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Four Fundamental Distinctions in Conceptions of Wellbeing Across Cultures

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Culture plays crucial roles in human groups. It allows us to collectively "meet basic needs of survival, by coordinating social behaviour to achieve a viable existence, to transmit successful social behaviours, to pursue happiness and wellbeing, and to derive meaning from life" (Matsumoto, 2009, p. 5). Thus, there is much to be found in the culture of any human population concerning optimal functioning and wellbeing. As humans necessarily live in culturally specific ways, they also exist, act, and engage in strategies to enhance wellbeing in culture-specific ways to varying degrees (Kitayama & Markus, 2000). Indeed, optimal functioning and wellbeing partly depend on the individual's ability to live in accordance with the values and practices emphasized in one's culture (Sasaki, Ko, & Kim, 2014).

A fundamental dimension of cultural variability with far-reaching implications for definitions of culturally specific wellbeing is the distinction between independent, individualistic cultures and interdependent, collectivistic cultures (Kitayama, Duffy, & Uchida, 2007). Although independent and interdependent modes of being and acting coexist in all cultures, research

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indicates that individual independence is more strongly stressed in individualistic cultures (e.g., Western European, Nordic, and Anglo-Saxon cultures) and that social interdependence is stressed more strongly in the rest of the world (e.g., East Asia and Africa). Persons in independent cultures "see themselves as unique, promote their own goals, and seek self-expression. Persons with an interdependent construal of the self seek to belong and fit in, to promote others' goals, and to occupy their proper place" (Berry, Poortinga, Segall, & Dasen, 2002, pp. 101–102). Recent cultural neuroscientific findings suggest that cultural differences in the self-concept may be reflected in neurophysiological functioning. For example, Zhu, Zhang, Fan, and Han (2007) scanned the brains of Chinese and Western participants from Western countries during a self-referential task. They found that the ventral medial prefrontal cortex (associated with the elaborated encoding of self-related information or self-relevance of stimuli) was engaged during both self-reflection and reflection on a close other (e.g., mother) in the Chinese, but only during self-reflection in the Westerners, indicating that there is an overlapping neural representation of the self and close others in Chinese, whereas in Westerners there are dissociated neural representations of the self and other (Han, 2017). This cultural and physiological distinction is likely to have consequences for psycho-social functioning and wellbeing.

This chapter focuses on the importance of four fundamental differences in the concepts and predictors of mental wellbeing in independent individualistic versus interdependent collectivistic cultures. The four identified issues are: (1) the importance of hedonic experience, (2) self-enhancement, (3) mastery, and (4) context. These four dynamics are not meant to exhaust the universe of cultural differences concerning wellbeing, but they are instead meant to provide a framework for categorizing and making sense of some basic cross-cultural variations in this domain. We note also that the four issues are interconnected and overlapping rather than distinct and mutually exclusive. The chapter will conclude with a brief section on the theoretical and empirical implications of the insights emerging from the cross-cultural analyses for international measurements of wellbeing. We argue and provide some evidence that, given the differences in how wellbeing is conceptualized by people across cultures, various markers of wellbeing may function differently in different global regions. This insight has crucial implications for how we rank countries based on wellbeing.

The Tension Between Hedonic and Eudaimonic Experience

Considerable controversy exists within theory and empirical research regarding the relative contributions of hedonic (i.e., pleasurable living) and eudaimonic (i.e., meaningful living) dynamics to a sense of wellbeing. Since the Enlightenment, Westerners have believed in the importance of mood and affective experience as an ingredient of a good life (Christopher, 1999; Tatarkiewicz, 1976). In the contemporary Western outlook, wellbeing is defined predominantly based on the absence and presence of certain emotional experiences and subjective outlooks (Belliotti, 2004). Hedonic happiness has "grown into a fundamental part of our commonsensical understanding of ourselves and the world, a concept so familiar that we take it for granted. It feels and rings so natural today that to call happiness into question is odd if not audacious" (Cabanas & Illouz, 2019, p. 3). With the current "Western hedonistic outlook, it is not surprising that the pursuit of happiness is top of the agenda" (Van Deurzen, 2008, p. 70). The prominent happiness researcher Layard (2005) recognized happiness as the ultimate human goal:

> We naturally look for the ultimate goal that enables us to judge other goals by how they contribute to it. Happiness is that ultimate goal because, unlike other goals, it is self-evidently good. If we are asked why happiness matters, we can give no further, external reason. It just obviously does matter. As the American Declaration of Independence says, it is a 'self-evident' objective. (p. 113)

A hedonistic conceptualization of wellbeing is consistent with the values of modern Western culture, namely liberal modernity, hedonism, and individualism, and thus is celebrated in Western cultures (e.g., McMahon, 2008).

The modern science of wellbeing and positive psychology also seems to favour a hedonic concept of wellbeing. Not only do virtually all large-scale international surveys of wellbeing use hedonic measures of wellbeing (e.g., Diener & Tay, 2015; Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2019), some Western psychologists resist accepting eudaimonic wellbeing as a co-equal component with hedonic wellbeing. Instead, they tend to regard eudaimonic wellbeing as subordinate to hedonic wellbeing, for example, by assuming that eudaimonic wellbeing is a predictor of hedonic wellbeing (e.g., Kashdan, Biswas-Diener, & King, 2008; Martela & Sheldon, 2019). Although eudaimonic skills are considered to be indispensable, "the experience of pleasure and the achievement of a subjective sense of wellbeing remain at the centre of the story" (Kahneman, Diener, & Schwarz, 1999, p. x).

However, the hedonic conceptualization of wellbeing is not considered to be the superordinate goal in many collectivistic cultures (e.g., Joshanloo, 2019a; Lee et al., 2012). In these cultures, positive emotions and pleasures are considered too temporary and peripheral to be the criterion against which wellbeing is measured (Joshanloo, 2014). For example, Buddhism dismisses any kind of hedonism because it may engender selfishness (Ricard, 2011). Asceticism has always been considered a key method for the purification of the soul in many religions. Some traditional religions are suspicious of bodily pleasures and promote desire control techniques to prevent individuals from pursuing pleasures at the expense of embracing collectivistic or spiritual virtues (Joshanloo, 2013a, 2014).

Considering hedonic happiness as the supreme goal of wellbeing striving is far from universal (see Joshanloo & Weijers, 2014 for a review). In many cultures, suffering and negative affect are seen as inevitable elements of life that may not be eliminated and instead are considered enabling, enriching, and necessary for developing virtues (Joshanloo, 2013a, 2014). Collectivistic cultures take a more balanced approach towards subjective happiness and believe that other values (e.g., harmony, justice, truth, wisdom, and goodness) are more important than hedonic happiness. Suh (2000) argues that while Westerners feel a strong pressure to experience happy mood, East Asians tend to feel pressure to belong, and thus their life is more guided by the need to have good interpersonal relationships than to be individually happy. Similarly, Kitayama and Markus (2000) point out that a more esteemed value for collectivistic cultures is mutual sympathy, and this state may well arise from the "nonpursuit" of personal happiness.

Empirical results show that individualistic cultures value pleasure as a guiding value for life more strongly than collectivistic cultures do (Schwartz, 2009). Lu and Gilmour (2006) found that American participants were more likely than Chinese participants to conceive personal happiness as a natural and personal right and a supreme value. People from individualistic cultures are more likely to strive to maximize positive affect than are people from collectivistic cultures (Sims et al., 2015). Although the mood-related personality trait of neuroticism is a stronger predictor of subjective wellbeing in Sweden and the United States, satisfaction with relationships is a stronger predictor of subjective wellbeing in India (Galinha, Garcia-Martin, Oishi, Wirtz, & Esteves, 2016). People from collectivistic cultures pursue happiness mainly in socially engaged ways (Ford et al., 2015), showing that happiness-seeking endeavours cannot be divorced from more important values such as harmony with other people.

In many collectivistic cultures, experiences and events (including happiness and unhappiness) are seen to be in a constant state of change, i.e., to be transient and cyclical (Wong & Liu, 2018). For example, a common theme in many non-Western schools of thought is that "happiness is rooted in misery. Misery lurks beneath happiness" (https://terebess.hu/english/tao/gia.html), which leads to the idea that happiness should not be actively sought, and unhappiness should not be avoided. Geertz's (1973) anthropological study of the Javanese ethnic group in Indonesia indicates that in this culture happiness is not always preferred over unhappiness, and instead, a more balanced view is taken:

> Happiness and unhappiness are, after all, just the same. You shed tears when you laugh and also when you cry. And, besides, they imply one another: happy now, unhappy later; unhappy now, happy later. The reasonable, prudent, "wise" man strives not for happiness, but for a tranquil detachment which frees him from his endless oscillation between gratification and frustration. (p. 136)

Therefore, rather than pursuing continuous high levels of positive affect and happiness, a culturally appropriate strategy in collectivistic cultures is "maintaining a state of balance, embracing both pleasant and unpleasant experiences and being content with their coexistence, and avoiding extreme positivity and negativity" (Wong & Liu, 2018, p. 550). Consistent with the preference for emotional moderation, empirical evidence demonstrates that Asian participants value low-arousal emotions (e.g., feeling calm and relaxed) more than do Westerners, whereas Western participants value high-arousal emotions more (e.g., feeling excited) (Tsai, Knutson, & Fung, 2006).

Joshanloo and Weijers' analysis of non-Western cultures (2014) suggests that some of these cultures are averse to the experience of emotional happiness in certain contexts, particularly immoderate degrees of happiness. They provide examples from many cultures that reflect a suspicion about emotional happiness. Their theoretical view is that four broad cultural conceptions seem to underlie happiness aversion in various cultures: (1) Being happy makes it more likely that bad things will happen to you, (2) being happy makes you a worse person, (3) expressing happiness is bad for you and others, and (4) pursuing happiness is bad for you and others. Joshanloo (2013b) has created a self-report measure to capture fear of happiness beliefs. He and his colleagues (2014a) investigated the distribution of these beliefs across 14 countries and found that fear of happiness (or "happiness aversion") beliefs were more prevalent in collectivistic countries than in individualistic countries. Other lines of research have found that Asians are more likely than Westerners to believe that the experience of happiness may be fraught with

negative consequences (Uchida & Kitayama, 2009). Sheldon et al. (2017) found that Russians reported greater inhibition of the expression of happiness to strangers than Americans, and this degree of happiness inhibition was unrelated to hedonic wellbeing in Russia, whereas it was negatively correlated with hedonic wellbeing in the United States.

Given the higher value attached to hedonic wellbeing and hedonism in individualistic cultures, it is not surprising that hedonic values and experiences have a stronger association with wellbeing in individualistic cultures. In a comparative study across 19 countries, Joshanloo and Jarden (2016) found that hedonism was more strongly related to happiness in more individualistic cultures. Similarly, in a 147 country study, Joshanloo (2019a) found that the frequency of positive and negative emotional experiences was a less important determinant of life satisfaction in religious/traditional cultures than in secular/modern cultures. And last, in a study among Chinese Singaporeans, researchers found that participants who endorsed Asian dialectical beliefs reported less positive hedonic affect (Wong, Ho, Shin, & Tsai, 2011).

In sum, a hedonic understanding of wellbeing that seems to be dominant in individualistic cultures does not seem to be the dominant way of construing wellbeing in all places in the world. In collectivistic cultures, values such as interpersonal harmony and religious conduct seem to be pursued with more commitment than hedonic wellbeing. Thus, in many collectivistic cultures, finding a balance between happiness and unhappiness rather than pursuing happiness and avoiding unhappiness is a preferable strategy for achieving wellbeing. A single-minded pursuit of positivity is viewed with caution, if not suspicion. Hence, in many of these collectivistic cultures, practising interpersonal and spiritual virtues may be more instrumental than striving to maximize individual hedonistic experiences in accomplishing wellbeing. Thus, it can be argued that non-Western conceptualizations of wellbeing are more consistent with eudaimonism than with hedonism (Joshanloo, 2014).

It is noteworthy that eudaimonic skills are also considered crucial in individualistic cultures. The cultural difference is in their relative priority in the hierarchy of values. Furthermore, we are not arguing that radical, egotistic, and amoral versions of hedonism are dominant in individualistic cultures. Instead, we are recognizing the centrality of personal positive affective valence and the priority of hedonic experience as defining features of wellbeing in individualistic cultures and the Western social sciences.

The Tension Between Self-Enhancement and Modesty

Self-enhancement involves maintaining a positive self-regard by focusing and elaborating on positive information about the self (Tsai et al., 2015). Consistent with the value of building and maintaining an independent self-concept, self-enhancement (e.g., self-esteem, self-promotion, and having a strong ego) is considered crucial to wellbeing and optimal functioning in individualistic cultures (Joshanloo, 2014; Markus & Hamedani, 2007). However, the emphasis on self-enhancement has been criticized by collectivistic perspectives as being too self-focused, egocentric, and self-promotional (Joshanloo, 2014). In some non-Western schools of thought (such as Buddhism), the self is considered to be an artificial construct (Van Gordon, Shonin, & Griffiths, 2017) and thus the pursuit of self-gratification, egotism, and self-enhancement are considered vices and causes of suffering (Shiah, 2016). Accordingly, constantly striving to enhance the self is considered detrimental to wellbeing.

Empirical research suggests that self-enhancing motivations are weaker among East Asians than in European Americans (Heine & Hamamura, 2007; Rosenmann & Kurman, 2019). Studies show that American self-descriptions are predominantly positive, whereas Japanese self-descriptions include more negativity (Kitayama & Markus, 2000), which suggests that collectivist cultures promote a more balanced view of the self in contrast to individualist cultures that value a more uniformly positive self-concept. Whereas personal achievements are more emphasized by individuals as a means to boost self-esteem in individualistic cultures, in collectivistic cultures, failures are more likely to be remembered, considered meaningful, and utilized as a base for self-improvement (Jose & Bellamy, 2012; Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, & Norasakkunkit, 1997). For example, Endo and Meijer (2004) asked participants to remember incidents from their lives and found that, whereas the Americans recalled considerably more success stories, the Japanese recalled slightly more failure stories than success stories. Farh, Dobbins, and Cheng (1991) found that Chinese employees rated their job performance less favourably than did their supervisors, showing a modesty bias. Evidence exists that some Asians are reluctant to conclude that their performance is better than average even after they receive positive feedback (Heine, Takata, & Lehman, 2000). Similarly, Asian employees who self-enhance are more likely to receive a negative evaluation from their bosses (Cullen, Gentry, & Yammarino, 2014). Indeed, self-enhancers may be socially sanctioned in some East Asian cultures (Rosenmann & Kurman, 2019).

In addition to the cultural differences in self-enhancing tendencies, the link between self-enhancement and wellbeing is also culturally variable. For example, negative self-descriptors were found to be a positive correlate of depression in the United States but not in Japan (Arnault, Sakamoto, & Moriwaki, 2005). Generally, self-esteem is a stronger predictor of wellbeing in individualistic than in collectivistic cultures (Diener & Diener, 2009). Harmony-related variables are a better predictor of wellbeing than self-esteem in more collectivistic cultures. For example, relationship harmony is a better predictor of wellbeing than self-esteem in Hong Kong, whereas self-esteem is a stronger predictor in the United States (Kwan, Bond, & Singelis, 1997).

Self-critical sensitivity to the thoughts and feelings of others at the cost of ignoring the inner, private aspects of the self partially explains why hedonic wellbeing in Asian cultures is lower than expected from their economic indices (Suh, 2007). Negative feedback from others and the associated unpleasant feelings of shame and embarrassment serve as a stimulus for self-improvement in collectivistic cultures. For example, Heine, Kitayama, and Lehman (2001) found that Americans who failed on a task persisted less on a follow-up task, whereas Japanese who failed persisted more than those who succeeded. In a longitudinal study, Tsai et al. (2015) examined whether self-enhancing and self-improving content in participants' expressive writings (i.e., reflections on negative personal experiences) were related to anxious and depressive symptoms differentially among Asian and European Americans. They found that among European Americans, self-enhancing content predicted better outcomes, whereas, for Asian Americans, self-improving content predicted better outcomes. In another study, Tsai, Chiang, and Lau (2016) examined the effects of self-enhancement and self-improvement reflections on recovery from distress among Asian and European Americans. They found that the level of emotional and physiological benefits from self-reflection depended on whether the self-reflection processes were consistent with individuals' cultural backgrounds. For example, Asian Americans exhibited considerably greater reductions in negative affect than European Americans in the self-improvement condition, and European Americans benefitted more from self-enhancement than from self-improvement.

It is noteworthy that Asians do not dislike themselves as individuals. Research with implicit measures of self-esteem shows that Asians feel implicitly positive about themselves (Kitayama & Rarasawa, 1997). Asians also enhance self-evaluation not directly but by making group-serving attributions (Yamaguchi & Sawaumi, 2019). It seems that in a collectivistic context, receiving positive evaluations from others is more salient and instrumental than constructing and maintaining positive self-evaluations. The collectivistic

self-critical tendency serves the function of motivating self-improvement, which can facilitate harmonious interpersonal relationships (Sasaki et al., 2014). Although there may be some hedonic costs associated with the self-critical and socially sensitive tendencies prevalent in collectivistic cultures (as suggested by Suh, 2007), these tendencies may contribute to important eudaimonic aspects of wellbeing. As mentioned before, eudaimonic conceptualizations of wellbeing are emphasized over hedonic ones in collectivistic cultures. Eudaimonic wellbeing is more consistent than hedonic wellbeing with a long-term emphasis on skill-building and striving for self-improvement as opposed to seeking immediate gratification (Joshanloo, Jovanović, & Park, in press).

In sum, in many collectivistic cultures, striving to increase positive feelings towards the self is not promoted. In contrast, self-transcendence and even self-abnegation are endorsed (Joshanloo, 2014). For instance, from a Buddhist perspective, Dambrun and Ricard (2011) argue that an individualistic notion of happiness can lead only to insubstantial and fleeting positive states as well as numerous negative ones (e.g., hostility, jealousy, anger, and hatred). These authors suggest that a conceptualization of happiness based on selflessness can lead to a higher frequency of compassion, empathy, care, respect, and similar values which are signifiers of psychological maturity in collectivistic cultures. Accordingly, psychological models of mental wellbeing in collectivistic cultures need to consider measuring self-transcendence and self-improvement in addition to self-enhancement. If self-enhancing tendencies become so prominent that they come to disrupt social harmony, they can hardly be considered to be indicators of wellbeing in harmony-oriented cultures.

The Tension Between Autonomy and Harmony

Although autonomy and relatedness are universal needs (Deci & Ryan, 2012), they are variably emphasized across different cultures (Wang & Senzaki, 2019). In particular, their desirability and centrality in models of wellbeing differ from culture to culture. Autonomy, agency, mastery, self-sufficiency, self-directedness, and self-determination are among the hallmarks of Western conceptualizations of wellbeing. Jahoda (1958) provided a thorough overview of all the theories and models related to mental health up until that time. Her analysis showed that many of these models "regard an individual's relation to the world as mentally healthy if it shows what is referred

to variously as autonomy, self-determination, or independence" (p. 45). According to Jahoda, two aspects of these concepts have been highlighted in Western classic notions of mental health: regulation of behaviour from within as well as independent behaviour. Likewise, Ryff's (2016) comprehensive analysis of the Western literatures of developmental, clinical, existential, and humanistic psychology resulted in the identification of autonomy as a key component of wellbeing. Ryff highlights several aspects of the concept such as resistance to enculturation, having an internal locus of evaluation, avoidance of approval-seeking, evaluating oneself by personal standards, and gaining freedom from the norms of everyday life. The satisfaction of autonomy needs is also regarded as a fundamental component of wellbeing in the Self-Determination Theory of Deci and Ryan (2012). The Western formulations and measurement instruments of wellbeing seem to de-emphasize the interpersonal and communal aspects of wellbeing (e.g., the relationship between the person and society) beyond personal relationships (Keyes, 1998).

Decades of empirical research have demonstrated that autonomy and mastery are more strongly valued in individualistic than collectivistic cultures. Evidence has been accumulated in multinational studies on values (Schwartz & Sagiv, 1995), locus of control (Smith, Trompenaars, & Dugan, 1995), and socialization processes (Keller, 2019), to name a few. In contrast, a sizable body of research indicates that interpersonal harmony, rather than mastery and autonomy, is paramount in collectivistic cultures (Kitayama & Markus, 2000; Suh, 2000). For example, evidence on control orientations indicates that in individualistic cultures, people favour using direct personal control to nurture their sense of autonomy and mastery in life. In contrast, people in collectivistic cultures tend to rely more on indirect, proxy, and collective control (Yamaguchi & Sawaumi, 2019). This preference for indirect ways of control in collectivistic cultures is consistent with the collectivistic ideals of avoiding interpersonal conflict, facilitating interpersonal harmony, and relying on collective over personal agency.

One key virtue in collectivistic cultures is to adjust oneself to the ebb and flow of the surrounding environment (i.e., things, people, and the universe at large). These cultures emphasize the importance of adjustment to the situation, i.e., employing gentleness and humility towards other people and conditions of life rather than trying to control and dominate people or things in one's environment (Joshanloo, 2013a, 2014). Accordingly, models and assessment tools of wellbeing originating from collectivistic cultures de-emphasize mastery and emphasize relationship harmony and adjustment (e.g., Brockman & Dudgeon, 2020; Hitokoto & Uchida, 2015; Kan, Karasawa, & Kitayama, 2009; Wang, Wong, & Yeh, 2016). In a study on lay

conceptualizations of happiness, Lu and Gilmour (2006) found that Chinese participants were more likely to endorse socially oriented conceptions (e.g., emphasizing role obligations in one's family and other groups), whereas American participants were more likely to endorse individually oriented conceptions (emphasizing personal responsibility, striving for success, and engaging in instrumental behaviour). Tellingly, although a sense of personal control has been found to be a strong predictor of wellbeing and health in the United States, the absence of relational strains is a stronger predictor in Japan (Kitayama, Karasawa, Curhan, Ryff, & Markus, 2010).

The ideal affective states seen to be instrumental in fostering wellbeing are also culturally variable. Given the centrality of adjustment and harmony goals in collectivistic cultures, low-arousal, passive positive emotions, such as peace and relaxation, are more valued in these cultures. In individualistic cultures, in contrast, where mastery and influence goals are salient, high arousal, active positive emotions (such as enthusiasm and excitement) are more strongly valued (Tsai, Miao, Seppala, Fung, & Yeung, 2007). Interpersonally disengaged, independent emotions (such as feelings of personal pride and superiority) are highly correlated with general positive mood in the United States, whereas in Japan interdependent emotions (such as feelings of respect and close feelings) manifest higher correlations with general positive mood (Kitayama, Markus, & Kurokawa, 2000). Similarly, Joshanloo and Weijers (2019) have found that in collectivistic cultures positive affect is aligned with positive relational experiences, whereas, positive affect more likely co-occurs with the experience of autonomy in individualistic cultures.

It is likely, given the salience of autonomy and mastery in the pursuit of happiness in individualistic cultures, that actively pursuing happiness may lead to detachment from others and a heightened sense of loneliness in these cultures (Mauss et al., 2012). In contrast, in collectivist societies, the pursuit of happiness is balanced against the value of interpersonal harmony and is executed through more socially engaged ways (Ford et al., 2015). In collectivistic cultures, it is ensured that mastery and autonomy do not disrupt interpersonal harmony. For example, there is evidence that the Japanese are more likely than Americans to be concerned about whether their personal success has troubled others (Miyamoto, Uchida, & Ellsworth, 2010). One of the reasons that people of collectivistic cultures are less likely to openly express their happiness is that they are worried that such expressions may disrupt social harmony (Joshanloo & Weijers, 2014; Uchida & Kitayama, 2009). Therefore, although personal achievement and the accompanying sense of mastery are universally valued, there is a stronger pressure on the members of

collectivistic cultures to pursue, celebrate, and express them more cautiously, to avoid conflict with other salient goals.

In sum, one of the fundamental differences in individualistic and collectivistic notions of happiness and a good life is that in the former, attempting to change, master, and control the world (including various aspects of one's life, relationships, and nature) is prioritized, whereas in the latter, adjustment to the environment, achieving harmony with others and the cosmos is more highly valued. In individualistic cultures, directly causing desired changes in the environment can lead to higher wellbeing through boosting the cultural ideal of autonomy. In contrast, to meet the cultural ideal of harmonious adaptation, fitting well with the environment is a more culturally suitable wellbeing strategy in collectivistic cultures (Yamaguchi & Sawaumi, 2019). Current Western models and measures have largely been developed based on the mastery model, ignoring the significance of harmony and adjustment in collectivistic contexts.

The Tension About the Importance of Context

Wellbeing has been largely conceptualized as an individual-level approach in modern Western cultures. In this understanding, wellbeing is personal and private, and internal feelings, personal control, and personal accountability are emphasized over contextual determinants of wellbeing. According to Cabanas and Illouz (2019), wellbeing and illbeing in these societies are regarded mainly as products of our personal choices and behaviours. Happiness is predominantly "seen as a mindset that can be engineered through willpower; the outcome of putting into practice our inner strengths and authentic selves" (p. 3). Positive psychology (which is deeply influenced by and is contributing to the pervasive processes of individualization and psychologization of wellbeing) has been criticized for putting excessive emphasis on internal states and failing to adequately consider contextual factors and the interplay between personal actions/emotions and contextual factors (Ciarrochi, Atkins, Hayes, Sahdra, & Parker, 2016). For example, Seligman (2004) concludes that changing "circumstances is usually impractical and expensive" (p. 50), and he calls instead for focusing on individual and psychological factors in achieving wellbeing. As noted by one of positive psychology's founding fathers (Gruner & Csikszentmihalyi, 2018), the field has largely focused on micro-level interventions at the personal level, largely ignoring socio-political environments that shape individual lives.

When coupled with the focus on hedonic wellbeing, these individualization processes may lead to demonizing negative feelings and demanding the pursuit of positivity while ignoring social contexts that may rightfully call for negativity (e.g., anger/frustration in reaction to traumatic or oppressive social contexts) (McNulty & Fincham, 2012; Yakushko, 2019).

However, research indicates that collectivistic cultures are more prepared and equipped to admit the importance of the context (or field) when explaining events including wellbeing outcomes (see Nisbett, 2003 for a review). European and North Americans tend to focus on a few salient objects in the environment and their attributes while discounting the role of general contextual factors, whereas Asians see "a great deal of the field, especially background events; they are skilled in observing relationships between events; they regard the world as complex and highly changeable and its components as interrelated" (Nisbett, 2003, p. 109). In other words, Westerners see the world analytically, and Asians see the world holistically. A consequence of the holistic style of thinking for Asians is that they

attend to objects in their broad context. The world seems more complex to Asians than to Westerners, and understanding events always requires consideration of a host of factors that operate in relation to one another in no simple, deterministic way. (Nisbett, 2003, p. xvi)

The holistic outlook on life is also endorsed in other collectivistic cultures outside of Asia. For example, from a Sub-Saharan perspective, the Western worldview is negligent in ignoring or downplaying the importance of invisible forces that affect life events and the interconnection of world phenomena. This perspective posits that humans are part of a complex and interconnected system of forces that are organized in three levels: the visible material world, the world of the ancestors, and the spirit world (Bains, 2015). Illbeing is a function of disharmony or the influence of evil spirits. Achieving wellbeing is impossible if insight into the interdependence of these forces is not gained. Likewise, ethnographic studies demonstrate a heavy reliance on the use of communal networks and acknowledgement of the spiritual plane of existence in indigenous systems of healing across cultures (Sue & Sue, 2008). Based on many indigenous philosophies, the Western conceptualization of wellbeing can be criticized on the grounds that it does not provide a holistic outlook on wellbeing by ignoring the unity between the mind, body, community, spirit/god, and nature. To these indigenous systems, enhancing wellbeing requires acknowledgement of this interconnectedness between internal and external forces, restoring the balance between them, and utilizing them in the

process of healing (e.g., by connecting to the spiritual forces and mobilizing one's social support group).

Research shows that the fundamental attribution error (the tendency for people to discount situational explanations and over-emphasize dispositional explanations for behaviour) is more common in individualistic than collectivistic cultures (Choi, Nisbett, & Norenzayan, 1999). People from collectivistic societies are more likely to explain life events, outcomes, and behaviour in terms of situational factors rather than dispositions inherent in individual actors (Norenzayan & Nisbett, 2000). Thus, the causal power of the situation is better recognized and acknowledged in collectivistic cultures. A study measuring eye movements while viewing focal objects placed within complex backgrounds demonstrated that Easterners were more likely to pay attention to contextual elements surrounding a focal object than Westerners (Chua, Boland, & Nisbett, 2005). It is difficult for some people in collectivistic cultures to pay attention to an object while ignoring its context, whereas this is relatively easier for Western participants (Norenzayan & Nisbett, 2000). Young and middle-aged adult Japanese have been found to make greater use of "wise reasoning" strategies than their American counterparts (Grossmann et al., 2012). These strategies are theorized to reflect a greater appreciation of context and interrelatedness between events, including.

> acknowledgment of other people's points of view, appreciation of contexts broader than the issue at hand, sensitivity to the possibility of change in social relations, acknowledgment of the likelihood of multiple outcomes of a social conflict, concern with conflict resolution, and preference for compromise. (p. 1059)

Consistent with the emphasis on context, research also shows that Asians are more likely to engage in social comparison in evaluating their achievements and wellbeing (Sasaki et al., 2014). Recent cultural neuropsychological results also confirm these cultural differences (Han, 2017). For example, Asians' brain activity is more sensitive to relative income, whereas brain activity in Westerners' brain activity is more sensitive to absolute income (Kang, Lee, Choi, & Kim, 2013). Suh and Choi's (2018) review of available evidence indicates that extrinsic goods (income, educational level, and physical appearance) are stressed more in the collectivistic understanding of wellbeing (even in rich East Asian cultures) than they are in individualistic cultures, where the internal, private aspects of the self are more emphasized. Researchers have found that, whereas internal feelings are more important predictors of wellbeing in individualistic cultures, social cues such

as perceived appraisals of others and group standards are more important in determining wellbeing in collectivistic cultures (Suh, Diener, Oishi, & Triandis, 1998). An important part of the context is the social networks within which one is embedded. For example, Ortiz (2020) pointed out that in the Latino/Hispanic culture, self-actualization is regulated through collective values, and the family plays a central role in defining self-actualizing for an individual.

A holistic style of thinking comes with greater expectations for change and the perceived fragility of states of being. The world is seen to be in constant flux. Ji, Nisbett, and Su (2001) presented linear (i.e., straight lines) and nonlinear (i.e., curved lines) trends to their American and Chinese participants and asked them to select the trend that best represented the trajectory of their happiness through their lifetime, from the beginning to the end. The Chinese endorsed nonlinear choices more than the Americans, suggesting that Chinese people are more likely than Americans to predict a reversal in their happiness status, which is consistent with regarding happiness as fragile and under the influence of a broad set of internal and external factors. The same results were found with Chinese and Canadian children (Ji, 2008). Endorsing beliefs concerning the fragility of happiness (the idea that happiness is fleeting and may be easily and quickly replaced by less favourable states) is associated with appreciating the power of context in determining our happiness (Joshanloo et al., 2014b). Endorsing fragility beliefs is positively associated with attributing one's level of happiness to such external factors as luck and fate and de-emphasizing personal control over one's level of happiness (Joshanloo, 2019b). In a study comparing 15 nations, Joshanloo et al. (2014b) found that fragility of happiness beliefs were more prevalent in more collectivistic and religious countries that endorsed the importance of fate and other external factors in determining life outcomes.

De Vaus, Hornsey, Kuppens, and Bastian, (2018) argued that the holistic way of thinking leads to the perception that emotional states, including sadness and happiness, can and do change, a realization that encourages the individual to enact more effective emotion regulation. Viewing negative emotions as malleable and temporary facilitates their acceptance and enables self-distancing (e.g., thinking "this too shall pass"). In contrast, the decontextualized Western views of emotion that highlight the ability of the person to exert control over external circumstances consider emotions mainly as the individual's responsibility. This perspective may lead to the notion that experiencing negative emotions is a personal/moral failure, resulting in ineffective emotion regulation. De Vaus and colleagues argued that the holistic versus analytical styles of thinking may partly explain the relatively lower prevalence

of mood disorders in Asian versus Western nations. Thus, these holistic and dialectical beliefs may reduce the frequency of positive affective experience or life satisfaction, but they also may come to hinder the escalation of negative affect into serious clinical disorders in Asian cultures.

Scientific models of wellbeing originating from collectivistic cultures take a holistic stance and note the importance of a broader set of determinants and components (e.g., Chan et al., 2014; Ng, Yau, Chan, Chan, & Ho, 2005; White, Gaines, & Jha, 2014). Given the relatively harsh conditions of life in many developing countries, achieving wellbeing goes far beyond internal quests for creating more positive affect or mastering subjective skills such as mindfulness. Instead, dramatic improvements in socio-political conditions are required.

Accordingly, in collectivistic cultures, researchers tend to include a broader array of contextual factors in addition to the variables usually included in Western wellbeing research, such as self-esteem, optimism, and personality traits (Pavot & Diener, 2008), to be able to adequately explain individual differences in wellbeing. For example, factors such as features of the natural environment, flood risk, and sanitation cannot be ignored in Bangladesh (Gruebner et al., 2012). In Thailand, community relationships, water supply, infrastructure and public services, food security, and land for farming are among the contextual determinants of wellbeing (Jongudomkarn & Camfield, 2006). Likewise, historical trauma, forced acculturation, loss of culture, language, and religion, and traditions of caring for older adults at home matter for wellbeing in Native Americans and Alaska Natives (Roman, Jervis, & Manson, 2012), as do forest activities, fishing, cattle rearing, cattle grazing in rural India (Mishra, 2017). And in Rural China, one cannot adequately explain wellbeing if one ignores mountainous versus hilly terrain, degree of harmony among lineages, and degree of harmony in villages (Knight, Lina, & Gunatilaka, 2009).

In sum, whereas individualistic cultures emphasize internal loci of control and internal explanations for affective experience and wellbeing, it is easier for collectivistic cultures to acknowledge the importance of contextual factors, external forces, and interconnectedness between internal and external determinants of wellbeing. Further, non-Westerners are more likely to endorse notions of externality and fragility of wellbeing.

Implications for Measuring Wellbeing at the Country Level: A Cautionary Remark

Markers of wellbeing can be studied at the individual and/or cultural levels. The preceding sections focused on individual-level models and results. At the cultural level, the unit of analysis is usually national cultures (or countries), and we usually consider aggregate attributes such as gross domestic product (GDP) and income inequality that describe groups of people who reside within a given country. The average individual assessments within a group can be used as an aggregate attribute for that group (such as national life satisfaction). It is important to note that results at the individual and national levels can be different. For example, a positive correlation exists at the national level between country-level individualism and job satisfaction, whereas the relationship between individualistic values and job satisfaction at the individual level within a certain culture (e.g., Hong Kong) may be negative (Triandis, Chen, & Chan, 1998). Given the existence of cultural differences in wellbeing at the individual level (as reviewed above), it is worth examining whether various markers of wellbeing function variably at the national level and yield differential associations with other country-level variables.

One of the consequential, yet largely ignored, insights that have emerged in the country-level analyses of wellbeing is the strong correlation between life satisfaction (also called life evaluation or happiness, Diener & Tay, 2015; Helliwell et al., 2019) and economic indicators such as GDP (Joshanloo, Jovanović, & Taylor, 2019; Van de Vliert, 2012). This correlation has been found to be as high as $r = 0.82$ (Joshanloo, 2018). Besides, life satisfaction is so strongly associated with indicators of socio-economic progress such as urbanity, globalization, individualism, democracy, education, religiosity, and nationally averaged age (negatively) that it is almost redundant when we have access to a large portion of these variables in country-level analyses (Joshanloo et al., 2019). One important repercussion of this substantial overlap between life satisfaction and economic and socio-political indices is that life satisfaction indices are largely biased against poor developing countries (at least in some regions). What is repeatedly found (e.g., Diener & Tay, 2015; Helliwell et al., 2019; Joshanloo, 2018) is that national indicators of wellbeing paint a dark picture of the status of wellbeing in some developing regions (e.g., Africa, Middle East, Central Asia, South Asia). For example, none of the African countries can be considered to have high wellbeing if we base our analysis of national wellbeing merely on life satisfaction. This outcome may be interpreted as a lack of wellbeing in many developing countries.

Joshanloo (2018) found that eudaimonic wellbeing was considerably less strongly associated with GDP than was life satisfaction. Other researchers have also shown that collectivistic measures of wellbeing (e.g., with a focus on the happiness of the family) manifest weaker correlations with individualism than the commonly used measures (Krys et al., 2019). In their comprehensive analysis of 20 country-level subjective and objective indicators of wellbeing, Joshanloo et al. (2019) identified three distinct factors: socio-economic progress (including economic, social, political indicators plus life satisfaction), psycho-social functioning (including eudaimonic wellbeing, positive affect, and social support), and negative affect. Notably, they demonstrated that psycho-social functioning and positive and negative affect were less strongly associated with national income and socio-political progress than was life satisfaction. These findings suggest that these wellbeing indicators paint a more promising picture of the status of wellbeing in some of the developing nations than one would think based on the traditional indicator of life satisfaction alone. For example, the Philippines scores highly on eudaimonic wellbeing (Joshanloo, 2018), Uzbekistan scores highly on psycho-social functioning, and Belarus and Mongolia score lowly on negative affect (Joshanloo et al., 2019). Hence, we suggest that indicators of wellbeing other than life satisfaction alone may be more suited to capture differences in wellbeing between countries exhibiting high, medium, and low development. For example, we see more variability in eudaimonic wellbeing scores than in life satisfaction scores in Africa, with some of the African countries exhibiting relatively high levels of eudaimonic wellbeing (Joshanloo, 2018).

The findings reviewed suggest that life satisfaction cannot be used as a proxy for all wellbeing variables such as eudaimonic wellbeing, (presence of) positive affect, and (lack of) negative affect at the country level. If a comprehensive assessment of wellbeing at the country level is intended, the diverse array of wellbeing variables available to researchers needs to be used in cross-cultural comparisons (Joshanloo et al., 2019). Using the whole arsenal of wellbeing measures will enable us to go beyond simple facts such as wellbeing is lower in developing than developed countries. The orders of countries in wellbeing rankings are partly determined by the wellbeing variable chosen.

Concluding Remarks: Measuring Wellbeing and Applying Wellbeing Interventions in Diverse Countries

Since most research on wellbeing is conducted by Western researchers at this time, the research findings are likely to be biased in favour of western measures of wellbeing that privilege conceptions of wellbeing based on individualistic principles. Therefore, wellbeing researchers need to be acutely mindful of the consequences of the cultural differences in how wellbeing is construed. We highlighted four of these fundamental differences in this chapter, an oversimplified summary of which is presented in Fig. 26.1. Without taking these cultural differences into account, a fair and comprehensive understanding of worldwide wellbeing is not possible. Ignoring cross-cultural differences in the measurement of wellbeing may lead to a one-sided, incomplete, or unfair assessment of wellbeing across regions of the world.

Perhaps even more important is that without an adequate appreciation of cultural differences, individualistic measurement tools and wellbeing enhancement strategies are more likely to be imposed on collectivistic cultures. We encourage groups who propose wellbeing interventions and policies to give greater attention to the culturally specific realities of the context. Proposed strategies and policies that are inconsistent with the fundamental mores and ethos of a target group may come to harm their wellbeing rather than help them. Evidence is accumulating for the contention that some of
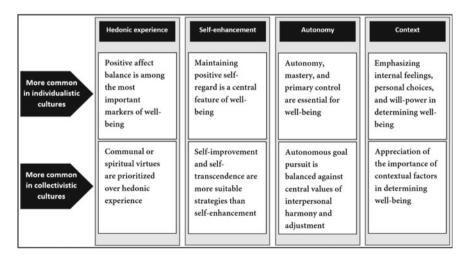
	Hedonic experience	Self-enhancement	Autonomy	Context
More common in individualistic cultures	Positive affect balance is among the most important markers of well-being	Maintaining positive self-regard is a central feature of well-being	Autonomy, mastery, and primary control are essential for well-being	Emphasizing internal feelings, personal choices, and will-power in determining well-being
More common in collectivistic cultures	Communal or spiritual virtues are prioritized over hedonic experience	Self-improvement and self-transcendence are more suitable strategies than self-enhancement	Autonomous goal pursuit is balanced against central values of interpersonal harmony and adjustment	Appreciation of the importance of contextual factors in determining well-being

Fig. 26.1 Four fundamental cultural differences in conceptions of wellbeing

the wellbeing enhancing activities that are being widely proposed are culture-bound and may be ineffective or even backfire in some cultures (e.g., Shin & Lyubomirsky, 2017).

In particular, interventions founded on enhancing personal happiness may turn out to be detrimental to the broader community's wellbeing in collectivistic cultures, for example, by exacerbating inequality (Adams & Estrada-Villalta, 2017). Individualistic orientations are associated with lower wellbeing in some collectivistic cultures (Jose & Schurer, 2010; Ogihara & Uchida, 2014). In collectivistic contexts, wellbeing should not be understood

> as the result of the actions taken by an out-of-context individual but by a person who is socially embedded and whose identity implies the existence of a social context. As a result, social action aimed at increasing people's wellbeing must recognize the importance of the social context. Wellbeing should not be promoted with an individualistic viewpoint but with a social view. (Rojas & García Vega, 2017, p. 242)

Culturally biased measurement tools that may accompany culturally inconsistent wellbeing interventions are incapable of fully capturing potentially unpleasant repercussions of these interventions over the long term. Furthermore, the potential of commercialization of research findings and the attractiveness of expansion of the market into new territories may be a barrier to a thorough and comprehensive cultural analysis of models and tools prior to making cultural generalizations. The unsurprising existence of such pitfalls reinforces our contention that wellbeing research will undoubtedly benefit from developing a deeper and more nuanced appreciation of cross-cultural differences in the bases for key wellbeing components.

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