchi* in your daily life? Discuss specific scenarios where *nunchi* could enhance your personal and professional interactions, such as improving empathy, conflict resolution, and relationship building. On the flip side, discuss potential drawbacks, such as the risk of misreading cues or experiencing emotional exhaustion. How can individuals maximize the benefits of *nunchi* while managing its potential costs effectively?



Assessment

Understanding Nunchi

Two embedded exam questions

What does the term "nunchi" refer to according to Keith Kim (2013)?

- a. a lack of emotional intelligence
- b. the ability to understand social situations quickly
- c. an expression of individualism in social settings
- d. a type of emotional intelligence training

In collectivistic cultures like Korea, why is nunchi considered important?

- a. It helps individuals assert their personal opinions.
- b. It allows individuals to ignore social roles and expectations.
- c. It enables individuals to read the room and maintain harmony.
- d. It promotes competition among peers.



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88%

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100%

Interest in Korean Culture

88% reported increased interest

Responses to the question asking if they are more interested in learning other things about Korean culture after learning about nunchi.

	#	%
Very much	15	45
A bit	14	43
No change	4	12
No, or not much	0	0

= 88%

N=34 students in Cultural Psychology, Fall 2024

Lessons can be adaptable to many disciplines and easily shared (varied discussion prompts provided)

Such small, embedded lessons can take great strides in increasing interest in a foreign culture

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Half of social life is nunchi.

Korean adage

감사합니다

Thank you!

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Contact

Cindy J. Lahar, PhD. Professor of Psychology and Program Coordinator for Psychology, University of South Carolina Beaufort, Bluffton, SC. 29909

Email: CLAHAR@uscb.edu





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Thank you!