process of Chinese in Hong Kong. They found some continuities with findings in other cultures but also found some unique spiritual and cultural beliefs and rituals about death and the afterlife that were employed by the Chinese participants in coping with loss. This is part of a larger effort to develop an indigenous Chinese relational approach to counseling that could eventually be empirically tested.

Numerous indigenous and folk methods of healing exist around the world, and the cultural wisdom of such therapies could be further studied by positive psychologists. In Japan, Naikan therapy encourages the cultivation of gratitude and could be studied by positive psychologists interested in that virtue. Toyi-toying is a collective performance of energetic song and dance originally developed in Zimbabwe and used in South Africa for public demonstrations to bring about political awareness and social change. Psychologists in South Africa are using toyi-toying as a liberating embodied therapy for trauma. Process and outcome studies of indigenous therapies should utilize culturally-appropriate measures in respectful partnership with cultural brokers.

Finally, the intercultural development and multicultural competence of psychological researchers and practitioners is vital to the future of indigenous positive psychology. Psychology is a human science, and while degrees of objectivity are possible, developmental differences in strengths like multicultural competence will influence the perceptions and professional judgments of psychologists.

SEE ALSO: ▶ Buddhism

References


Individualism

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Individualism as a cultural syndrome suggests that the individual is the basic unit of society and that societies continue to exist if they facilitate attainment of personal goals. The alternative perspective (termed collectivism), is that individuals make up social units and can only be understood in the context of these units and as related to particular others. The concept can be traced back to the late 1700s during the French Revolution when individualism was first used to describe the negative potential impact focusing on individual rights would have on larger societal welfare and structure. Current research in the area was highly influenced
by Geert Hofstede’s 1980 book, *Culture’s Consequences*, in part because he provided an integrated theoretical model linking societal differences in individualism to other important societal differences and in part because he provided an empirical approach with resultant nation-level scores. Between 1973 and 1978 Hofstede collected 32 work-related attitude and value responses from 60,000 IBM and subsidiary employees in 65 countries. Responses were factor analyzed and the factors were named, the first factor was named “individualism.” Hofstede defined individualism as a focus on rights above duties, a concern for oneself and immediate family, an emphasis on personal autonomy and the basing of one’s identity on personal accomplishments, and assumed that low individualism is synonymous with high collectivism. Though the latter assumption is open to question, his work has set the tone for the next quarter century’s research and theorizing.

Since 1980, researchers have operationalized individualism in one of three ways: they used Hofstede’s results to infer individualism, they directly assessed individualistic value judgments and attitudes, or they used experimental techniques to make an individualistic worldview come to mind. Using Hofstede’s ratings to infer that samples from different countries are different in their level of individualism requires that researchers assume that Hofstede’s results are both stable over time and that a country-level generalization is relevant for a particular sample. Hofstede disagrees with both of these premises.

Alternatives to simply using Hofstede’s ratings are to directly assess attitudes or values relevant to individualism or to prime or temporarily trigger individualistic worldviews and examine the effects of this cued worldview on self-concept, ways of relating to others, bases of well-being, memory, perception and thinking more generally. Daphna Oyserman, Heather Coon and Markus Kemmelmeier reviewed these methods as part of a meta-analytic review of all English language studies published in the 20 years after Hofstede. In terms of direct assessment, they found that though no single scale dominates the field, individualism is most commonly operationalized as personal independence (collectivism is most commonly operationalized as obligation and duty to the ingroup). Assessments of individualism have also included items focusing on what might be considered theoretically relevant associated factors such as personal achievement, self-knowledge, uniqueness, privacy, clear communication and competition (assessments of collectivism include theoretically relevant associated factors such as relatedness to others, seeking others’ advice, harmony, working in groups, sense of belonging to a group, contextualized self and valuing hierarchy).

In terms of ways to prime or cue individualism as a world view, Oyserman and Spike Wing-Sing Lee reviewed these methods as part of a meta-analytic review of all the published English language studies using any variants of this technique. They found six main ways that individualism was triggered in the moment. These include thinking of ways in which one is similar to (or different from) one’s family members, reading a paragraph with first-person singular pronouns (or first-person plural pronouns) and circling them, or writing sentences using words related to individualism (or collectivism).
Are Americans Individualists?

Americans believe they are individualists, free to pursue their personal version of happiness, not bound in by obligations and duties. Indeed, a core assumption in cultural psychology is that Americans are higher in individualism (and lower in collectivism) than other societies, particularly East Asian countries, reflecting a general contrast between East and West. Evidence in support of this assumption is reasonably strong; the Oyserman, Coon, and Kemmelmeier meta-analysis demonstrates moderate-sized differences in European Americans’ individualistic (and collectivistic) attitudes and value judgments compared to others, particularly Africans, Eastern Europeans and Asians. There are some caveats to this generalization. European Americans are lower in collectivism than Europeans, challenging the notion of a single Western culture. Only small-sized effects are found for comparisons with Korea and Japan and these differences were contingent on how individualism and collectivism were assessed and were not always in the expected direction. Comparisons between European Americans and Americans from three large racial-ethnic minority groups demonstrate that Asian Americans are lower in individualism and higher in collectivism than European Americans, African Americans are reliably higher in individualism (and no different in collectivism) than European Americans, and Latin Americans are reliably higher in collectivism (and no different in individualism) than European Americans. Taken together, these findings support the general assumptions surrounding country-level differences in individualism but challenge the notion that these differences can be summarized as a general “East vs. West” cultural difference and highlight the within-area and within-society heterogeneity in levels of individualism (and collectivism).

What does Individualism Influence? Implications of Individualism (and Collectivism)

Within an individualistic cultural frame, essential values are assumed to be individual freedom, personal fulfillment, autonomy and separation; relationships are chosen, voluntary and changeable, can be worked on and improved or left when costs outweigh benefits. A basic self-goal is to feel good about oneself as a unique and distinctive person and to define these unique features in terms of abstract traits. Open emotional expression, free choice and attainment of one’s personal goals are important sources of well-being and life satisfaction. Judgments and causal reasoning are focused toward a salient focal object (e.g., the self) rather than connections and relations. These differences may be linked to differences in salient self-concept; because individualism is associated with focus on the self as private and separate from others, personal preference is likely to be a more salient basis for judgment and an important cognitive procedure would be to distinguish and separate (find the main point).

SEE ALSO: ► Collectivism ► Culture