2 EASTERN AND WESTERN PERSPECTIVES ON POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

How "ME + WE = US" Might Bridge the Gap

Contributions From Phil McKnight Included

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

2.1 Describe the main differences and core emphases in individualist and collectivist mindsets

2.2 Identify major Western and Eastern influences regarding strengths perspectives in different cultural groups

2.3 Compare and contrast how value systems, orientation to time, and thought processes impact manifestation of strengths

2.4 Understand that value of different constructs represent key factors in East and West cultural norms

2.5 Critique a perspective focused solely on "Me" or "We" and cultivate an understanding of a balanced approach being most healthful


A MATTER OF PERSPECTIVE

Positive psychology scholars aim to define specific strengths and highlight the many paths that lead to better lives (Chang, Yu et al., 2016; Snyder et al., 2021). As Western civilization and European events and values shaped the vantage point of the field of psychology, it is not surprising that the origins of positive psychology have focused more on the values and experiences of Westerners. Constructs such as **hope**, optimism, and personal self-efficacy, among others, are particularly valued in these cultures and have been prominent throughout Western history. As our views in the field have broadened to understand the importance of including non-Western ideologies, populations, and ideas, however, scholars have begun to take a wider historical and cultural context into account to understand strengths and the practices associated with living well (see, e.g., Layous et al., 2017; Shin et al., 2020; Sue & Constantine, 2003). In this chapter

we revisit the previously neglected wisdoms of the Eastern traditions in addition to those origi-
nating in the West, with the goal of adding different viewpoints about human strengths within
a cultural context.

"A good fortune may forebode a bad luck, which may in turn disguise a good fortune."
This Chinese proverb exemplifies the Eastern perspective that the world and its inhabitants are
in a perpetual state of flux. Thus, just as surely as good times occur, so too will bad times visit
us. This expectation of and desire for balance distinguishes many Easterners' views of optimal
functioning from the more linear path taken by Westerners to resolve problems and monitor
progress. Ever adaptive and mindful, Eastern populations move with the cycle of life until the
change process becomes natural and **enlightenment** (i.e., being able to see things clearly for
what they are) is achieved. While Western ideologies center on the search for rewards in the
physical plane, Eastern mindsets seek to transcend the human plane and rise to the spiritual.

In this chapter, we discuss and contrast several Western and Eastern historical and phil-
osophical traditions that demonstrate how these different groups characterize important
strengths and life outcomes. Next, we discuss some of the inherent and fundamental differences
between Eastern and Western value systems, thought processes, and life outcomes sought. We
also articulate the idea of the "good life" from these two perspectives and discuss the associated
strengths that assist each group in attaining positive life outcomes. We then delve into a discus-
sion of some specific concepts that are deemed to be necessary qualities for achieving the "good
life" in each group. It is important to note that what is viewed as the "good life" may be different
in each cultural group. Although we will not always enclose this term in quotation marks as we
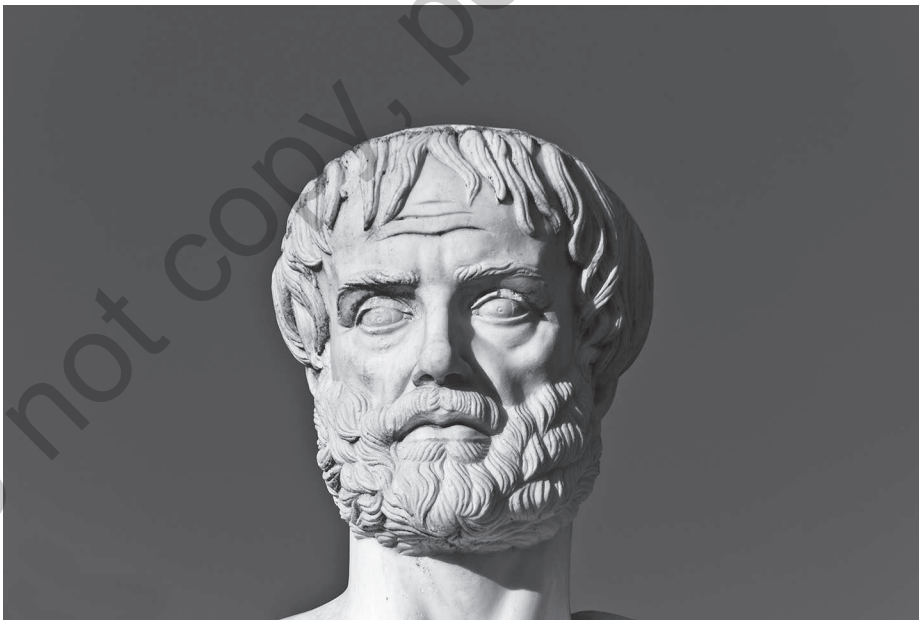
Aristotle

do here, please note that it is always culturally bound. Also important is that in discussing these groups with broad strokes, we realize that in-group diversity is also present. In closing, we talk about the ME perspective and the WE perspective and give our thoughts on trying to see things from more than one perspective.

HISTORICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITIONS

To summarize thousands of years of Western and Eastern ideology and traditions is obviously beyond the scope of this chapter. Therefore, we highlight the basic tenets of three influential Western traditions: (1) **Athenian**, (2) **Judeo-Christianity**, and (3) **Islam**, as well as the less well-known but important teachings from American Indian **Anishinaabe** traditions that also relate to current understandings of strengths. Next, four influential Eastern disciplines are discussed: (1) **Confucianism**, (2) **Taoism**, (3) **Buddhism**, and (4) **Hinduism**.

Western Influences: Athenian, Judeo-Christian, Islamic, and Anishinaabe Traditions

Athenian Views

Discussion of virtue and human strength is something on which both Plato and Aristotle focused heavily in their teachings in Ancient Greece. Aristotle, after expanding on Plato's ideas regarding virtue, detailed 11 moral virtues: *courage, moderation, generosity, munificence* (this relates to money spending at an appropriate level), *magnificence* (described as "greatness of soul"), *even temper, friendliness, truthfulness, wit* (describing an ability to laugh and have fun at an appropriate level), *justice*, and *friendship* (Solomon, 2006). In addition to these moral virtues, Aristotle described intellectual virtues (mainly associated with ideas regarding wisdom) and believed that "strength of character, as inculcated by the political community, would lead to enduring human excellence" (Solomon, 2006, p. 9).

Judeo-Christianity

Followers of Judaism and Christianity are instructed by The Christian Bible and Hebrew Bible (or Tanakh) and their discussions of virtues in many chapters and verses. In the Old Testament (found in both bibles, though in different orders), the virtues of *faith, hope*, and *charity* are highlighted and encouraged and were later discussed as part of the "Seven Heavenly Virtues" by Thomas Aquinas (Williams & Houck, 1982). According to historians, Aquinas lists these virtues as *fortitude* (courage), *justice, temperance, wisdom* (these four are often called the cardinal virtues; Peterson & Seligman, 2004), *faith, hope*, and *charity* (Williams & Houck, 1982). Other scholars cite the Ten Commandments given by Moses in the Old Testament as directives toward cultivating certain strengths within the Jewish tradition. Peterson and Seligman (2004) interpret the acts that the commandments prohibit as falling under the category of particular cardinal virtues: "Justice is implied in prohibitions against murder, theft, and lying; temperance in those against adultery and covetousness; and transcendence generally within the divine origin of the commands" (p. 48).

Other mentions are made of various gifts and strengths throughout the New Testament in the Christian Bible. For example, the Book of Romans describes the "gifts" that are valued by the Judeo-Christian God and includes strengths such as leadership, faith, mercy, love, joy, hope, patience, hospitality, and others (12:3–21). In addition, the Book of Proverbs has many affirmations of specific virtuous behaviors (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). In the prologue of this book of the Bible, the following words are given as the purpose and theme of Proverbs:

1. The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel:

2. for attaining wisdom and discipline; for understanding words of insight;

3. for acquiring a disciplined and prudent life, doing what is right and just and fair;

4. for giving prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the young—

(Proverbs 1:1–4)

These words caution followers to live virtuous lives, giving particular weight to the virtue of wisdom. Finally, the Beatitudes discussed in the Book of Matthew give a series of virtuous traits (e.g., meekness, being a "peacemaker," mercy, righteousness, etc.) that are said to be pleasing to God (Matthew 5:1–11).

Another book of Jewish teachings, the Talmud, also provides instructions about living a virtuous life. In the Pirke Avot, or *Ethics of the Fathers*, directives are given on how to live life as an ethical follower of Judaism with lessons on being a hospitable host, particularly to the poor; being fair in decision making and judgments; and seeking peace in everyday life (Bokser, 1989). In addition, the Talmud states, "You shall administer truth, justice and peace within your gates" (Zech 8:16), showing similar value to other religious traditions for these specific virtues.

Allah
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Islam

Although we have added Islam to the "Western" heading in this section as is commonly done in texts that discuss both Western and Eastern religions, it is important to note that scholars disagree as to whether Islam should be considered a Western or an Eastern religion (S. Lloyd-Moffet,

personal communication, November 21, 2013). Islam is practiced by both Western and Eastern individuals and groups, and thus its virtues and practices may be influenced by more than one context.

Islam incorporates many virtues recognizable in other philosophical traditions and categorizes them as moral obligations. Among others, *gratitude* (e.g., to Allah for His benevolence), *love* (of Allah because of His forgiveness), *kindness* (especially toward parents), *justice* (emphasizing fraternity and equality of all), and *courage* (acts of bravery) are valued (Farah, 1968). In addition, there is a strong component of looking out for one's brother, particularly if one has more than one needs. Giving to the poor is a requirement in the Islamic faith reflected in the third pillar, *zakat* (alms), and it is something that is to be done secretly as opposed to directly if possible so that the giver maintains their humility and the recipient is not embarrassed by having to accept the gift (Ahmed, 1999). Abiding by these moral obligations and pillars assists the faithful in pleasing Allah in this tradition.

Anishinaabe Teachings

Although less well known, we would like to share one more set of Western-oriented teachings that come directly from our beginnings in North America. The Ojibwe, part of the Anishinaabe, tell a story that guides values in this cultural group, known as "The Seven Grandfathers' Teachings." In this story, the first elder of the tribe was said to have received knowledge from each of the Seven Grandfathers with the purpose of these gifts being "to help the people live a good life and to respect the Creator, the earth and each other" (Native Women's Centre, 2008, p. 5). These teachings include seven values that should be followed, and each is represented by a different animal; the teachings include *wisdom* (cherishing knowledge; represented by a beaver), *love* (absolute kindness and knowing peace; represented by an eagle), *respect* (honoring creation, other people, and ourselves among others and showing appreciation; represented by a buffalo), *bravery* (facing life with courage; represented by a bear), *honesty* (living life with integrity and being trustworthy; represented by sasquatch, the Wilderness Man), *humility* (being deferent, valuing equity; represented by a wolf), and *truth* (to apply the teachings faithfully; represented by a turtle) (American Indian Health Service of Chicago, 2021; Benton-Banai, 1988; National Museum of the American Indian, n.d.). It is obvious that there is much similarity to the other Western teachings noted in this section. This gives us another connection across groups with valuing of strength and goodness.

Eastern Influences: Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, and Hinduism

Confucianism

Confucius, or the Sage, as he is sometimes called, held that leadership and education are central to morality. Born during a time when his Chinese homeland was fraught with strife, Confucius emphasized morality as a potential cure for the evils of that time (Soothill, 1968), and the tenets of Confucianism are laden with quotations that encourage looking out for others. In fact, one of Confucius's most famous sayings is a precursor of the Golden Rule and can be translated as, "You would like others to do for you what you would indeed like for yourself"

(Ross, 2003; *Analects* 6:28). In some ways, these teachings are parallel to thoughts put forth by Aristotle and Plato regarding the responsibility of leaders to take *charge* of the group, although there is less emphasis in Western writings on the collectivist ideal of taking *care* of others in the group.

The attainment of virtue is at the core of Confucian teachings. The five virtues deemed central to living a moral existence are *jen* (humanity, the virtue most exalted by Confucius and said to encompass the other four virtues), *yi* (duty to treat others well), *li* (etiquette and sensitivity for others' feelings), *zhi* (wisdom), and *xin* (truthfulness). Confucian followers must strive to make wise decisions based on these five virtues; this continual striving leads the Confucian follower to enlightenment, or the good life.

Confucius
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Taoism

Ancient Taoist beliefs are difficult to discuss with Western audiences partly because of the untranslatable nature of some key concepts in the tradition of Taoism. Lao-Tzu (the creator of the Taoist tradition) states in his works that his followers must live according to the Tao (pronounced "dow" and roughly translated as "the Way"). The Chinese character portraying the concept of the Way is a moving head and "refers simultaneously to direction, movement, method, and thought" (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 42; Ross, 2003); Tao is the energy that surrounds everyone and is a power that "envelops, surrounds, and flows through all things" (*Western Reform Taoism*, 2003, p. 1).

The Way
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According to Taoist traditions, the difficulty in understanding the Way stems from the fact that one cannot teach another about it. Instead, understanding flows from experiencing the Way for oneself by fully participating in life. In this process, both good and bad experiences can contribute to a greater understanding of the Way. Achieving naturalness and spontaneity

in life is the most important goal in Taoist philosophy. Thus, the virtues of *humanity, justice, temperance*, and *propriety* must be practiced by the virtuous individual without effort (Cheng, 2000). One who has achieved transcendence within this philosophy does not have to think about optimal functioning but behaves virtuously naturally.

Buddhism

Seeking the good of others is woven throughout the teachings of "the Enlightened One" (i.e., the Buddha). In one passage, the Buddha is quoted as saying, "Wander for the gain of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world" (Sangharakshita, 1991, p. 17). At the same time, the Buddha teaches that suffering is a part of being and that this suffering is brought on by the human emotion of desire. In the Buddhist philosophy, **Nirvana** is a state in which the self is freed from desire for anything. It should be noted that both premortal and postmortal nirvana states are proposed as possible for the individual. More specifically, the premortal nirvana may be likened to the idea of the ultimate good life in this philosophy. Postmortal nirvana may be similar to the Christian idea of heaven.

Like the other Eastern philosophies, Buddhism gives an important place to virtue, which is described in several catalogs of personal qualities. Buddhists speak of the *Brahma Viharas*, those virtues that are above all others in importance. These virtues include love (*maitri*), **compassion** (*karuna*), joy (*mudita*), and equanimity (*upeksa*) (Sangharakshita, 1991). The paths to achieving these virtues within Buddhism require humans to divorce themselves from the human emotion of desire to put an end to suffering.

Hinduism

The Hindu tradition differs somewhat from the other three philosophies discussed previously in

Lao-Tzu
E. T. C. Werner, *Myths and Legends of China*, 1922.

Buddha
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that it does not appear to have a specific founder, and it is not clear when this tradition began in history (Stevenson & Haberman, 1998). The main teachings of the Hindu tradition emphasize the interconnectedness of all things. The idea of a harmonious union among all individuals is woven throughout the teachings of Hinduism, which refer to a "single, unifying principle underlying all of Earth" (Stevenson & Haberman, 1998, p. 46).

One's goal within this tradition would be to live life so fully and so correctly that one would go directly to the afterlife without having to repeat life's lessons in a reincarnated form, because, "to return to this world is an indication of one's failure to achieve ultimate knowledge of one's self" (Stevenson & Haberman, 1998, p. 53). Thus, the quest of one's life is to attain ultimate self-knowledge and to strive for ultimate self-betterment. Individuals are encouraged to be good to others as well as to improve themselves. The *Upanishads* state that "good action" is also encouraged in the sense that, if one does not reach ultimate self-knowledge in one's life and thus does have to return to Earth via reincarnation after death, the previous life's good actions correlate directly with better placement in the world in the subsequent life (Stevenson & Haberman, 1998). This process is known as *karma*. The good life in the Hindu tradition, therefore, encompasses individuals who are continually achieving knowledge and continually working toward good actions (Dahlsgaard et al., 2005; Oman & Paranjpe, 2020; Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

SUMMARY OF EASTERN AND WESTERN PHILOSOPHIES

Each of the philosophies discussed here incorporates ideas about the importance of virtue, along with individual strengths, as people move toward the good life. Similarities also can be drawn among the different ideologies, especially in the types of characteristics and experiences that are valued, although there are also differences in terms of which traits are particularly prized. It is also important to mention here (although we will have more to say about this in Chapter 4 in this volume as well) that just because two virtues or values translate to the same word does not mean that they have the same meaning or function. Wisdom, in Judeo-Christian value systems, for example, is often interpreted in the Bible as understanding God's plan and thus is almost impossible for a human person to comprehend. This is somewhat different from the way Confucius talks about *zhi*, also translated as wisdom, in that Confucius focuses more on the idea of zhi as "a moral virtue that involves . . . the ability to transform and regulate the social order" (Raphals, 1992, p. 16). Different again is the Ojibwe understanding of wisdom, which instead involves cherishing knowledge (Native Women's Centre, 2008). It is interesting and thought-provoking, regardless, that so many different cultural groups have thought of what "the good life" should mean from so many different traditions. In today's world, we can make a vow to learn from these different traditions and perhaps in this way approach a truly multicultural understanding of the good life by working to understand the differences in positive psychology viewed from each perspective.

EAST MEETS WEST

Despite having some similarities, Eastern and Western ideologies stem from very different historical events and traditions. We begin this section with a brief discussion of these two different value systems (**individualism** and **collectivism**). Next, we explore ways in which differences can be seen explicitly in each cultural approach with regard to orientations toward time and their respective thought processes. These cultural differences give more information about characteristics identified as strengths in each culture and ways in which positive life outcomes are pursued and achieved within these cultural contexts.

INDIVIDUALISM: THE PSYCHOLOGY OF ME

Since the publication of Alexis de Tocqueville's (1835/2003) *Democracy in America*, the United States has been known as the land of the "rugged individualist." Since the establishment of American independence in 1776, this rugged individualism has metamorphosed into the "me generation" that held sway from the 1960s through the early 1990s (Myers, 2004). In this individualist mindset concern for the individual is greater than concern for the group. As shown in Figure 2.1, when the average person in a society is disposed toward individual independence, that society is deemed individualistic (see the bell-shaped curve drawn with the dotted line).

Core Emphases in Individualism

The three core emphases within individualism include: (a) a sense of independence, (b) a desire to stand out relative to others (**need for uniqueness**), and (c) the use of the self or the individual as the unit of analysis in thinking about life. In societies that emphasize and value individualism, such as the United States, social patterns resemble a loosely interwoven fabric, and it is the norm for each person to see themselves as independent of the surrounding group of people

FIGURE 2.1 ■ Norms and Individual Differences for Individualistic and Collectivistic Societies
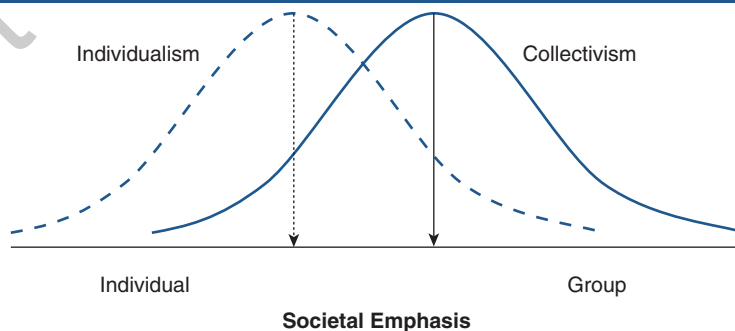
(Triandis, 1995). On this point, research involving many studies supports the conclusion that individualism in the United States reflects a sense of independence rather than dependence (see Oyserman et al., 2002).

A second core emphasis within individualism is that the person wants to stand out relative to the population as a whole. Within individualistic societies, therefore, people follow their own motives and preferences instead of adjusting their desires to accommodate those of the group. The individualistic person thus sets personal goals that may or may not match those of the groups to which they belong (Hamamura et al., 2018; Schwartz, 1994; Triandis, 1988, 1990). Because of the individualistic propensity to manifest one's specialness, coupled with societal support for actions that show such individuality, it follows that the citizens of individualistic societies such as the United States will have a high need for uniqueness. We explore this fascinating motive in greater detail later in this chapter.

A third core emphasis of individualism is that the self or person is the unit of analysis in understanding how people think and act in a society. That is, explanations of events are likely to involve the person rather than the group. Therefore, the various definitions of individualism draw upon worldviews in which personal factors are emphasized over social forces (Hamamura et al., 2018; Triandis, 1995).

These core emphases influence behavior such that secondary emphases flow from the individualistic focus upon the self rather than the group. Goals set by citizens of an individualistic society typically are for the self; moreover, success and related satisfactions also operate at the level of the self. The individualistic person pursues what is enjoyable to them, in contrast to collectivistic people, who derive their pleasures from things that promote the welfare of the group. Of course, the individualist at times may follow group norms, but this usually happens when they have deduced that it is personally advantageous to do so.

As may be obvious by now, individualists are more focused upon their own self-esteem or pleasure in interpersonal relationships and beyond. Individualists also weigh the disadvantages and advantages of relationships before deciding whether to pursue them (Hamamura et al., 2018). Individualists tend to be rather short term in their thinking and often are somewhat informal in their interactions with others.

COLLECTIVISM: THE PSYCHOLOGY OF WE

Thousands of years ago, our hunter–gatherer ancestors realized that there were survival advantages to be derived from banding together into groups with shared goals and interests (Hamamura et al., 2018; Panter-Brick et al., 2001). These groups contributed to a sense of belonging, fostered personal identities and roles for their members, and offered shared emotional bonds (Bess et al., 2002; Hamamura et al., 2018). Moreover, the resources of the people in groups helped them fend off threats from other humans and animals. Simply stated, groups offered power to their members, and as the people in such groups protected and cared for each other they formed social units that were effective contexts for the propagation and raising of offspring. Gathered into groups, humans reaped the benefits of community.

Today, more cultures across the world can be categorized as collectivist in comparison to individualist (Pedrotti & Isom, 2021), which may be in part at least because human beings always have had the shared characteristics of what social psychologist Elliot Aronson (2003) has called "social animals." In this regard, one of our strongest human motives is to belong—to feel as if we are connected in meaningful ways with other people (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Social psychologists Roy Baumeister and Mark Leary (1995) and Donelson Forsyth (1999; Forsyth & Corazzini, 2000) and many others (see Begus et al., 2020; Oyserman & Dawson, 2021) have argued that people prosper when they join together into social units to pursue shared goals.

Core Emphases in Collectivism

Now, let's return to Figure 2.1. As shown there, when the average person in a society is disposed toward group interdependence, that society is labeled collectivist (see the bell-shaped curve drawn with the solid line). At this point, you may be curious as to which country most markedly adheres to collectivistic values. In response to this question, research suggests that China is one of the most collectivistic of the various nations around the globe (see Davis & Wu, 2019; Oyserman, 2017).

The three core emphases of collectivism are (a) dependence, (b) conformity, or the desire to fit in, and (c) perception of the group as the fundamental unit of analysis. First, the dependency within collectivism reflects a genuine tendency to draw one's very meaning and existence from being part of an important group of people. In collectivism, the person goes along with the expectations of the group, is highly concerned about the welfare of the group, and is very dependent upon the other members of the group to which they belong (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Oyserman & Dawson, 2021). The research also corroborates the fact that collectivism rests on a core sense of dependency, as well as an obligation or duty to the ingroup and a desire to maintain **harmony** between people (Oyserman, 2017; Oyserman et al., 2002).

Regarding the desire to fit in, Oyserman et al. (2002) wrote, "The core element of collectivism is the assumption that groups bind and mutually obligate individuals" (p. 5). As such, collectivism is an inherently social approach in which the movement is toward ingroups and away from outgroups. This differs sharply from views in individualist cultures, such as the United States where a desire to fit in is often shunned.

Turning to the third core emphasis, the group as the perceived unit of analysis, the social patterns in collectivist societies reflect close linkages in which people see themselves as part of a larger, more important whole. In brief, the collectivist concern is for the group as a whole rather than its constituents (Hofstede, 1980).

Collectivists are defined in terms of the characteristics of the groups to which they belong. Thus, collectivist-oriented people pay close attention to the rules and goals of the group and often may subjugate their personal needs to those of the group. Moreover, success and satisfaction stem from the group's reaching its desired goals and from feeling that one has fulfilled the socially prescribed duties as a member of that effective, goal-directed, group effort (Oyserman & Dawson, 2021). Collectivist people obviously become very involved in the ongoing activities and goals of their group, and they think carefully about the obligations and duties of the groups

to which they belong (Feinberg et al., 2019). Furthermore, the interchanges between people within the collectivist perspective are characterized by mutual generosity and equity (Toikko & Rantanen, 2020).

Because of their attention to the guidelines as defined by the group, the individual members with a collectivist perspective may be rather formal in their interactions. That is, there are carefully followed, role-defined ways of behaving.

FACTORS IMPACTING HOW STRENGTHS MANIFEST IN ME VS WE CULTURES

The Stories We Tell: Value Systems

As we have already discussed, cultural value systems (including individualist and collectivist perspectives) have significant effects on what a cultural group determines to be a strength a versus weakness (Pedrotti & Edwards, 2014, 2017; Pedrotti et al., 2021). Commonly told childhood stories in both Eastern and Western cultures teach lessons about what is "right" and can give examples of valued traits in this way, and so we would like to share some with you here. The Japanese story "*Momotaro*" ("Peach Boy," Sakade, 1958) gives an excellent example of the cultural importance of the traits of interdependence, the ability to avoid conflict, and duty to the group within Eastern traditions. The story begins with an elderly couple who have always wished for a child, although they are not able to conceive. One day, as the woman is washing her clothes in a stream, a giant peach floats to where she is standing and, upon reaching the woman, splits open to reveal a baby! The woman takes Momotaro home, and she and her husband raise him. At the age of 15, to the great pride of his parents, he decides to go to fight the ogres who have been tormenting the village and to bring back their treasure to his community. Along the way, Momotaro befriends many animals one by one. The animals want to fight each new animal they meet, but at Momotaro's urging, "The spotted dog and the monkey and the pheasant, who usually hated each other, all became good friends and followed Momotaro faithfully" (Sakade, 1958, p. 6). At the end of the story, Momotaro and his animal


Momotaro and His Animal Friends
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friends defeat the ogres by working together and bring the treasure back to the village, where all who live there share in the bounty. As the hero, Momotaro portrays the strengths valued in Japanese and other Asian cultures: (1) He sets out for the good of the group, although in doing so risks individual harm (collectivism); (2) along the way, he stops others from petty squabbling (promoting harmony); (3) he works with these others to achieve his goal (interdependence and collaboration); and (4) he brings back a treasure to share with the group (interdependence and sharing).

This story highlights important Eastern values and differs sharply from common Western stories. First, in most Western fairytales, the hero is fighting alone (which is usually viewed as valiant and brave) and takes dangers on single-handedly, as is the case with the princes in *Sleeping Beauty* and *Rapunzel* and the title character in *The Valiant Little Tailor* (Grimm & Grimm, as cited in Tatar, 2002). These types of tales show that individual independence is often valued over needing others' assistance. In instances where the hero does accept help from another, there is often a price involved where the "helper" makes sure that they also personally benefit from the transaction. Such examples can be found in the classic Western tale of *Rumpelstiltskin* (Grimm & Grimm), where the title character offers to help the maiden only if he can be promised her firstborn in return, or

The Little Mermaid (Andersen, as cited in Tatar, 2002), where the Sea Witch will only help the Little Mermaid to gain legs to meet her love if she surrenders her beautiful voice to the witch. This more closely follows the Western value on personal gain despite potential loss to another, and to some extent is a cautionary tale in terms of what can happen when you accept help (these characters often come to bad ends). Finally, many stories emphasize the hero seeking personal fortune (or payment for service in the form of a bride or kingdom), but few discuss seeking fortune for the community (without any payment) as occurs in many Eastern stories.

A discussion of fairytales is not often included in a scholarly publication such as this; however, these stories tell the tale of our cultural values, and they have been used throughout the ages to promote some behaviors and to decry others. Here it is clear that cultural orientation determines which characteristics are transmitted as the valued strengths to its members.
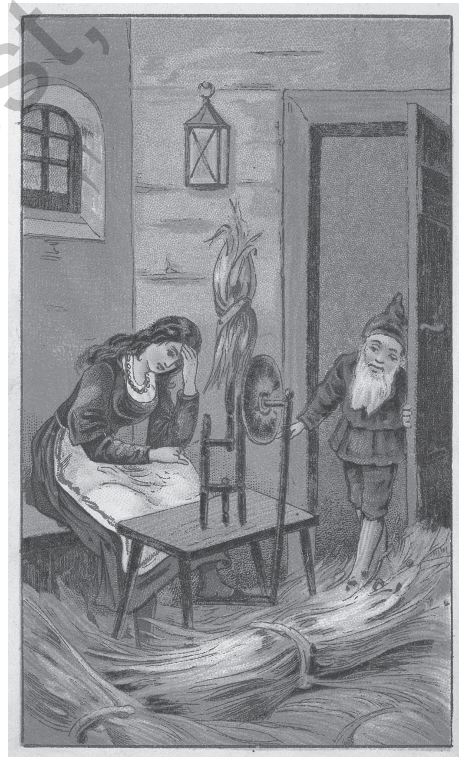
"I will help you, but only if you give your first born to me!"
iStockphoto.com/ZU_09

Orientation to Time

Differences also exist between East and West in terms of their orientations to time. In Western cultures such as the United States, individuals who follow this mindset (particularly within the majority culture) often look to the future. Indeed, some of the strengths that are valued most (e.g., hope, optimism, self-efficacy; see Chapter 8) reflect future-oriented thinking. In Eastern cultures, however, there is a greater focus on and respect for the past. This past-oriented focus is revealed in the ancient Chinese proverb, "To know the road ahead, ask those coming back." Thus, Eastern cultures value the strength of "looking backward" and recognizing the wisdom of their elders, whereas Western cultures are more firmly focused on the future.

Thought Processes

When considering the unique aspects of Western and Eastern thought, we often focus on the nature of specific ideas, but we do not as commonly reflect on the process of linking and integrating ideas. Indeed, as researchers (e.g., Nisbett, 2003) have noted, stark differences exist in the very thought processes used by Westerners and Easterners, and this results in markedly divergent worldviews and approaches to meaning making. Richard Nisbett, Professor Emeritus at the University of Michigan who studied social psychology and cognition during his career illustrates how he, as a Westerner, became aware of some of these differences in thinking during a conversation he had with a student from China. Nisbett (2003) recalls,

> A few years back, a brilliant student from China began to work with me on questions of social psychology and reasoning. One day early in our acquaintance, he said, "You know, the difference between you and me is that I think the world is a circle, and you think it is a line." The Chinese believe in constant change, but with things always moving back to some prior state. They pay attention to a wide range of events; they search for relationships between things; and they think you can't understand the part without understanding the whole. Westerners live in a simpler, more deterministic world; they focus on salient objects or people instead of the larger pictures; and they think they can control events because they know the rules that govern the behavior of objects. (p. xiii)

As Nisbett's story shows, the thinking style used by the Chinese student, and not just the ideas themselves, was vastly different from Nisbett's. This more circular thinking style is best exemplified by the Taoist figure of the *yin* and the *yang.* Most people are familiar with the *yin* and *yang* symbol. This figure represents the circular, constantly changing nature of the world as viewed by Eastern thought. This more circular thinking pattern affects the way in which the Eastern thinker maps out their life and therefore may influence the decisions a person makes in the search for peace. Whereas in the United States we give high priority to the right to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," the goals of the Easterner might have a different focus. Take, for instance, the positive psychological construct of happiness (see Chapter 6). Researchers have posited that happiness (whether group or individual) is a state commonly sought by Easterners and Westerners alike (Diener et al., 1995). The difference in the philosophical approaches to life, however, may make the searches look very different. For example, a Westerner whose goal is

happiness draws a straight line to that goal, looking carefully for obstacles and finding possible ways around them. Their goal is to achieve this eternal happiness, and the strength of hope is used to achieve this. For the Easterner who follows the *yin* and the *yang*, however, this goal of happiness may not make sense (Wong & Liu, 2018). If one were to seek happiness and then achieve it, in the Eastern way of thinking, this would only mean that unhappiness was close on its heels. Instead, the Easterner might have the goal of balance (perhaps based more on using the strength of endurance), trusting in the fact that, although great unhappiness or suffering may occur in one's life, it would be equally balanced by great happiness.

Yin Yang
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These two different types of thinking obviously create very different ways of forming goals to achieve the good life.

East and West: Is One Best?

There are substantial differences in the types of ideas and the ways in which those ideas are put together that emerge from Eastern and Western traditions, and it is important to remember that neither is inherently "better" than the other. This is especially relevant for discussions regarding strengths as we must use culture as a lens for evaluating whether a particular characteristic might be considered a strength or a weakness within a particular group. This said, there are some particular benefits and pitfalls that seem to align with one or another of the two mindsets that are perhaps particularly relevant today.

As we move out of the COVID-19 pandemic, research explaining some of the behaviors surrounding mask wearing and limiting social interaction is beginning to emerge, in addition to some of the impacts of these on well-being, and some of these relate to individualist versus collectivist cultural orientation. Several studies found that more collectivist countries (e.g., China) and regions (e.g., the South Pacific and Africa) were better able to contain the spread of COVID-19 "because of a vigilant public concerned for public safety and compliant with public safety measure" (Liu & Wang, 2021, p. 23). Further research supported that "greater collectivism is associated with more support for and uptake of COVID-19 prevention behaviors" (Card, 2022, p. 417), and this has been shown in a number of studies (e.g., Cho et al., 2022; Lu & Jin, 2021). Liu and Wang (2021) additionally suggest that adherence to individualism and preference for one's own freedom as opposed to concern for the group impacted countries like the United States greatly in terms of coordination in fighting the pandemic. Others found similar results in cross-country comparisons (Jiang et al., 2021; Webster et al., 2021). That said, additional researchers have shown that there is more nuance to predicting a particular cultural

response than simply looking at collectivist or individualist tendencies. Card (2022) investigated the role of personality in the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically looking at the Big 5, and found that the personality trait of Agreeableness was the largest predictor of overall COVID-19 prevention behaviors, personal hygiene efforts, and social distancing. Second in each of these predictive relationships was Conscientiousness (Card, 2022).

A second area of research surrounding collectivism and individualism is also very relevant to today's political climate. Lin et al. (2022) found that those higher in collectivist beliefs are more likely to believe what has recently been termed "fake news" and to find it meaningful, as well as show a higher propensity to believe in pseudoscience in general. These researchers suggest that sometimes economic conditions can create a propensity toward collectivism and a dependence on this ingroup. Biddlestone and colleagues (2020) conducted research and found different results supporting the idea that those highest in "vertical individualism" (i.e., belief in a hierarchical power system in addition to individualism) were most likely to believe in conspiracy theories and less likely to engage in social distancing. Regardless, both studies seem to provide evidence for identity factors related to individualism and collectivism (i.e., "I am X, thus I belong to this group, and **we** think Y") being used to make decisions about how to act during the pandemic and in other crises (see also Kitayama et al., 2022; Oyserman & Dawson, 2021). This is something that likely all of us can relate to seeing firsthand, with the strong political party divide that has seemed to intensify in the United States in recent years. As groups see themselves as more insular to the ingroup and more dissimilar to the outgroup, belief in empty claims appears to increase (Lin et al., 2022; Oyserman & Dawson, 2021).

More research is needed in these areas and is emerging daily, but perhaps a better understanding of how collectivist and individualist ideologies might interact with personality traits and external circumstances may assist us in working toward more healthy outcomes for all in the future.

PERSONAL MINI-EXPERIMENTS
GETTING AND GIVING HELP

In this chapter, we explore how the sense of community can promote optimal human functioning. The following exercises encourage you to think about how your relationships to others and the broader community can make a positive difference in your life.

Asking for Help. A primary way in which individualists and collectivists differ is in the cultural messages they receive regarding asking for help. If you are more on the individualist side, and thus a person who finds it difficult to ask for the help of another, this exercise offers you a chance to break that habit. Select some activity for which you are especially unlikely to ask for help, and the next time you are in this situation, instead of trying to struggle through it by yourself, go ahead and ask another person for a hand. Here are some questions to ask yourself about a recent situation in which you could have asked for help:

1. Describe the circumstance, including all your thoughts and feelings. What did you imagine people would say if you asked for help? What would you have thought about yourself if you had asked for help?
2. Did you ask for help? If not, why not? If so, how did you overcome your rule of not asking for help?
3. How did the situation turn out when you did ask for help? What were the reactions of the person you asked for help? Did you get the needed help? If you did, how did you feel? Do you think you could ask for help in a future, similar situation?

Part of being in a community is being able to call upon the people in that community for assistance. Contrary to what some of you may have been taught as an individualist about not asking for help, it is not a weakness to ask for help. Indeed, it is a strength. You are human. You do need other people to get things accomplished. This is not a bad thing but a wonderful reality that is part of being a member of a community. As we have suggested in this exercise, give it a try. Once people do, they rarely turn back.

Volunteering Your Help. Remember the last time you offered your assistance to someone else? It probably took very little of your time, and you made a small improvement in your community. The other beautiful aspect of offering help is that it feels absolutely wonderful. (See the Personal Mini-Experiments in Chapter 11.) Helping thus provides two benefits: one to the recipient and one to the giver. To implement this exercise, just look around your local community and watch your neighbors. Part of this may be a simple wave or greeting. At other times, it may be obvious that someone really could use a helping hand. There are many flat tires needing to be fixed, people who need assistance carrying packages, tourists needing directions, and so on. To see how you have fared in this exercise, answer the following questions:

1. Describe the last circumstance in which you noticed that a person needed help, and include all your thoughts and feelings. What did you imagine people would say if you offered help? What did you think about yourself after offering help?
2. Did you offer help? If not, why not? If you did, how were you able to overcome any rule to the contrary (such as "Don't bother others")?
3. How did the situation turn out when you offered help? How did the person to whom you offered help react? Did you give the needed help? If you did, how did you feel? Do you think you could do this again in a future, similar situation?

EXEMPLAR CONSTRUCTS IN INDIVIDUALIST AND COLLECTIVIST CULTURES

So far, we have discussed how values, thinking styles, and orientation to time influence the development of goals in the lives of both Westerners and Easterners. Differences also exist, related to these, in the routes that each group uses to move toward its goals. Western-oriented thinking focuses on the individual's goal, whereas Eastern philosophers suggest a different focus, one in which the group is highlighted. Here, we detail constructs that may have particular value to the different groups. For Western cultures, the construct of hope is a key component mentioned throughout time. Additionally, the need for uniqueness is something that marks individualist cultures. For Eastern cultures, the constructs of compassion and harmony are highly valued.

"The Rugged Individualist" and the Construct of Hope

Hope has been a powerful underlying force in Western civilization. Indeed, looking back through the recorded history of Western civilization and religion, hope—the agentic, goal-focused thinking that gets one from here to there—has been so interwoven into the fabric of our civilization's eras and events that it can be hard to detect. In this regard, the belief in a positive future is reflected in many of our everyday ideas and words.

During the Dark Ages, intellectual and social immobility pervaded, and a paralysis of curiosity and initiative existed. From the years of the Middle Ages (500–1500), such paralysis precluded the purposeful, sustained planning and action required by a hopeful, advancing society. The fires of advancement were reduced to embers during this dark millennium and kept glowing only by a few institutions such as the monasteries and their schools. With the advent of the Renaissance, hope was seen as more relevant to present life on Earth than to the afterlife, and these active and hopeful thoughts began to be coupled with goal-directed actions. The period following the Renaissance, the Age of Enlightenment, created an atmosphere conducive to exploration and change and reflected the nature of hope because of its emphases on rational agencies and rational abilities. These qualities were interwoven in the dominant belief of the age: that reason brought to life with the scientific method led to the achievements in science and philosophy. Education, free speech, and the acceptance of new ideas burgeoned during the Enlightenment. Indeed, the consequences of such enlightened thinking were long lasting and reflective of the power of hope. Next, the period known as the Industrial Revolution (or the Age of Industrialization) drove movement of production from homes and small workshops to large factories and vastly increased material benefits for individual citizens making hope for the future seem more attainable.

Western civilization has been defined by its critical mass of hopeful events and beliefs. Throughout the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and the Industrial Revolution, hopeful thinking was a critical part of the Western belief system, and the idea of hope has long served as an underpinning for thinking in Western civilization. Personal and individual goals, as exemplified by the construct of hope, seem to be the primary tool of the Western "rugged individualist" in moving toward their depiction of the good life.

The Need for Uniqueness

Let's take another look at Figure 2.1. You will notice that the two curves overlap with some people toward the group end of the continuum and others toward the individual end. In this latter regard, we now explore the desire to manifest specialness relative to other people.

The pursuit of individualistic goals to produce a sense of specialness has been termed the need for uniqueness (see Lynn & Snyder, 2002; Ruvio et al., 2008; Vignoles, 2009). This need is posited to have a strong appeal to many, as people often seek to maintain some degree of difference from others (as well as to maintain a bond to other people). In the 1970s, researchers Howard Fromkin and C. R. Snyder (see Snyder & Fromkin, 1977) embarked on a program of research based on the premise that most people in Western groups have some desire to be special relative to others. They called this motive

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the *need for uniqueness;* others have termed it the *motive for distinctiveness* (Vignoles, 2009). Beyond establishing that some specialness was desirable for most of the people in their samples from the United States, these researchers also reasoned that some people have a very high need for uniqueness, or distinctiveness, whereas others have a very low need for uniqueness.

Encoding and Emotional/Behavioral Reactions to Similarity Information

As noted previously, people evaluate the acceptability of their having varying degrees of similarity to other people. These hypothetical encodings on the uniqueness identity dimension are shown in Figure 2.2. As can be seen, the similarity information is encoded as increasingly higher in acceptability, until one gets to a very high level of similarity in which it becomes clear that people desire some specialness. It should be noted that people in Western cultural groups seem least comfortable with either of the extremes of low similarity (point A in Figure 2.2) or high similarity (point E in Figure 2.2).

When confronted with the varying degrees of perceived similarity that produce the acceptability encodings of Figure 2.2, people then should have the most positive emotional reactions when they perceive that they are highly similar to others (point D in Figure 2.2). Consistent with this hypothesis, people's emotional reactions become more positive as levels of similarity increase from the very slight, to slight, to moderate, to high, becoming negative as the level of similarity enters the very high range (Figure 2.3). Note that the very highest positive emotional reactions occur when people perceive that they have a relatively moderate to high degree of similarity, thereby showing the maximal pleasure derived from human bonds.

FIGURE 2.2 ■ Acceptability Encoding as a Function of Perceived Similarity to Other People
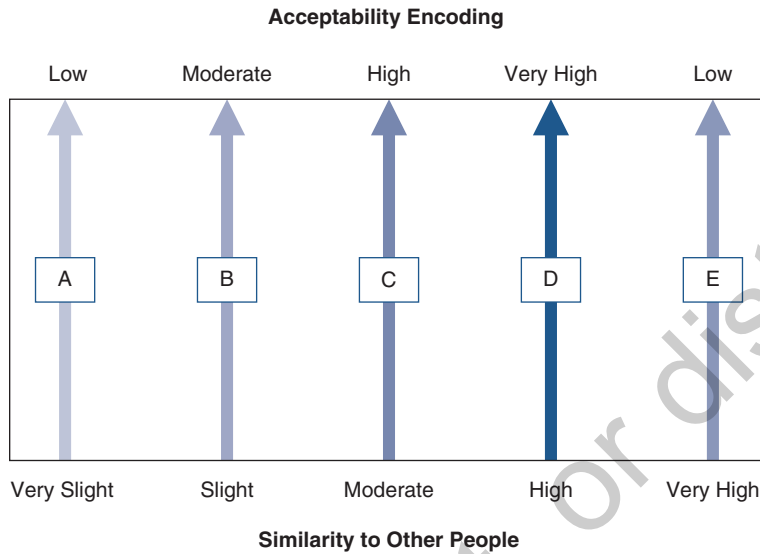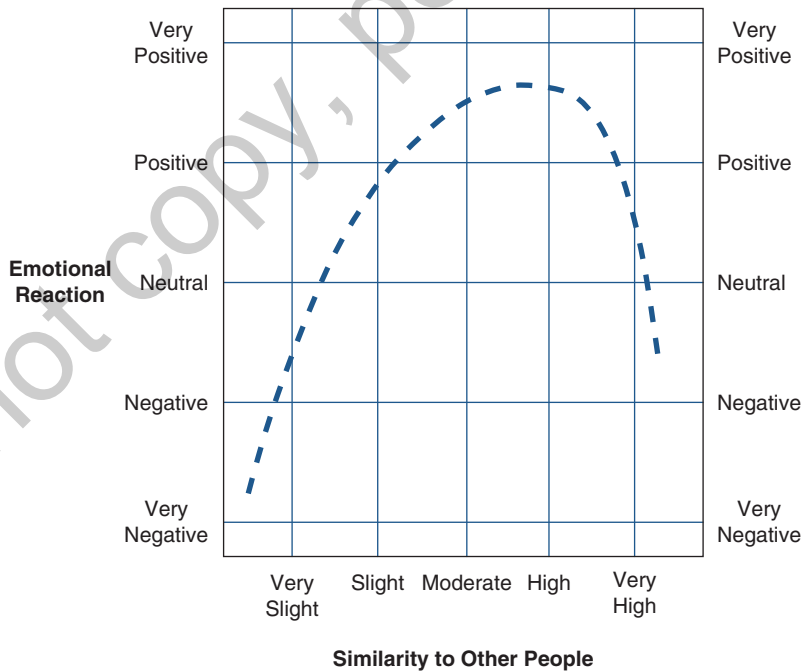
Acceptability Encoding

Low	Moderate	High	Very High	Low
A	B	C	D	E

Very Slight	Slight	Moderate	High	Very High

Similarity to Other People

FIGURE 2.3 ■ Emotional Reactions as a Function of Perceived Similarity to Other People

Emotional Reaction — Very Positive, Positive, Neutral, Negative, Very Negative

Similarity to Other People: Very Slight, Slight, Moderate, High, Very High

Similarity to Other People

It may help here to give an example of how moderate similarity to another person is emotionally satisfying. I (JTP) reflect upon my initial reaction at moving from California to the Midwest for graduate school as a good example of the desire for moderate similarity. At first, I was a bit taken aback at being one of very few individuals of racial minority background on my new campus. Feeling very different was a challenge at first, and looking for some similarity in fellow students became a goal of mine. It was a stroke of good luck that another student in my cohort shared this circumstance and was having a similar experience. We soon discovered that we were also both of biracial descent, although of different racial groups. This moderate similarity provided us with some shared experiences and understandings, while still allowing for our own individual differences. From time to time, however, and especially when we were in graduate school, others confused us for one another from time to time. Although neither of us believe that we look much alike, we both have dark hair that was approximately the same length at the time, and both of our skin tones are a bit darker than the average majority culture person in the Midwest. We have discussed our negative reaction to others thinking we "looked exactly alike" or confusing our names at times. Here, similarity was presented as too great—we desired some uniqueness, even though a moderate level of similarity was fine. Our friendship has now lasted more than 20 years, and as we have moved through other experiences in life (parenthood, professional development, etc.), we continue to enjoy the emotional satisfaction that comes from having these moderate similarities.

The acceptability reactions that result from a degree of perceived similarity to others (see Figure 2.2) also can cause people to change their actual behaviors to become more or less similar to another person. More specifically, the most positive acceptability (i.e., high similarity) not only produces the highest positive emotional reactions but also should result in no need to make any behavioral changes relative to other people. On the other hand, a very slight level of similarity to others yields low acceptability; therefore, people should change to become more similar to others. Moreover, a very high level of similarity to other people is low in acceptability, and therefore people should change to become less similar to others. In this latter sense, because people's need for uniqueness is not being satisfied, they should strive to reestablish their differences. Consistent with these predicted behavioral reactions, the results of several studies (see Figure 2.4) have supported this proposed pattern (Snyder & Fromkin, 1980).

Taken together, these findings suggest that people in Western cultures such as those studied in the research elucidated here are drawn to moderate-to-high levels of perceived similarity to their fellow humans but that there are upper limits to this desire for the human bond. Furthermore, there appears to be a desire for balance in this area, such that people are motivated by a need for uniqueness when they feel too much similarity and that they will strive for similarity when they feel too different. Based on the previously discussed theoretical predictions and findings on uniqueness-related behaviors, Snyder and Fromkin (1977) developed and validated the Need for Uniqueness Scale. If you would like to get a sense of your own desire for specialness by completing the scale, refer to the Appendix.

Having explored the personal need for uniqueness, at this point we describe the acceptable societal processes by which our uniqueness needs are met. People are punished when they

FIGURE 2.4 ■ Direction and Amount of Change as a Function of Perceived Similarity to Other People
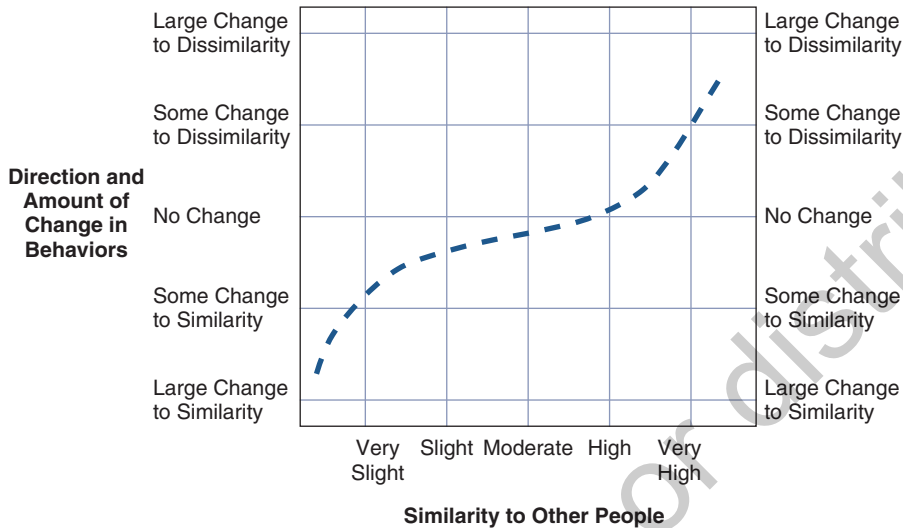
deviate sharply from normal or expected behaviors in a society (Goffman, 1963; Schachter, 1951). Thus, unusual behaviors quickly may elicit societal disapprovals and rejections (see Kaufman et al., 2022; Schur, 1969). On the other hand, the following of rules (normal behaviors) typically does not elicit much reaction from other people. How, then, are people to show their specialness? Fortunately, each society has some acceptable attributes whereby its citizens can show their differences without being labeled as deviant, and these are called *uniqueness attributes.* One example may be found in the attractiveness to "scarce commodities" in our society. Salespeople know this is a desire and often use a "Hurry on down while the supply lasts" pitch to draw in potential buyers. In what has been called a "catch-22 carousel" (Snyder, 1992), advertisers use uniqueness appeals to persuade people to buy products and then, by making yearly changes in their products (styles of clothes, cars, etc.), motivate customers to purchase the latest version. The irony is that, after the latest uniqueness-based advertisement has persuaded people to buy, they notice that what they have bought is now quite common— many other people also have it. Of course, the yearly change of styles keeps people on the consumer "catch-22 carousel." Other studies have noted that when leaders attend to individuals' needs for uniqueness, they may be seen as more inclusive (Randel et al., 2017), and that more valuing of differentness in general (termed "embracing weirdness" by these authors) may create more inclusive leaders (Davidson, 2021, p. 125; see the whole chapter for more on this interesting topic).

We have reviewed the theory and measurement of hope and the need for uniqueness, which are perhaps two of the quintessential Western constructs. We now turn to the Eastern side, for a closer look at two more collectivist constructs: compassion and harmony.

Eastern Values: Compassion and Harmony

In the main Eastern philosophical branches of learning (Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, and Hinduism), repeated mention is made of two constructs: compassion for others and the search for harmony or life balance. Thus, each has a clear place in the study of positive psychology from an Eastern perspective.

Though the idea of compassion is discussed in both Western and Eastern philosophies, it is more frequently written about in Eastern traditions. In Confucian teachings, compassion is discussed within the concept of *humanity* and is said to encapsulate all other virtues, while within the Hindu tradition, compassion is called for in good actions toward others as it will direct followers upon the path that will not require them to return to Earth after death. Compassion is most thoroughly discussed however in Buddhist writings, with the Buddha often described as "perfectly enlightened, and boundlessly compassionate" (Sangharakshita, 1991, p. 3).

Buddhist teachings describe the attainment of compassion as the ability to "transcend preoccupation with the centrality of self" (Cassell, 2009, p. 397). As such, the idea of compassion, or *karuna*, also is woven throughout Buddhism as a virtue on the path toward transcendence. The ability to possess feelings for something completely separate from our own suffering allows us to transcend the self and, in this way, to be closer to the achievement of the "good life." In fact, transcendental compassion is said to be the most significant of the four universal virtues and it often is called Great Compassion (*mahakaruna*) to distinguish it from the more applied *karuna* (Sangharakshita, 1991).

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In more recent writings in positive psychology, physician Eric Cassell (2021) proposes the three following requirements for compassion to occur: (1) the difficulties of the recipient must be serious, (2) the recipient's difficulties cannot be self-inflicted, and (3) we, as observers, must be able to identify with the recipient's suffering. Compassion is described as a "unilateral emotion" (Cassell, 2009, p. 394) that is directed outward from oneself. Similarly, although discussed in somewhat different ways as Confucian, Taoist, and Hindu principles, the capacities to feel and to do for others are central to achieving the "good life" for each of these traditions as well. Furthermore, acting compassionately fosters group, rather than personal, happiness and can be used to ease suffering overall (Cassell, 2016, 2021). Compassion also may come more naturally to a person from a collectivist culture than to someone from an individualist culture. On this point, researchers have argued that a collectivist culture may breed a sense of compassion in the form of its members' prosocial behaviors (Batson, 1991; Batson et al., 2009; Calder et al, 2022). When a group identity has been formed, therefore, the natural choice may be group benefits over individual ones. More information from qualitative and quantitative studies in this area would be helpful in defining the mechanisms used to foster such compassion.

In addition to compassion, though related, happiness is described in Eastern philosophies as having the "satisfactions of a plain country life, shared within a *harmonious* social network" (Nisbett, 2003, pp. 5–6, emphasis added). In this tradition, harmony is viewed as central to achieving happiness. In Western history, the Greeks are said to have viewed happiness as the ability "to exercise powers in pursuit of excellence in a life free from constraints" (Nisbett, 2003, pp. 2–3). Thus, the good life was viewed as a life with no ties to duty and the freedom to pursue individual goals. There are clear distinctions in comparing this idea of happiness to Confucian teachings, for example, in which duty (*yi*) is a primary virtue.

In Buddhist teachings, when people reach a state of nirvana, they have reached a peacefulness entailing "complete harmony, balance, and equilibrium" (Sangharakshita, 1991, p. 135). Similarly, in Confucian teachings, harmony is viewed as crucial for happiness, and getting along with others allows the person to be freed from individual pursuits and, in so doing, to gain "collective agency" (Nisbett, 2003, p. 6) in working out what is good for the group. Thus, the harmonizing principle is a central tenet of the Eastern way of life. The balance and harmony that one achieves as part of an enlightened life often are thought to represent the ultimate end of the good life.

The concept of harmony has received minimal attention in the field of positive psychology to date, although some attention has been given to the idea of appreciating balance in one's life in reference to certain other constructs (e.g., wisdom; see Baltes & Staudinger, 2000, and Chapter 9). Moreover, Clifton and colleagues (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001; Lopez, Hodges, & Harter, 2005) include a harmony theme in the Clifton StrengthsFinder (see Chapter 3); they describe this construct as a desire to find consensus among the group, as opposed to putting forth conflicting ideas. Some research appears to find in inverse relationship between harmony and depression but only in individuals who define themselves by cultural models that emphasize reliance on others (Smith & Bryant, 2016; Yang, 2016), that is, those that are collectivist in nature. This shows the importance of taking context into account when describing a strength. Given the central role of harmony as a strength in Eastern cultures, more research may be

warranted on this topic in the future. Finally, after more conceptual work is completed, positive psychology scholars interested in harmony would benefit greatly from the development of reliable and valid measuring devices. Such tools would help researchers to uncover the primary contributors and correlates of harmony.

ME/WE BALANCE: THE POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY OF US

Both the Individualistic and the Collectivistic Perspectives Are Viable

Social scientists often have conceptualized individualism and collectivism as opposites (Hui, 1988; Oyserman et al., 2002), and this polarity typically has been applied when contrasting the individualism of European Americans with the collectivism of East Asians (Chan, 1994; Kitayama et al., 1997). This polarity approach strikes us as being neither good science nor necessarily a productive strategy for fostering healthy interactions among people from varying ethnicities within and across societies, and some research has shown that investigations of individualism and collectivism must be much more nuanced in order to fully understand how members of these groups function in the world (Card, 2022).

Viewing individualism and collectivism as opposites also has the potential to provoke disputes in which the members of each camp attempt to demonstrate the superiority of their approach. Such acrimony between these two perspectives seems especially problematic given that the distinctions between individualism and collectivism have not been found to be clear-cut. For example, Vandello and Cohen (1999) found that, even within individualistic societies such as the United States, the form of the individualism differs in the Northeast, the Midwest, the Deep South, and the West. Moreover, cultures are extremely diverse; each has dynamic and changing social systems that are far from the monolithic simplicities suggested by the labels "individualist" and "collectivist" (Bandura, 2000; Vargas & Kemmelmeier, 2013). Likewise, there may be generational differences in the degree to which individualism and collectivism are manifested (e.g., Matsumoto et al., 1996). And when different reference groups become more salient, propensities toward individualism and collectivism vary (Freeman & Bordia, 2001). Finally, we've seen in research described here that individualism and collectivism may interact with specific personality traits that may elicit different types of behavior within a single tradition (Card, 2022).

The United States has always been thought of as a very individualistic nation. Current reports, however, suggest that this may have had more to do with the fact that the majority of individuals living in the United States were originally of European (Western) origin. Interestingly, today, as racial and ethnic diversity increases in the United States, changes are beginning to emerge with regard to the individualist orientation of the country as a whole. Today, there is preliminary "evidence of convergence of cultural orientations" (Vargas & Kemmelmeier, 2013, p. 195). In this way, perhaps due to its unique diversity of cultural influences, the United States is becoming more of an "US" nation. That said, there are still verifiable differences between cultural groups (e.g., Black American, Latina/o/x, Asian American, and White) that appear to be related to systematic socioeconomic differences between these groups

(Vargas & Kemmelmeier, 2013). These distinct economic differences are most marked between White Americans/Asian Americans versus their Black/Latina/o/x counterparts. The fact that the economically disadvantaged groups are lower in competitiveness is a finding that might suggest a sense of hopelessness at being able to compete in the first place due to their disadvantages. It is also a possibility that cooperation is more necessary in lower socioeconomic status groups. If our goal is to see more of an understanding of both individualistic and collectivistic mindsets, and a potential convergence toward each other to some extent, we may need to work harder to extend economic equality across cultural groups.

Based on findings such as these and others, researchers in the field have suggested that we should move beyond the rather static view of individualism and collectivism as separate categories and instead take more dynamic approaches to culture to find when, where, and why these mental sets operate (Card, 2022). They argue for an understanding of how individualism and collectivism can operate together to benefit people. We, too, believe that both the individualist and collectivistic perspectives have advantages for people and that the best resolution is to learn to embrace aspects of each.

One characteristic of a happy and productive life is a sense of balance in one's views and actions. We believe that a positive psychology approach to this issue would equate the ME and the WE emphases. The ME/WE perspective allows a person to attend to both the person and the group. Indeed, this is what has been found to characterize the perspectives of high-hope people about their lives and their interactions with others (Snyder, 1994/2000c, 2000b). That is to say, in their upbringings, the high-hope children learned about the importance of other people and their perspectives and the role that consideration for others plays in the effective pursuit of personal goals. Just as the high-hopers think of ME goals, then, they simultaneously can envision the WE goals of other people. In addition, being able to see things from a ME perspective and a WE perspective allows us all to interact with a larger group of individuals, even those who come from different perspectives than our own: "As the heterogeneity of American culture continues to expand, more opportunities for meaningful interaction between differing ethnic/racial groups have emerged than ever before" (Vargas & Kemmelmeier, 2013, p. 198). Being rigidly ME or WE may be problematic for these types of interactions.

Suggestions for ME People (Individualists)

You now should have better ideas about your individualist and collectivist tendencies (see the Personal Mini-Experiments in this chapter for more self-assessment). In this section and the next, therefore, we offer some suggestions to help you navigate more effectively in environments in which people hold perspectives that differ from the individualistic or collectivistic ones that you typically hold.

To begin, individualists often perceive collectivists as being far too conforming and lacking in competitiveness. In this regard, it helps to realize that collectivists derive their sense of status from their group memberships and not from their personal accomplishments. Individualists should understand that collectivists want interpersonal harmony and therefore try very hard to avoid situations involving conflict (Ting-Toomey, 1994). In such circumstances, the

individualists may view conflicts as a useful means of clearing the air so that people can move on to other matters, but they should realize that collectivists are quite concerned with saving face after such conflicts. Thus, individualists can help by solving problems before they escalate into huge confrontations. Similarly, the individualist should not push the collectivist into a corner by repeatedly asking confrontational "Why?" questions in response to which the collectivist must defend their position. Moreover, if conflict is necessary, the individualist should try, whenever possible, to help the collectivist maintain their pride (what sociologists call *face* or *honor;* Oyserman, 2017).

Suggestions for WE People (Collectivists)

Collectivists, on the other hand, often see individualists as too competitive. Similarly to what is stated above, a useful lesson here is to understand that individualists see their status as based on their personal accomplishments rather than on their memberships in groups. Moreover, the more recent the accomplishments, the more power they wield in terms of status. Thus, collectivists should not be shocked when individualists do not seem impressed with group successes that are based in large part on lineage, family name, age, or gender (males may have more status in some collectivistic societies). It may help collectivists to use recent accomplishments to attain status in the eyes of individualists with whom they interact.

Collectivists' dependence on cooperative solutions to dilemmas may not work when they are dealing with individualists. Instead, the collectivist must be able to take into account the "What's in it for me" perspective of the individualist in order to understand the latter's reactions during negotiations. Likewise, the normal arguing of individualists should not be interpreted by collectivists as intentionally hurtful behavior; this is just how the individualist conducts business. Thus, whereas a collectivist interacting with another collectivist may interpret "Let's have lunch" as a genuine invitation, it is often merely social talk when uttered by the individualist. Recognizing these cultural differences may help to diminish hurt feelings and misunderstandings, both of which can be detrimental to meaningful interactions between groups.

FINAL THOUGHTS

It is important to recognize that, in discussing Western and Eastern thoughts in this chapter, a central tenet of Eastern ways of life is broken in the decidedly Western, didactic teaching method used to bring this information to students of positive psychology. The traditional Easterner would object to the notion that the concepts here could be learned from mere words and would argue that only life experience would suffice. As part of Eastern teachings, self-exploration and actual hands-on experience are essential for true understanding of the concepts that are presented in only an introductory fashion in this chapter. Thus, we encourage students to seek out more experience of these ideas in everyday life and to attempt to discover the relevance of strengths such as hope, compassion, and harmony in your own lives, regardless of your cultural background. Ideas that stem from Eastern ideology can be relevant for Westerners

who want to discover new ways of thinking about human functioning and vice versa. Challenge yourself to be open-minded about the types of characteristics to which you assign the label "strength" and about different perspectives, and remember that different traditions bring with them different values.

Additionally, those with individualist perspectives must realize that their views are not widely shared around the world. It has been estimated that 70% of the present 6.5 billion or so people on Earth take a collectivist view of people and their interactions (Triandis, 1995). Let's do the math here: *That is about 4.5 billion collectivists and 2 billion individualists.* As cherished as the individualist perspective held by many who reside in the United States may be, *individualists are the minority in a world populated by collectivists.* In thinking about our relationships with each other, our futures will rest upon a willingness to cooperate and come together. Although the pursuit of specialness certainly can and has produced benefits for humankind, if too many people act in pursuit of their own individuality especially at the expense of harmony, we will miss our chance to work together to build shared cultures.

WHERE WE ARE GOING: FROM ME TO WE TO US

In this chapter, we have discussed two important human frameworks—individualist and collectivist—and the historical traditions derived from them that are relevant to positive psychology. In closing this chapter, we propose that being able to use a blend of the one and the many—the ME/WE or, more simply, US—may enhance our ability to interact with a variety of others and spur our multicultural competence. This approach represents an intermingling in which both the individual and the group are able to be considered for satisfying and productive lives. Diversity can assist in productivity overall due to the increase of ideas and thinking strategies (Cunningham, 2009), but if leaders are not cognizant of the differences in how collectivists and individualists interact, this gain could be lost.

As we see it, the US perspective reflects a viable positive psychology resolution for a more multiculturally competent world. Some communications and psychology programs offer courses in intergroup dialogues or intergroup relations (see the University of Michigan's program at https://igr.umich.edu). The idea behind this type of program is to teach individuals to be able to listen to a perspective that differs from their own, particularly when coming from someone who is different culturally from them in some way. Understanding another perspective does not mean that we have to adopt that other perspective, but listening without anger and trying to see where others are coming from can help us to understand a bit more. The US perspective follows with this ideology in that in using it, we seek to move a bit more toward the middle ground so as to hear one another's diverse views.

Considering the increased global access we have to one another as technology shrinks the distance between us, and the ever-increasing diversity occurring in the United States in particular, we are poised on the cusp of a major change in the balancing of individualism and collectivism—the needs of the "one" and the "many" (Newbrough, 1995; Snyder, Feldman et al., 2000). As such, the positive psychology of US may be just around the corner.

APPENDIX: THE NEED FOR UNIQUENESS SCALE

Directions: The following statements concern your perceptions about yourself in several situations. Rate your agreement with each statement by using a scale in which 1 denotes strong disagreement, 5 denotes strong agreement, and 2, 3, and 4 represent intermediate judgments. In the blanks before each statement, place a number from 1 to 5 from the following scale:

1	2	3	4	5

Strongest Disagreement Strongest Agreement

There are no right or wrong answers, so select the number that most closely reflects you on each statement. Take your time, and consider each statement carefully.

_____ 1. When I am in a group of strangers, I am not reluctant to express my opinion publicly.

_____ 2. I find that criticism affects my self-esteem.

_____ 3. I sometimes hesitate to use my own ideas for fear that they might be impractical.

_____ 4. I think society should let reason lead it to new customs and throw aside old habits or mere traditions.

_____ 5. People frequently succeed in changing my mind.

_____ 6. I find it sometimes amusing to upset the dignity of teachers, judges, and "cultured" people.

_____ 7. I like wearing a uniform because it makes me proud to be a member of the organization it represents.

_____ 8. People have sometimes called me "stuck-up."

_____ 9. Others' disagreements make me uncomfortable.

_____10. I do not always need to live by the rules and standards of society.

_____11. I am unable to express my feelings if they result in undesirable consequences.

_____12. Being a success in one's career means making a contribution that no one else has made.

_____13. It bothers me if people think I am being too unconventional.

_____14. I always try to follow rules.

_____15. If I disagree with a superior on his or her views, I usually do not keep it to myself.

_____16. I speak up in meetings in order to oppose those whom I feel are wrong.

_____17. Feeling "different" in a crowd of people makes me feel uncomfortable.

_____18. If I must die, let it be an unusual death rather than an ordinary death in bed.

_____19. I would rather be just like everyone else than be called a "freak."

_____20. I must admit I find it hard to work under strict rules and regulations.

_____21. I would rather be known for always trying new ideas than for employing well-trusted methods.

_____22. It is better to agree with the opinions of others than to be considered a disagreeable person.

_____23. I do not like to say unusual things to people.

_____24. I tend to express my opinions publicly, regardless of what others say.

_____25. As a rule, I strongly defend my own opinions.

_____26. I do not like to go my own way.

_____27. When I am with a group of people, I agree with their ideas so that no arguments will arise.

_____28. I tend to keep quiet in the presence of persons of higher ranks, experience, etc.

_____29. I have been quite independent and free from family rule.

_____30. Whenever I take part in group activities, I am somewhat of a nonconformist.

_____31. In most things in life, I believe in playing it safe rather than taking a gamble.

_____32. It is better to break rules than always to conform with an impersonal society.

To calculate your total score, first reverse each of the scores on Items 2, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 14, 17, 19, 22, 23, 26, 27, 28, and 31. That is, on these items only, perform the following reversals: 1 → 5; 2 → 4; 3 → 3; 4 → 2; 5 → 1. Then, add the scores on all 32 items, using the reversed scores for the aforementioned items. Higher scores reflect a higher need for uniqueness.

KEY TERMS

Anishinaabe Teachings
Athenian tradition
Buddhism
Collectivism
Compassion
Confucianism
Enlightenment
Harmony

Hinduism
Hope
Individualism
Islam
Judeo-Christian tradition
Need for uniqueness
Nirvana
Taoism