Increasing Well-Being in Independent and Interdependent Cultures

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"Happiness depends upon ourselves."
—Aristotle (384 BC-322 BC), Greek philosopher

"Thousands of candles can be lighted from a single candle, and the life of the candle will not be shortened. Happiness never decreases by being shared."
—Buddha (563 BC-483 BC), Founder of Buddhism

What is happiness and how can it be achieved? Billions of people throughout history have sought the answer to these questions, from philosophers and religious teachers to commoners and ordinary citizens. The quotations above by Aristotle, an ancient Greek philosopher, and Buddha, the founder of a major world religion, endeavor to fathom the meaning of happiness. Their conceptions diverge considerably from one another, with Aristotle maintaining that happiness is within an individual's power and faculties to achieve, and Buddha contending that happiness is best experienced and even multiplied in relation to other people.

Western notions of happiness and well-being have dominated mainstream psychology, with subjective well-being (also known as happiness) defined as the experience of frequent positive emotions, infrequent negative emotions, and satisfaction with life (Diener, 1984; Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). However, since Asians comprise 60% of the world population (Population Reference Bureau, 2014), a consideration of Eastern notions of happiness is critical to a more complete understanding of the phenomenon. Thus, this chapter strives to 1) tease apart how happiness concepts in Eastern cultures differ from those in Western cultures, and 2) introduce the latest developments in positive activity interventions aiming to enhance happiness in Eastern cultures. We conclude with suggestions for future directions in this area of research, as well as their practical applications.

Cross-Cultural Differences in Subjective-Well Being

Although it is clear that people across the world strive to be happy (Diener, 2000), research has revealed national differences in the life domains that people are satisfied with, how happy nations are relative to others, and the antecedents leading to happiness for individuals within different cultures. First, it is clear that nations differ in their overall levels of subjective well-being. In one study of 43 nations, 15% of the variance in life satisfaction, 12% of the variance in financial satisfaction, and 12% of the variance in satisfaction with health was due to between-nation differences (Inglehart, Basanez, & Moreno, 1998). In another study of 39 nations, 12% of the variance in life satisfaction, 18% of the variance in positive emotions, and 11% of the variance in negative emotions were due to between-nation differences (Suh, Diener, Oishi, & Triandis, 1998). Shedding light on the nature of these differences, Asian American, Korean, and Japanese participants were found to derive more daily satisfaction from positive events than did European American participants (Oishi, Diener, Choi, Kim-Prieto, & Choi, 2007).

More important, studies have shown that these cross-cultural differences in subjective well-being emerge even after considering alternative explanations. For example, in an investigation on happiness and life satisfaction in Japan, South Korea, China, and the U.S., East Asian participants scored lower than Americans on general happiness and life satisfaction not only in absolute terms, but also when income was controlled (Diener, Suh, Smith, & Shao, 1995). To account for these differences in subjective well-being, artifactual explanations such as humility, fear of fate, not wanting to stand out, or unimportance of subjective well-being were ruled out (Diener, Suh, Smith, & Shao, 1995). On the other hand, more substantive explanations

such as normative desirability of negative emotions, displeasure with specific life aspects, and pressure for achievement were supported (Diener, Suh, Smith, & Shao, 1995).

Other studies have found that national differences in levels of subjective well-being appear to be due to cultural factors such as differences in wealth, human rights and social equality, self-enhancement and self-critical tendencies, relative approach versus avoidance orientations of societies, and norms prescribing the extent to which subjective well-being is important (Diener, 2000; Diener, Diener, & Diener, 1995; Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2003; Heine, Takata, & Lehman, 2000; Lee, Aaker, & Gardner, 2000; Oishi, 2001). Culture can also moderate which emotion variables most influence subjective well-being—such as satisfaction with the self, satisfaction with one's level of personal freedom, financial satisfaction, and self-reported experiences of positive emotion (Diener & Diener, 1995; Diener et al., 2003; Oishi, Diener, Lucas, & Suh, 1999; Suh, Diener, Oishi, & Triandis, 1998). Overall, the evidence demonstrates that there are indeed cross-cultural differences in subjective well-being.

Historical Roots of Subjective Well-Being

In the majority of both Eastern and Western cultures across time, happiness has been defined as "good luck" and as involving favorable external conditions (Kesebir & Diener, 2008; McMahon, 2006). In some Western cultures such as the United States, however, this definition has been replaced by one focused on internal feeling states (Oishi, Graham, Kesebir, & Galinha, 2013). To understand the reasons for this difference, we must delve into the historical roots and philosophical backgrounds of Eastern versus Western cultures.

Western notions of happiness include the pursuit of hedonia and eudaimonia, epitomized by Epicurus and Aristotle, respectively. Among hedonic-oriented psychologists, well-being is considered identical to subjective well-being, which is characterized by a predominance of

positive over negative affect, as well as a global satisfaction with life (Diener, 1984). This definition is rooted in the arguments of Utilitarian thinkers like Jeremy Bentham, who define a good life as consisting of the presence of pleasure and the absence of pain. By contrast, the eudaimonic traditions hold that humans can only live a good life when they actualize their potential and live in accordance with virtue, or moral excellence. Accordingly, there is an emphasis on valued traits such as self-esteem, meaning in life, optimism, personal expression, and autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff, 1989). This individualism and cherishing of personal rights further stem from the Judeo-Christian assertion that every person is created equal under God (Hwang, 2001); thus, every person is deserving and has rights and freedoms. The North American ethos, in particular, has been depicted as a "rugged" individualism in its pursuit of individual interests and rewarding of personal successes (Hsu, 1971).

In contrast, Eastern ideas of happiness derive their roots from Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist philosophies. Confucius preached that a wise ruler must rule with "virtue" and render people equal by ritual. He taught that the dominant virtues of benevolence, righteousness (or justice), and propriety should regulate interpersonal relationships. Happiness does not lie in personal salvation or material accumulation, but in self-cultivation, maintaining a harmonious family, ruling a country wisely, and keeping peace in the world. For the ordinary citizen, Confucian philosophy presupposes that each individual is a continuation of his or her ancestors and therefore, one should strive to promote the prosperity of one's family. Happiness is achieving this life goal through hard work and frugality to accumulate material resources, through intellectual labor and passing exams to obtain respectable social status, through suppression of selfish and earthly desires to lead a virtuous life, and ultimately through fulfillment of one's social duties.

Taoists assert that everything in the universe must follow *Tao*, the great Natural force that commences everything. In the "two poles" principles, the world is believed to exist through the operation of two opposite poles, *yin* and *yang*, and that peace is cultivated through accepting both good and bad, happiness and misery, and success and failure. Taoism contends that perfect happiness is liberation from all human desires, by following the Natural force, not attempting to change circumstances, accepting fate calmly, and facing life with a peaceful mind. The ultimate goal is to become anonymous—to vanish into, transcend, and merge with Nature.

Happiness in Buddhism can only be found in "nirvana," which promises eternal bliss beyond everyday misery of this world (Chiang, 1996). Renunciation of illegitimate desires (e.g., material gains, bodily pleasures) is thought to bring freedom and peace.

Ordinary East Asian individuals may apply teachings from all of these traditions in different contexts; for example, they may act in accordance with Confucianism when interacting with other people, with Taoism when faced with nature, and with Buddhism when they are confronted with themselves (Lu, 2001). Taken together, Eastern traditions emphasize conceptualizations of happiness as harmonious, interdependent, accepting the bad with the good, and unifying oneself with the group and with nature. This stands in stark contrast with the Western schools of thought that emphasize personal autonomy and meaning, self-actualization and self-expression, and simply, more net positive affect than negative affect. In light of these philosophies, the Eastern view of happiness is quite distinct from Western views and may need to be conceptualized separately in order to reflect indigenous thoughts (Joshanloo, 2013).

Independent vs. Interdependent Conceptions of Happiness

Self-Construals

Given the distinct historical roots and doctrines characterizing East Asian cultures, subjective well-being for these cultures must be conceptualized independently of Western assumptions and schemas. However, the majority of studies aiming to increase subjective well-being have presumed Western or independent self-construals, emphasizing personal agency and self-improvement. Markus and Kitayama (1991) defined an independent self-construal as a view of the self in which individuals see themselves as separate entities who are bounded, unique, and autonomous. In such a self-view, individuals assert and protect their own rights, act on the basis of their own attitudes and judgments, and separate and distinguish themselves from the context. (See Figure 1A for a conceptual representation of the Western, independent view of the self.) In contrast, Eastern (i.e., Asian) cultures' interdependent self-construals are defined as a view of oneself as connected, relational, and a part of a larger social unit. In this type of self-construal, individuals maintain a social orientation in which roles, statuses, and in-group memberships are carefully considered (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). (See Figure 1B for a conceptual representation of the Eastern, interdependent view of the self.) East Asian cultures are a prominent example of highly interdependent cultures and have received the most attention in the literature; therefore, we will focus on East Asians for the remainder of this chapter. Similarly, we will focus on European American culture as the countervailing Western, independent culture.

Socially Engaging and Disengaging Emotions

These two distinct self-views have been found to be associated with two types of behavior—socially engaging versus socially disengaging. Socially engaging behavior involves taking one's proper place, perfecting one's own roles, empathizing with others and acting on the

bases of these others' expectations and needs, and blurring the distinction between self and others in the social context. This type of behavior is associated with interdependence and interpersonal engagement of the self in East Asian cultures (Kitayama, Markus, & Kurokawa, 2000). Socially disengaging behavior, such as asserting and protecting one's own rights, acting on the basis of one's own attitudes or judgments, and separating or distinguishing the self from the context, is associated with independence and interpersonal disengagement of the self in the U.S. (Kitayama et al., 2000).

Studies have shown that Americans report more frequent positive emotions (e.g., happiness, elation) than negative emotions (e.g., sadness, anxiety), but Japanese report more frequent engaging emotions (e.g., respect, guilt) than disengaging emotions (e.g., pride, anger) (Kitayama et al., 2000). Across a range of situations, Japanese also report experiencing engaging emotions more strongly than disengaging emotions, but Americans report the reversed tendency (Kitayama, Mesquita, & Karasawa, 2006). Furthermore, researchers have found that the frequency of general positive emotions is positively related to the frequency of interpersonally engaging positive emotions in Japan, but with the frequency of interpersonally disengaging positive emotions in the U.S. (Kitayama et al., 2000), suggesting that positive emotions are associated with differences in interpersonal engagement across cultures.

The links between Western culture and interpersonally disengaging emotion, as well as between Eastern culture and engaging emotions, impact each culture's conceptualization of subjective well-being. Indeed, European American subjective well-being is better predicted by the experience of disengaging positive emotions than by that of engaging emotions (Kitayama et al., 2006). European American subjective well-being, with its cultural emphasis on free will, personal accountability, and individual reason, is characterized by an explicit pursuit of

happiness (Lu & Gilmour, 2004). With an infrastructure built on democracy and equality, a constitution that upholds personal rights, and social customs that encourage personal striving, in the U.S., explicitly seeking happiness by mastering the environment and achieving goals is compatible with living out an independent personhood (Lu & Gilmour, 2004). This European-American pursuit of happiness has been conceptualized as "individually-oriented subjective well-being" (Yamaguchi & Kim, 2015).

In contrast, Japanese subjective well-being is better predicted by the experience of engaging positive emotions than by that of disengaging emotions (Kitayama et al., 2006). Asian subjective well-being, with its cultural emphasis on connectedness and social relationships, is distinctly characterized by role obligation. In "socially-oriented subjective well-being," individuals strive for socially prescribed achievement, fulfillment of role obligations in close relationships, maintenance of interpersonal harmony, and welfare of the collective, such as family (Lu & Gilmour, 2004; Yamaguchi & Kim, 2015). Such a view of subjective well-being is consistent with a Confucian obligation-based moral discourse, in contrast with a Western discourse based on rights. Indeed, studies have shown that the connection between relationship harmony and self-esteem is stronger in Asian countries than in the U.S. (Kwan, Bond, & Singelis, 1997).

Measurement

Other researchers have conceptualized interdependent happiness as the global, subjective assessment of whether one is interpersonally harmonized with other people, quiescent, ordinary, and connected to the collective way of well-being (Hitokoto & Uchida, 2015). To measure such a happiness that is contingent upon significant others' happiness and approval, items such as "I believe that I and those around me are happy" and "I feel that I am being positively evaluated by

those around me," may need to be used in place of classic happiness scales (e.g., the Subjective

Happiness Scale; SHS) that distinguish an individual and her happiness from her context (e.g.,

the item "In general, I consider myself [1 = *not a very happy person*; 7 = *a very happy person*];"

Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999). (Even the SHS item, "Compared with most of my peers, I

consider myself (1 = *less happy*; 7 = *more happy*)," although addressing a person's context, does

not presume that an individual's happiness is directly contingent upon others' happiness.) The 9-

item Interdependent Happiness Scale (IHS) has been validated in East Asian samples, better

explaining the subjective well-being of such individuals than traditional measures of subjective

well-being (Hitokoto & Uchida, 2015).

Ideal Affect

Owing to the ancient *yin-yang* philosophy, another characteristic of socially-oriented

subjective well-being is an observance of dialectical balance, in which a more solemn and

reserved attitude is taken towards pursuing happiness (Lu & Gilmour, 2004). Affect valuation

theory states that "ideal affect" (what people want to feel) differs from "actual affect" (what

people actually feel), and that cultural factors shape ideal affect more than actual affect (Tsai,

Knutson, & Fung, 2006; Tsai & Park, 2014). Such cultural factors might include interacting with

parents, peers, or teachers; exposure to popular media; and engaging in religious practices.

According to affect valuation theory, affect covaries along two dimensions—valence and

arousal. Tsai and colleagues (2006) contend that residents of Western cultures aim to influence,

change, and improve their environments, and thus initiate action in general more frequently. As a

result, European and Asian Americans have been found to value high-arousal positive states

(e.g., excited, energetic) more than do Asians.

In contrast, due to the East Asian cultural emphasis on fitting in and adjusting one's needs to fit the environment, people with interdependent concepts first assess the demands of the environment by allowing others to act first and observing situations. Because East Asians tend to observe before acting, the researchers predicted and found that Asians and Asian Americans value low-arousal positive states (e.g., calm, relaxed) more than European Americans do (Tsai et al., 2006). Additionally, the researchers found that the discrepancy between ideal and actual affect correlates with depression, especially for low-arousal positive emotions for Asians and Asian Americans and for high-arousal positive emotions for European and Asian Americans (Tsai et al., 2006; Tsai & Park, 2014).

Furthermore, the actual experience of positive and negative affect appears to be less mutually exclusive (i.e., more dialectical) —that is, they may co-occur—in East Asian contexts compared to Western contexts. Studies have shown that Beijing and Hong Kong Chinese show a weaker inverse relationship between actual positive and negative affect than European American and Chinese American groups (Sims, Tsai, Wang, Fung, & Zhang, 2012). Moreover, dialectical affective experience was mediated by ideal affect: The more individuals were experimentally induced to value positive states and devalue negative states, the more they reported both actual positive and negative affect.

In sum, the above lines of research provide strong theoretical and empirical support for two distinctive types of subjective well-being. The European American (individual) conceptualization of subjective well-being is characterized by autonomy, explicit pursuit, high-arousal positive states, and low social engagement; this is the conceptualization employed in the majority of research and literature on subjective well-being. However, (social) subjective well-being in East Asian cultures functions in distinctive and often contrasting ways, specifically as a

more relational, collectivistic, interdependent construct characterized by low-arousal positive states and high social engagement.

Independent vs. Interdependent Well-Being and Social Support

These two types of subjective well-being, socially- and individually-oriented, affect the use of social support in counterintuitive ways based on what is known about the nature of interdependent relationships. At first glance, social support may be expected to be highly beneficial for interdependent cultures due to their greater emphases on social relationships; however, some studies have found that Asians and Asian Americans rely *less* on social support for coping with stress than European Americans do, and these cultural differences are stronger for emotional support than for instrumental support (Taylor et al., 2004). Asians and Asian Americans are less likely to seek social support because they are concerned about the possible social ramifications of doing so, such as disturbing the harmony of the group, losing face, receiving criticism, or making the situation worse (Taylor et al., 2004). Other studies have found that Asian Americans are less likely to seek both instrumental and emotional support than European Americans (Kim, Sherman, Ko, and Taylor (2006). Furthermore, European Americans reported that family and friends' support was more helpful in dealing with stressors than did Asian Americans (Kim et al., 2006). Additionally, while Asian Americans and European Americans do not differ in how successfully stressors are resolved in general, among Asian Americans who do seek emotional support, the support is less helpful for resolving the stressor (Kim et al., 2006). Asian Americans, who consider their fates to be more yoked with those of close others, are also less likely to seek social support when they are primed to think about close others. If an Asian American's identity is intertwined with that of a close other, the relationship implications for asking for help (e.g., imposing on the other) may be more chronically accessible,

thereby deterring them from asking the close other for help. In contrast, European Americans'

willingness to seek support was unaffected by relationship priming (Kim et al., 2006). Thus,

these studies show that individuals from interdependent cultures may rely less on actual social

support for coping with stressors due to their social implications.

On the other hand, some studies have shown that among Asians, *perceived* emotional

support positively predicts subjective well-being, even after self-esteem is controlled (Uchida,

Kitayama, Mesquita, Reyes, & Morling, 2008). For European Americans, the positive effect of

perceived emotional support on subjective well-being is weak and disappears entirely after self-

esteem is controlled.

Notably, two pathways to subjective well-being are self-related and other-related. In a

recent study, Americans reported higher levels of subjective well-being, emotional expression,

and social support provision than their Japanese counterparts, but both groups showed similar

influences of self- (in this case, via the personal expression of emotions) and other-related

pathways (via giving social support to others) on subjective well-being (Novin, Tso, & Konrath,

2014). In both groups, independent self-construal was found to have a direct positive effect on

subjective well-being, and also to indirectly predict subjective well-being via increased

emotional expression and giving support to others (Novin et al., 2014). Interdependent self-

construal also had a positive direct relationship to subjective well-being; however, it also

affected subjective well-being indirectly via giving more support to others and via showing less

emotional expression. These findings were nearly identical across cultures, except that

Americans showed a stronger positive relationship between independent self-construal and

emotional expression, and Japanese showed a stronger positive relationship between

independence and giving social support. Thus, in this study, both independent and

interdependent self-construals had positive effects on subjective well-being by the provision of social support to others in both Eastern and Western cultures. In conclusion, the research reveals a complex relationship between social support and subjective well-being in interdependent and independent cultures, and highlights that further research is needed to disentangle the effects of *actual* versus *perceived* support and *giving* versus *receiving* social support in both cultures.

Culture Influences Positive Activity Interventions

Thus far, we have discussed differences between independent and interdependent conceptualizations of happiness and well-being. For the remainder of the chapter, we describe implications of these different conceptualizations on happiness-increasing interventions in both contexts, as well offer several practical applications. One such practical application involves the treatment of major depression. Major depression is a psychiatric disorder characterized by sadness, decreased pleasure, feelings of worthlessness, and physiological symptoms (sleep, appetite, cognitive changes) (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Depression is currently the third leading cause of disease burden globally, will be the second leading cause by 2020, and the leading cause by 2030 (Murray & Lopez, 1996; WHO, 2008). For clinical patients who have not responded to conventional care, positive activity interventions hold promise for augmenting traditional drug therapy and psychotherapy treatment (Layous, Chancellor, Lyubomirsky, Wang, & Doraiswamy, 2011; Shin & Lyubomirsky, in press). If administered optimally, positive activity interventions can build positive psychological resources, such as social connections and meaning in life, and ameliorate existing maladaptive symptoms such as anxiety and rumination (Sin, Della Porta, & Lyubomirsky, 2011; Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009). Positive activity interventions involve simple, self-administered cognitive and behavioral strategies (i.e., "positive activities") that can increase subjective well-being by promoting positive feelings, thoughts, and

behaviors (Layous & Lyubomirsky, 2014). Positive activities such as counting one's blessings (Chancellor, Layous, & Lyubomirsky, 2015; Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Froh, Sefick, & Emmons, 2008; Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005; Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005), writing letters of gratitude (Boehm, Lyubomirsky, & Sheldon, 2011; Layous, Lee, Choi, & Lyubomirsky, 2013; Lyubomirsky, Dickerhoof, Boehm, & Sheldon, 2011; Seligman et al., 2005), and performing acts of kindness (Dunn, Aknin, & Norton, 2008; Layous, et al., 2013; Layous, Nelson, Oberle, Schonert-Reichl, & Lyubomirsky, 2012; Nelson et al., 2015; Nelson, Layous, Cole, & Lyubomirsky, in press; Sheldon, Boehm, & Lyubomirsky, 2012) have been shown to reliably boost well-being in European American and other independent cultures.

As mentioned previously, because Asians comprise 60% percent of the world population (Population Reference Bureau, 2014) and Asian Americans are the fastest-growing minority group in the U.S., there is a critical need to address this population's mental health needs (U.S. Census, 2010). For Asians in Asia, the 12-month prevalence rate for mental disorders is approximately 4% to 9%; however, it is unknown whether this relatively low rate is due to measurement artifacts (see later discussion of psychosomatic symptoms), underreporting, or actual differences (The WHO World Mental Health Survey Consortium, 2004). Although mental illness prevalence rates are the same for Asian Americans as those of the general U.S. population (approximately 26% for 12 months), Asian Americans use psychological services at lower rates than European Americans (The WHO World Mental Health Survey Consortium, 2004; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001). Furthermore, among the Asian Americans who do use services, their condition severity is high, indicating that they delay seeing a mental health professional until problems are very serious. Stigma and shame have been identified as major deterrents to the utilization of mental health services both in Asia and for Asians

Americans in the U.S (Lauber & Rössler, 2007; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001).

Self-administered positive activities may be especially valuable for Asians and Asian Americans because they are less stigmatizing, economical, and carry no side effects. A variety of different positive activity interventions, including recounting kindness, performing acts of kindness, and practicing gratitude, have worked successfully in interdependent populations. In Japan, people increased their subjective well-being, and became more kind and grateful after counting their own acts of kindnesses over one week (Otake, Shimai, Tanaka-Matsumi, Otsui, & Fredrickson, 2006). The authors suggested that gratitude may promote happiness by enhancing one's experience of positive events and one's social network. In another study, relative to controls, Japanese participants who recounted three positive events at work reported greater happiness over time, were less sedentary, engaged in less socializing (perhaps indicating higher productivity), and left the office earlier (Chancellor et al., 2015). Furthermore, those who put more effort into the positive activity showed greater changes. In South Korea, performing kind acts while receiving autonomy support led to greater improvements in subjective well-being than performing kind acts without autonomy support or engaging in comparison activities (Nelson et al., 2015). These well-being improvements were mediated by feelings of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. In Hong Kong, researchers implemented gratitude, hope, and open-mindedness interventions (Zhou et al., 2016). The interventions—particularly, open-mindedness—were effective in increasing attitude and intention to perform behaviors, frequency of targeted behaviors, and family health and happiness. The authors surmised that the open-mindedness intervention improved family communication, which plays a critical role in family relationships. As a whole, these studies exemplify how conventional positive activity interventions can also

work in interdependent cultural contexts and that similar underlying mechanisms (e.g., the role of connections with others) are shared by both independent and interdependent cultures .

Despite the evidence that positive activity interventions do increase subjective well-being in interdependent cultures, emerging research shows that culture may impact the interpretation and meaning of conventional positive activities, the features of the positive activities that must be altered for optimal efficacy, and the types of subjective well-being (i.e., hedonic vs. eudaimonic) that are bolstered. In one cross-cultural study conducted in South Korea and the United States, U.S. participants experienced increased subjective well-being from practicing both gratitude and kindness, but South Korean participants benefitted only from performing kind acts (Layous et al., 2013). The researchers posited that South Koreans did not derive as much benefit from practicing gratitude because they felt indebted and guilty about being the recipient of others' kind acts. This interpretation aligns well with the idea that socially-oriented, interdependent subjective well-being is concerned with the maintenance of interpersonal harmony, the welfare of the collective group, and the fulfillment of role obligations in close relationships. This interpretation is also consistent with the findings that social support (a typical catalyst for gratitude) is less sought out—but not less offered—in interdependent cultures. Taken together, these findings suggest that when psychologists prescribe positive activities to practice for persons from interdependent cultures, they must consider the social ramifications of the target positive activity, such as its effects on group harmony, losing or saving face, or receiving criticism from others. Notably, the activity of performing acts of kindness takes these social ramifications into consideration, whereas writing gratitude letters does not.

In another study, expressing optimism about their personal futures and writing letters of gratitude to family and friends increased life satisfaction more in European Americans compared

to predominantly foreign-born Asian Americans (Boehm et al., 2011). Further, Asian Americans benefitted marginally more from conveying gratitude to people in their lives compared to expressing optimism about their personal futures. These results are consistent with individualist cultures' value on self-improvement and personal agency (leading to a direct pursuit of happiness) and interdependent cultures' valuation of harmonious relationships (resulting in reluctance to experience intense positive states) and role obligations (prompting familial duty to help each other). That is—gratitude is, by its nature, an interpersonal activity, whereas optimism primarily applies to the individual. Positive activity interventions for interdependent cultures must be designed in accordance with cultural values and norms for happiness. For example, the intervention might have more effectively increased well-being in Asian and Asian American populations if an act of gratitude were performed with a material item (i.e., a gift) and done by a collective group (such as a family) towards another collective group (such as a business).

Finally, a recent study showed that affirming their most significant values (e.g., relationships, career, honesty) increased hedonic and eudaimonic well-being for U.S. participants, but only eudaimonic well-being for South Koreans (Nelson, Fuller, Choi, & Lyubomirsky, 2014). Researchers deduced that based on Eastern cultures' emotional dialecticism, the South Koreans derived both positive and negative meanings when affirming their values. By contrast, U.S. participants likely focused on the positive aspects of their values given their preference for high arousal positive emotions, and thereby experienced hedonic well-being when considering their core values. As discussed earlier, subjective well-being may need to be defined distinctly for interdependent and independent cultures—what is considered the ideal for independent cultures (more positive emotions) may be different from what is considered the ideal for interdependent cultures (a balance of positive and negative emotions). Overall,

positive activity interventions do seem to be effective at increasing subjective well-being in interdependent cultures, but their careful design, implementation, and interpretation of their findings appear to be critically relevant to their success.

Current Research on Interdependent Positive Activity Interventions

Studies have already shown that due to their positive focus on others, both remembering and enacting prosocial behavior are positive activities that have the potential to be successful in Eastern interdependent cultures (Chancellor et al., 2015; Nelson et al., 2015; Otake et al., 2006). Additional studies in our laboratory are currently underway to test the mechanisms (i.e., *who* to help, *how* to help, and *why* to help) underlying the success of positive activities in interdependent cultures.

In one study, to determine *who* is the optimal target to help, Hong Kong (Asian) and U.S. (European American) participants are writing about kindnesses they have done for close others, strangers, or themselves (active control), or about their daily activities (neutral control) (Shin, Yue, Sheldon, & Lyubomirsky, 2016). Specifying and assigning who participants write about is expected to help determine how Asians' emphasis on interpersonal harmony, the welfare of the collective group, and role obligations affects the benefits derived from practicing prosocial behavior. Due to their interdependent orientation, relative to controls, Asian participants who recall times they helped close others are hypothesized to experience greater subjective well-being via feelings of greater connectedness and relationship closeness. Asian participants who recall times they helped strangers are hypothesized to experience decreased or no change in subjective well-being due to the discomfort associated with interacting with individuals outside of their collective group and the lack of role obligation to such individuals. In contrast, European Americans, due to their independent orientation, will likely experience greater subjective well-

being from recalling times they helped both strangers and close others, and this effect is expected

to be mediated by greater personal autonomy and competence.

In another ongoing study, to determine optimal ways of *how* to help, Hong Kong (Asian)

and U.S. (European American) participants are asked to give *solicited* support (i.e., to meet

practical needs that a close other explicitly asks of them), *unsolicited* support (i.e., to anticipate

and then meet a close other's practical needs), or to organize household items (control) (Shin et

al., 2016). By distinguishing unsolicited social support from solicited social support in practicing

prosocial behavior, our study aims to confirm the significance of empathizing with others, acting

on the bases of their expectations and needs, and blurring the distinction between the helper and

the helped in increasing subjective well-being within interdependent Asian cultures. Relative to

controls, we expect Asian participants who give unsolicited support to experience greater

subjective well-being because of their comfort and proficiency with anticipating others' needs

due to their interdependent orientation. In contrast, Asian participants who give solicited support

are expected to experience decreased or no change in subjective well-being due to the discomfort

and awkwardness of being unable to anticipate others' needs and thereby disrupt relational

harmony. European Americans, on account of their independent orientation, are hypothesized to

experience greater subjective well-being from giving solicited support, mediated by greater

personal autonomy and competence, due to their fluency with distinguishing themselves from the

one they are helping.

Finally, to test the effect of the reasons (the *why*) for valuing kind acts on the effort put

forth towards them, South Korean (Asian) and U.S. (European American) participants are asked

to read a news article that frames acts of kindness as good for oneself versus good for others, and

then to perform acts of kindness throughout the week (Layous, Shin, Choi, & Lyubomirsky,

2016). Experimentally manipulating whether individuals value kindness as good for themselves versus good for others will help determine the effect of cultural values (such as acting on the bases of others' needs) on effort put forth towards a kindness intervention. Due to their interdependent orientation, Asian participants who value kindness as good for others are expected to experience greater subjective well-being owing to increased motivation to make close others happier. Asian participants who value kindness as good for themselves are hypothesized to experience decreased or no change in subjective well-being due to the discomfort of having to consider their own personal preferences. Due to their independent orientation, European Americans are hypothesized to experience greater subjective well-being from valuing kindness as good for themselves by virtue of the stock they put into their personal wants and propensity to strive for happiness. Preliminary results are showing that the European Americans did experience greater subjective well-being from valuing kindness as good for themselves, but the South Korean participants did not experience greater well-being from valuing kindness as good for others. Future research with alternative manipulations and additional cross-cultural samples is needed to further understand and replicate these findings.

In determining whom, how, and why to help others in interdependent cultures, this new ongoing research aims to test and confirm the unique effects of interdependent self-construals in increasing subjective well-being.

Future Questions and Directions for Positive Activity Interventions

Despite the advances in theory and empirical research on positive activity interventions across cultures, the field is still in its infancy, with substantial theoretical gaps to be filled and empirical questions to be answered. Studies have shown that subjective well-being measures with the highest cross-cultural validity are those that account for cultural differences—for

example, by including indigenous emotion words or considering their factor structure and reliability cross-culturally (Diener et al., 2003). Because emotions in interdependent cultures are expressed indirectly so as not to disturb relational harmony (e.g., asking, "Are you eating proper meals?" may be more appropriate than asking "How are you doing?"), subjective well-being questionnaires for such cultures may need to be adapted to inquire about well-being more indirectly. To measure well-being, a physical health questionnaire inquiring about psychosomatic symptoms (e.g., the Kim Depression Scale for Korean Americans; Kim, 2002) could be used as a proxy for measuring emotional health. Asking about insomnia or heart palpitations is more socially appropriate and relevant for interdependent cultures than asking directly about one's happiness, which is more appropriate in independent cultures. (For more information on somatization in Asian cultures see Hong, Lee, & Lorenzo, 1995; Kleinman, 1982; Park & Bernstein, 2008; Parker, Cheah, & Roy, 2001; Zhou et al., 2015).

The designs of positive activity interventions also need to be sensitive to the distinct self-concepts of individuals from interdependent and independent cultures. As mentioned earlier, when developing positive activity interventions for interdependent cultures, social ramifications of the positive activity intervention, such as its effects on group harmony, saving face, or receiving criticism from others must be taken into consideration. Writing gratitude letters, for example, may not only have different mechanisms of operation in interdependent cultures but may even backfire if not implemented properly (Layous et al., 2013). Gratitude is a type of emotional (rather than instrumental) support that has been shown to be a less effective form of social support for interdependent cultures (Kim et al., 2006). Thus, rather than writing a letter, treating a friend to a meal or giving a thoughtful gift may more aptly and effectively express gratitude. Furthermore, positive activity interventions may not have the same effect even among

members of ostensibly similar Western independent cultures. For example, preliminary data suggest that workers in France who practice gratitude feel more guilt and embarrassment relative to U.S. workers (Armenta, 2014).

Likewise, more research is necessary for developing potentially new positive activity interventions in both interdependent and independent cultures. For example, due to the Confucian values of roles and propriety, positive activity interventions for East Asian cultures may be most effective when they are role-specific and context-specific. Positive activities for Asians and Asian Americans might best be conceptualized as those for a teacher, a student, a son/daughter, a parent, a boss, and an employee, for example, rather than for "individuals" in general. For Western cultures or other cultures with independent self-concepts, positive activity interventions may be most effective when they are goal-oriented or self-asserting. For example, a kindness intervention for Europeans and European Americans might prompt individuals to focus on the autonomous choices they can make to be kind or the benefits they personally glean from performing a kind act.

In contrast to members of independent cultures, members of interdependent cultures may find the pursuit of their own personal happiness selfish and non-normative and might rather aspire to maintain the welfare of the collective whole. To be more efficacious in interdependent cultures, positive activity interventions may need to be targeted to the level of the "collective unit" rather than to individuals within those units—for example, positive activity interventions could target whole families, businesses, and classrooms and be framed as enhancing those units rather than the self.

Furthermore, due to emotional dialecticism and the emerging research on affect valuation theory, positive activity interventions need to be designed with a different set of emotional

outcomes for interdependent cultures than they are for independent cultures. Although the overarching goal is the same, to increase overall well-being, positive activities for interdependent cultures may be more effective if they generate calmness, serenity, and an acceptance of both good and bad rather than intense positive emotions only. Instead of practicing optimism or counting one's blessings (solely), members of interdependent cultures may derive more benefit from a more balanced view of the past and future through an acceptance of the bad along with the good, and expected failures as well as successes.

Finally, although the research reviewed in this chapter has focused primarily on East Asian interdependent cultures, members of Southeast Asian, South Asian, Latino, and African cultures may also embody interdependent mindsets. In order to account for idiosyncratic features of these cultures as compared to East Asian cultures, well-being and positive activity intervention research should be expanded to include such cultures. Researchers should also note that most independent cultures also include some elements of interdependent self-concepts. Accordingly, conceptualizing self-concepts on a continuum may be more appropriate for the design of positive activity interventions.

Practical Applications of Interdependent Positive Activity Interventions

As the world of the 21st century becomes increasingly globalized and Asian populations—in both Asia and in countries like the U.S.—continue to grow, interdependent considerations will be critically relevant to efforts to bolster well-being in these populations. The advancements in culturally-relevant definitions of subjective well-being and the developments and future improvements in culturally-specific positive activity interventions have a myriad of potential real-world applications.

With the increasing prevalence of mental disorders, positive activity interventions have the potential to augment traditional forms of treatment (Layous et al., 2011; Shin & Lyubomirsky, in press). Underutilization of mental health services by Asians and Asian Americans due to stigma and shame indicate that novel methods of treatment are needed. Researchers can better tailor positive activity interventions to Asians and Asian Americans as they become increasingly knowledgeable about the harmonious relationships and dialectical emotional styles characteristic of interdependent cultures, rendering such interventions more effective in increasing well-being. Importantly, culturally-tailored positive activity interventions may also serve as protective factors to prevent future mental health conditions for Asians and Asian Americans (e.g., Layous, Chancellor, & Lyubomirsky, 2014).

A wealth of evidence also suggests that positive activity interventions can strengthen pre-existing social relationships such as those with family and friends (for example, see Layous et al., 2012; Lyubomirsky & Sin, 2009). Ongoing and future research on characteristics of interdependent cultures, such as harmonious relationships, prioritizing the welfare of the collective group, and fulfillment of role obligations in close relationships will inform the tailoring of positive activity interventions for Asians and Asian Americans. Furthermore, positive activity interventions tuned in to such social ramifications will help augment social connections within Asian American immigrant communities, whose members often feel disconnected from their home countries as well as isolated from mainstream U.S. society.

Advances in increasing flourishing and well-being in interdependent cultures will also be relevant to general self-help applications for Asians throughout the world, as well as for members of ethnic minorities in the U.S. Strategies for increasing happiness among people of interdependent cultures may be disseminated to media such as books, websites, and apps along

with mental health professionals such as counselors, coaches, and even primary care physicians, who are often the first to catch mental health conditions such as depression or anxiety.

The future is bright and promising for the field of subjective well-being and positive activity interventions. As the world population becomes increasingly internationalized, happiness-enhancing programs and guidelines can no longer be dominated by Western values and ideas. Instead, researchers, policy makers, and clinicians alike must acknowledge the growing importance of advancing well-being in socially-oriented, interdependent cultures.

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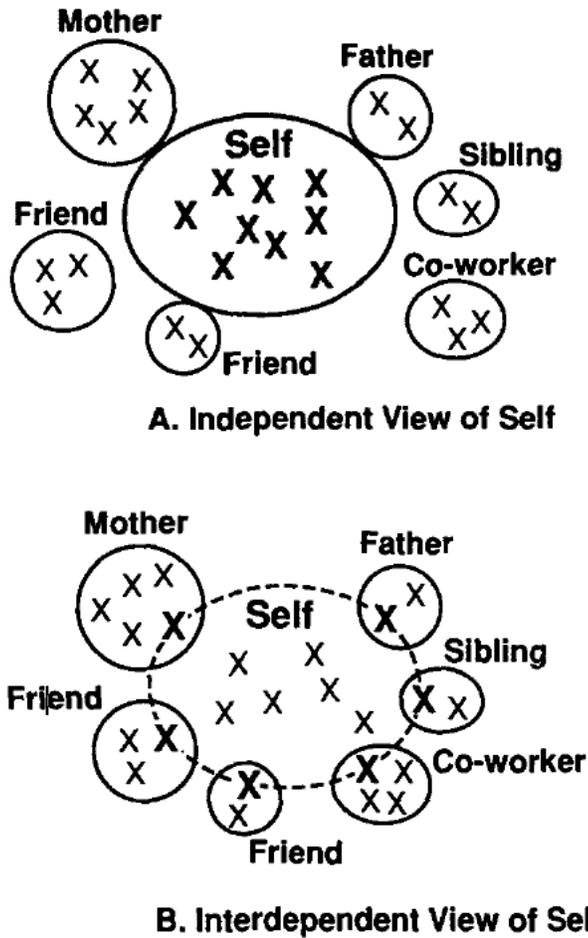
Figure 1. Conceptual representations of the self. (A: Independent construal. B: Interdependent construal.)

Figure 1. Conceptual representations of the self. (A: Independent construal. B: Interdependent construal.) Adapted with permission from "Culture and the self: Implications for cognition, emotion, and motivation" by Markus, H. R. & Kitayama, S., 1991, Psychological Review.