Coping Strategies and Culturally Influenced Beliefs about the World

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1. INTRODUCTION

Doing cultural psychology is like drawing caricature cartoons. Caricature cartoonists exaggerate bodily characteristics in ways that help people recognize features distinctive to particular individuals. Prior to seeing a caricature cartoon, casual observers may be able to recognize that a given individual's face is unique, but may not take the time to or may be unable to verbalize which features make it so. Caricatures help make the features explicit. Yet the very act of thus bringing these features into the public eye involves an exaggeration of their true nature.

Cultural psychologists, like their more visual cartoonist counterparts, also exaggerate particular features of the pictures they are (metaphorically) drawing. This has the same advantages, as well as the same dangers, as drawing caricatures. The act of distinguishing different features of a culture helps observers become aware of legitimate cultural differences. Humans are sometimes sensitive to even minute differences between cultural groups, but often may not take the time to understand, or may actively misinterpret these differences. Like recognizing that a face is distinct but not knowing why, humans may recognize that other cultures "seem different," but lack ability to articulate the reasons. Cultural psychologists help to clarify these differences between cultural groups which are noticed by many, but clearly and accurately described by few.

For example, Markus and Kitayama (1991) in a frequently cited paper explained that some cultural groups (e.g., Japanese) conceive of the self as being interdependent with others, but that other cultural groups (e.g., North Americans) conceive of the self as being independent. Sophisticated observers, and Markus and Kitayama themselves, will recognize that this statement oversimplifies and exaggerates reality. Few if any Americans (perhaps only the autistic or true hermits) will believe the self is truly free of dependence on others. Likewise, few if any Japanese will claim that the self completely lacks some sense of independent existence from others. Furthermore, consideration of the nature of normal distributions suggests that there will probably be many Americans who are more interdependent than many Japanese; consider, for example, the interdependence expressed when Americans cheer on their favorite sporting team. Thus, such blanket generalizations about cultural differences may capture something accurate about reality, but if taken as literal monolithic statements, such statements tend to be crude at best.

Of course, the underlying goals of the cultural psychologist and cartoonist are generally quite different: Cultural psychologists seek not the humor and divisiveness that the political caricature cartoonist seeks, but rather understanding and conciliation. Cultural psychologists face the difficult task of trying to increase understanding of group differences and similarities while not increasing the human tendency to prejudge individuals from particular racial or cultural groups.

Cultural psychologists thus always face the risk that their findings will be abused. Does this mean cultural psychologists should cease their activity? We believe not. Increased understanding of culturally distant values may promote learning from ways unlike one's own and may highlight important but previously unrecognized differences within cultural groups (e.g., Tweed and Lehman, 2002). As children's activities may not make sense to an adult observer, but will make sense from the perspective of the child, likewise, activities of one cultural group may not initially make sense to individuals from a culturally distant group, but will often make sense if members of the second group attempt to understand the meaning system of the first group. Even though cultural psychological findings simplify and possibly exaggerate differences between groups, they often nevertheless reflect something accurate about average differences between cultural groups. Even though Markus and Kitayama's (1991) explanation simplifies reality, it has nevertheless helped to clarify a way in which cultural groups *do* tend to differ, and in that sense, has contributed to increased understanding.

We mention the caricature analogy (and the dangers therein) as a caveat to the work we plan to cover here. In the remaining pages, we intend to discuss cross-cultural differences in beliefs and coping, focusing in particular on how culturally influenced beliefs about the world shape the ways in which people respond to life's difficulties. We think this discussion has merit, but its merit does not lie in identifying differences in belief structures that apply to every member of the cultural groups under

investigation, or even to every domain within those cultures. Rather, its merit lies in highlighting – like the caricature artist – those aspects of culturally-influenced beliefs that often shape coping styles and that reflect average differences between cultural groups. We hope this picture has usefulness for researchers, clinicians, and others in understanding cultures other than their own. But we realize that we exaggerate cultural differences here for the purpose of understanding. We hope that once that purpose has been achieved, the exaggerations will be recognized as such and not misappropriated.

2. WHY STUDY CULTURE AND COPING?

Coping with stressful life events is one of the fundamental aspects of human existence. Everyone has stress (see, e.g., Kohn, Lafreniere, and Gurevich, 1991). If such psychological strain is left unchecked, it becomes detrimental to humans' psychological and physical well-being. People simply cannot function well for very long at high levels of stress: Their minds and bodies eventually break down. Thus, all people everywhere are forced to find ways to cope with negative life events and subsequent negative emotions. People may cope in a number of ways such as avoiding the problem, distracting themselves, confronting others, forming a plan, reinterpreting the situation, or any of a number of different strategies (Folkman and Lazarus, 1985), and the choice of coping strategies is no small decision: How people cope with life events may have implications for mental and physical health (e.g., Burns, 2000; McKenna et al., 1999; Mulder et al., 1999; Park and Adler, 2003; Terry and Hynes, 1998).

Habits of coping, though, may differ around the world. Consider the contrasting views taught by the world's great religions. The Four Noble Truths of Buddhism teach one to cope by cultivating detachment. These Truths suggest that suffering results from desire, so according to this teaching, one will escape suffering by becoming detached from worldly objects and activities. In contrast, the Taoist tradition teaches a method of coping by means of adapting oneself to the environment. Water has great power, according to this tradition, but water travels mainly by flowing over or around barriers rather than by fighting against the barriers. Likewise, humans can cope by adapting to the environment. In further contrast, the Confucian tradition teaches that if one diligently strives to learn and to acquire righteousness, then one will cope well with unforeseen future circumstances. Thus, the Confucian tradition teaches the value of acquiring personal resources prior to encountering difficulty. These brief summaries are very selective and thus in some ways misrepresent each of these traditions, but nonetheless highlight the fact that differing traditions teach different coping strategies. The differences between these traditions further suggest that coping habits in regions influenced by these traditions may tend to differ from those of other regions because of the influence of these traditions.

So there is good reason to suspect that cultures with often vastly different approaches to suffering, adaptation, and the environment would in fact cope differently. Indeed, anecdotal reports further suggest that coping differences across cultures exist. Lebra (1984), for example, argued that many cultures will allow for direct confrontation when coping with interpersonal conflict, but that Japanese culture cultivates habits of indirect confrontation. Japanese, Lebra suggests, will use subtle cues, which other Japanese will understand, to communicate their feelings. Japanese will also recruit neutral third parties for assistance or will express anger at a third party in the presence of the offending party in order to communicate their feelings to the offending party. Lebra's insightful discussion highlights the role culture can play in coping. Empirical research (e.g., Tweed, White, and Lehman, 2004;Yeh and Inose, 2002) also provides further evidence of cross-cultural differences in coping habits. A number of studies of culturally influenced coping tendencies will be described later in this chapter. For many people, the mere existence of coping differences across cultures may be sufficient to justify research on coping and culture. The reasons to study coping and culture, however, reach beyond curiosity alone. For example, understanding the Taoist perspective on coping may facilitate skills in adapting to a demanding situation. Understanding the detachment orientation may facilitate a healthy and appropriate ability to remove oneself from the sources of stress. Thus, for clinicians and mentors, the study of coping and culture can potentially benefit those they lead because the clinician's or mentor's toolkit of coping resources may potentially be expanded by understanding coping strategies common in a culture not one's own (Chiu and Hong, in press). Further, it is vital for clinicians to understand the most typical coping strategies – and their outcomes – that persons seeking help might use. In an increasingly multi-cultural world, it thus becomes paramount that clinicians have at least a rudimentary

grasp of how coping strategies might differ across cultures. Otherwise, they may begin counseling from false assumptions about their clients' psychological functioning, and may make unnecessary missteps in the counseling process.

Thus, given how pervasive and significant coping is, and given that coping likely differs across cultures and contexts, it is important to explore the ways that culture might influence coping. That is the goal of this chapter.

3. CULTURALLY-INFLUENCED BELIEFS ABOUT THE WORLD AND THEIR ORIGINS

Often, cultural researchers focus on behaviors as touchstones for understanding cultural differences (e.g., Conway, Tweed, Ryder, and Sokol, 2001; Pekerti and Thomas, 2003; Schnieder et al., 2000). This approach has yielded useful theoretical and empirical fruit relevant to coping (e.g., Essau and Trommsdorff, 1996; Tweed, White, Lehman, 2004). For example, some East Asian groups are more likely to using coping styles that focus on adapting themselves to the situation than are Euro-Canadian groups (Tweed et al, 2004). While we fully endorse this focus and acknowledge its usefulness (indeed, we discuss behavior differences between cultures herein), focusing exclusively on coping behaviors also limits our understanding of the factors influencing those behaviors. In particular, knowing that cultural differences in coping behaviors exist only begs the question: What sorts of cultural processes contributed to the rise of those behaviors? Why, for example, do some East Asian groups tend to cope by adapting themselves to their environment more than do North Americans groups? Many potential angles exist for understanding the nature of coping differences between cultures. But we focus here only on one: The link between culturally influenced beliefs about the world and coping strategies.

Focusing on beliefs in order to study culture has been called the "theory" approach to cultural psychology (Peng et al., 2001). In particular, this approach seeks to understand cultural differences in people's folk theories (or implicit theories) about the world and the ways these differences are manifested. It is worth noting that some of the most interesting cultural beliefs may seldom be vocalized by respondents because they seem so obvious and indisputable or because they are below consciousness. Shweder, (1993) borrowed the term "experience-near beliefs" (Geertz, 1973) to describe these types of implicit theories that are expressed in behavior though not frequently spoken. Implicit theories provide an opportunity to examine underlying factors that may in some ways explain the more obvious behavioral differences across cultures.

A number of prior researchers have examined cultural differences in implicit theories. Chiu et al. (2000), for example, argued that Chinese culture cultivates an implicit theory that groups initiate behavior, but that North American culture cultivates a belief that individuals initiate behavior. For example, when told that a pharmacy distributed improperly prepared medication, Chinese participants tended to blame the clinic, but North Americans blamed the individual pharmacist. When told a story about a bull escaping from an enclosure, North Americans under time pressure attributed agency to that particular bull, but Chinese under time pressure tended to blame the herd as a whole. Thus even when participants were discussing animals, the implicit theories seemed to influence responses.

The implicit theories approach has also been applied to research within particular cultures. Dweck's (2000) program of research has examined the implicit theory that intelligence is malleable and has found that this belief seems to facilitate academic success. Wong (1998) examined individual's implicit theories about the nature of a meaningful life. He distinguished factors that people perceived to be associated with the meaningful life (e.g., community relations and fair treatment) and also examined which components were actually most strongly associated with the experience of meaningfulness (e.g., transcendence via serving a purpose beyond oneself and achievement striving).

Prior to our discussion of the nature of cultural beliefs, the source of cultural differences in beliefs deserves some comment. The source of cultural beliefs is a much larger question than can be addressed adequately in this chapter, but in brief, at least a few sources of cultural differences are especially worthy of consideration. Human epistemic needs, belongingness motives, terror management, communication processes, and rational responses to social and geographic environments may be some of the factors contributing to cultural differences in belief systems and ultimately in coping habits (see Conway and Schaller, in press; Lehman et al., 2004).

People have an innate desire to accurately understand their world. This human epistemic need, may in part account for the origins of cultural belief systems (see Richter and Kruglanski, 2003). Other people provide salient sources of information, and our deeply rooted need to have an understanding of our world often causes us to accept their explanations as fact. (We would often rather believe uncertain knowledge as fact than live with uncertainty). As a result, people tend to influence and be influenced by the people directly around them (see Conway and Schaller, in press), and thus belief systems emerge that are more stable and enduring if they are shared with geographically near others. This tendency for epistemic needs to contribute to the emergence of culture is perhaps strongest in times of widespread uncertainty, doubt, or difficulties (Richter and Kruglanski, 2003). It is in these sorts of culturally-shared trials (e.g., famines, wars) that great upheavals in cultural belief systems often occur, and new cultures are formed in the aftermath. Thus, the epistemic approach to culture not only provides a general explanation for why cultural beliefs emerge and differ, but also suggests when culture is especially likely to begin and change.

Of course, people are motivated by more than knowledge, and these other motives also impact the formation of cultural beliefs. Two related motives in particular seem directly tied to the origins of culture. First, people are fundamentally motivated to belong (Baumeister and Leary, 1995). This desire directly explains why culture exists at all: It exists in part to help people feel like they "fit it." If I can share the beliefs of those directly around me, this helps me feel like I have found a place in the world that I belong.

We are also motivated by a desire to avoid death. Terror management theory (e.g., Greenberg et al., 1997) suggests that cultural belief systems emerge in part to buffer people against the inevitable psychological consequences of the consciousness of one's own impending death. Membership in a group of culturally likeminded individuals creates a sense that one is serving values and purposes beyond oneself. This serves purposes that extend beyond one's own mortal existence, thereby alleviating the threat that one's impending death will bring an end to all that one creates. Much empirical support supports the relationship – deduced from the principles of terror management theory -- between the awareness of one's death and upholding or defending the cultural worldview. (Greenberg et al., 1997).

All of these approaches implicitly suggest that we are more influenced by people geographically close to us in space. Indeed, research on the emergence of culture from communication – much of it collected under the rubric of Dynamic Social Impact Theory (Latane, 1996; Lehman et al., 2004) -- highlights the role of physical proximity in shaping culture. This work suggests that all that is necessary for cultural "pockets" to emerge is (1) an arrangement in physical space so that persons cannot communicate with equal frequency with everyone else in that space, (2) initial variability in beliefs, and (3) individual differences in the persuasion "power" of the individuals comprising the initial focal population. Because persuasion tends to be directed at others who live geographically nearby , belief systems will tend to cluster in particular geographic regions. Thus, cultural differences emerge as a result of this tendency for communication and persuasion to be directed at geographically near others. In other words, cultural differences emerge because people over time persuade geographically near others of the value of particular beliefs.

So epistemic needs, belongingness motives, terror management, and communication processes all conspire together to produce local pockets of shared beliefs that we call culture. However, all of these approaches are devoid of *content*. They suggest the motives and processes underlying culture, but say little about why *specific* beliefs come to comprise *specific* cultures. From our discussion so far, it may seem as if "any old belief will do" – that all beliefs are equally likely to become the objects of cultural belief systems, and that the processes that determine the actual, real-world contents of culture are random.

But it is not so (see Conway and Schaller, 2004). Many factors influence the specific contents of culturally-shared beliefs, ranging from how memorable they are (Norenzayan and Atran, 2003) to how much they match the surrounding cultural milieu (see Conway and Schaller, in press). We focus here on one factor that seems most likely to have influenced the development of specific cultural beliefs relevant to coping: The particular environmental and socio-historical context within which those beliefs emerged.

In particular, rational responses to the social and/or geographic context in which a particular group lives may help explain the contents of some belief systems (see, e.g., Berry, 1994; Conway, Ryder, Tweed, and Sokol, 2001; Lehman, Chiu and Schaller, 2004; Vandello and Cohen, 1999). For example, Chinese beliefs that one best copes by adapting oneself to the situation may result from the history of experience that has shaped Chinese beliefs. Thus, people within China have not merely developed different beliefs about the same world and reality than some other cultural groups, but rather they have developed beliefs about a different world and reality. One could argue that they have experienced problems and difficulties that tend to be external, chronic, pervasive, unyielding and unforgiving – natural disasters, foreign invasions, civil wars, tyrannies, widespread poverty -- all of which are beyond one's control, and one rational way to maintain sanity was to transform their worldviews to accept the bleak reality and still live with contentment. Similarly, one can also imagine oneself in an African country ravaged by AIDS, genocide, and natural disasters. How would one cope in that kind of a situation? In order to contextualize coping, we need to recognize that different cultural groups really have lived in very different historical, socio-economic-political contexts which shape their beliefs.

For our purposes, we will discuss beliefs that are *already* shared – or viewed as culturally representative -- by some substantial percentage of a cultural population (see Conway and Schaller, in press; Schaller, Conway, and Crandall, 2003; Tweed, Conway, and Ryder, 1999). Thus, we will not primarily be attempting to explain where these beliefs came from, but – given that they exist – what consequences they have on coping. Below, we examine belief in an entity view of the world, in a benevolent purpose for events, in the ubiquity of change, in traditional Chinese values, in the utility of personal preparation, in the value of standing out, in the utility of effort, in a variety of religious doctrines, and in particular categories of illness. This review will of necessity provide a limited exploration of culturally-influenced beliefs that might be relevant to coping. A broad set of beliefs fit within the wide latitude of this definition, so this chapter can at most provide examples of the utility of this approach and provide suggestions for further research, but cannot provide a thorough catalogue of beliefs influencing coping. Also, the empirical research on cultural beliefs and coping is still too limited to provide a thorough picture. Indeed, herein we often follow a rough formula for highlighting how culture and coping overlap: We illustrate (1) that cultures tend to differ on X belief and (2) that X belief tends to have consequences for coping. This approach leaves many gaps, but some of these gaps reflect the actual state of the literature, and we hope that they will soon be filled. One aim of this chapter, then, is to provide an impetus for future research on this important topic. After we consider these different types of beliefs, we then turn our attention to the impacts that such beliefs have on health outcomes and to potential implications for cultural and clinical psychologists.

3.1. Belief in the Utility of Effort

People who believe in the utility of effort (Heine et al., 2001) assume that many outcomes in life are controlled by one's own exertion of energy. Recent research by Bond (2004) has affirmed that this construct has importance in cross-cultural research. In particular, Bond conducted an ecological factor analysis of belief statements in order to identify some of the most important belief constructs that differ across cultures. (In an ecological factor analysis, average scores for cultural subgroups are used as cases in the factor analysis, thus producing results that highlight dimensions on which the cultures tend to differ.) His questionnaire listing sixty social axioms had been distributed to 7,672 students from 41 cultural groups. The social axioms were general statements about the world and the self that were likely to vary across individuals. The statements were designed to be descriptive and factual rather than normative or moral. Thus, "we should be devoted to our family" would not be included because it makes a normative rather than factual claim. Two examples of the social axioms used are "Good deeds will be rewarded" and "It is rare to see a happy ending in real life." The participants rated their agreement with each statement. Average scores were calculated for each item within each cultural group. The cultural group average scores were then subjected to a factor analysis in a method similar to that used by Hofstede (1980) in his classic work. Belief that effort makes a difference emerged as a major factor differentiating cultural groups (sample item: "Adversity can be overcome by effort," Bond, 2004, p. 557).

The Confucian tradition teaches the value of perseverance in response to difficulty, so one could expect that belief in the utility of effort would be affirmed especially often in China and possibly in other East Asian countries influenced by the Confucian tradition.

Stevenson and others (Stevenson and Stigler, 1992; Stevenson et al., 1993) highlighted the importance of this belief in cross-cultural research comparing East Asian and North American samples. They presented evidence that Japanese students are more likely to believe that effort determines success than are American students. Heine et al. (2001) also examined a similar construct: The "utility of effort." They developed a questionnaire assessing belief in the utility of effort and found evidence that Japanese participants affirmed this belief more than did North American participants.

These same researchers (Heine et al., 2004; Stevenson and Stigler, 1992; Stevenson et al., 1993) also presented evidence that this belief seems to be associated with particular types of coping in response to demanding situations. Stevenson presented evidence that Japanese students, because they tend to believe that effort determines success, see more hope for creating and controlling their personal success, so as a result put forth more effort when facing demanding academic tasks. They further argued that this belief accounts in part for the academic success of Japanese students relative to American students.

Strong evidence that this belief influences behavior can only be provided, however, by true experimental studies in which this belief is manipulated and the effects are measured. Heine et al. (2001) did in fact manipulate participants' belief in the utility of effort and thereby presented experimental evidence that this belief induced greater persistence following failure on a task. Heine et al. thus supported the contention by Stevenson and others (Stevenson and Stigler, 1992; Stevenson et al., 1993) that belief in the utility of effort contributes to perseverant effort in response to demanding situations.

The role of this belief may be much broader, however, than the work by Stevenson (Stevenson and Stigler, 1992; Stevenson et al., 1993) and Heine et al. (2004) might initially seem to suggest. Belief that effort is efficacious may contribute to persistent coping not only for academic tasks and tasks assigned during psychology studies. Persistent coping in response to failure in other domains such as sports, relationships, and work potentially could be induced by this belief. Indeed, in keeping with this expectation, one would expect that East Asian samples may be especially likely to report coping by persevering. Yeh and Inose (2002; see also Wong and Ujimoto, 1998) did in fact find that East Asian immigrant youth reported using the strategy of enduring in the face of difficulty. This tendency to endure is congruent with an underlying belief that effort is efficacious. Thus, belief in the utility of effort seems to be relevant to cross-cultural examinations of coping. The evidence suggests that this belief in the utility of effort is influenced by one's cultural context and that this belief induces persistence in response to failure.

3.2. Religious Beliefs

Even a cursory glance at the major religious systems across different parts of the world's geography suggests that religion varies across cultures. Also, the importance attributed to religious beliefs seems to differ across cultures. In Bond's (2004) ecological factor analysis of belief statements, the second factor, "dynamic externality" affirms that religious beliefs play an important role in life (sample item: "Belief in a religion helps one understand the meaning of life," p. 557; Bond, 2004). The emergence of this factor in a cross-cultural ecological factor analysis suggests that cultural groups differ in the extent to which they tend to affirm these items. The exact implication of a culture being high or low on dynamic externality (affirming a central role for religion) is difficult to discern unless the exact nature of the religion is specified (e.g., beliefs in benevolent deity or vengeful deity, active deity or deistic deity). However, it is clear that cultures *do* differ, and differ substantially, in both the importance they attach to religion as well as the specific religious viewpoints themselves. Many people may not adhere strictly to the tenets of their religion, but even if relatively few people in a culture were to consistently attempt to live according to the society's traditional religious beliefs, the associated implicit beliefs about the world may live on in the cultural meaning system of much of the population.

Religious beliefs can profoundly influence how people cope. Although a relatively small proportion of empirical coping studies directly examine religious beliefs, some studies *do* suggest that religiosity plays an important role in coping (e.g., McIntosh, Silver, Wortman, 1993; Pargament, 1997).

For example, research suggests that African-Americans often successfully use a belief in God's love to overcome the negative effects of prejudice (Blaine and Crocker, 1995). Pargament has developed a program of research examining religious coping (e.g., Pargament, 1997; Pargament, Koenig, and Perez, 2000). Some types of religious coping such as having a sense that one is collaborating with God in solving a problem are associated with positive psychological outcomes (Pargament et al., 1990), but others such as interpreting trauma as divine punishment are associated with negative outcomes (Pargament, 1997). Cultural differences in religious belief create some obvious effects on coping particularly when the religious beliefs require particular rituals at times of stress. Parkes, Laungani, and Young (1997) edited a fascinating volume highlighting the diverse ways in which cultures deal with death, and many of the practices discussed were dictated by religious beliefs about death.

Indeed, clinicians may want to consider these issues of religiosity and coping further because of the potential to produce better outcomes through being responsive to their clients' religious belief systems. For example, Razali et al. (2002) conducted a four-cell study providing standard treatment for generalized anxiety disorder with either an added religious component or not to Muslim patients who were either religious or not. For the non-religious Muslims, the added religious component produced no positive or negative effect, but for the religious Muslims, those assigned to the psychotherapy plus a religious component experienced greater symptom reduction than did those experiencing standard psychotherapy alone. Similar results have been found with largely Christian populations of cancer patients: When doctors were encouraged to talk about spiritual issues, patients showed reduced depression, greater satisfaction with their care, greater well-being, and an improved sense of interpersonal caring when compared to control patients (Rhodes and Kristeller, 2001).

It is worth noting that religiosity includes multiple constructs including personal ideology, ritualistic behavior, internal emotional experience, intellectual knowledge, and social experience (Tarakeshwar et al., 2004). Thus, researchers cannot examine religiosity merely by assessing attendance at religious events or perceived importance of religion. Some recent publications provide useful guidance for those wanting to measure major dimensions related to religiosity (e.g., Hill and Pargament, 2003; Hill and Wood, 1999). Researchers interested in religion's influence on coping would do well to consider that these different dimensions of religiosity may have widely discrepant impacts on how people cope and on coping success. The relation between religious belief and coping has not, however, received extensive attention in the cross-cultural psychology literature. This absence might not be too surprising given the general neglect of religious themes by cross-cultural psychologists (see Tarakeshwar, Stanton, and Pargament, 2004) Thus, religious influences on coping probably deserve significantly more attention than they currently receive. Indeed, throughout this chapter we will return to the potential religious underpinnings of particular culturally-shared beliefs: The Buddhist belief that detachment eradicates suffering, the Christian belief that all events can be reappraised as working for the good of the righteous, and the Taoist belief in the ubiquity of change all have pervasive influences in their respective cultures.

3.3. Belief in an Entity View of World

Another set of beliefs, entity versus incremental beliefs about the self have been examined in a well developed program of research (Chiu et al., 1997b; Dweck, 2000; Levy et al., 1999). Incremental theorists, according to this framework, assume that the self is malleable; one can change oneself. Entity theorists, in contrast, believe that efforts to change the self are futile.

Studies of incremental versus entity orientation have focused mainly on lay theories about the self and have provided evidence that these implicit self-theories influence coping behavior (Dweck, 2000). In the cultural domain, however, lay theories about the self may be less important than lay beliefs about the world. In particular, findings by Chiu et al. (1997a) suggest that individuals from some East Asian cultures are more likely than Euro-Americans to perceive the world as difficult to change. When asked about the nature of the outside social world, the East Asian participants were less likely than the Euro-Americans to say that they could alter the nature of the outside world.

Traditional landscape art also seems to illustrate in a symbolic sense these underlying beliefs about the environment in relation to the self. Many traditional Chinese and also some traditional Japanese paintings include large mountains or rivers with one or a few human figures who appear small in

comparison to the geographic features. These portraits illustrate in a very realistic sense the scale differences between relatively small humans and large geographic objects. The paintings also make humans appear relatively weak and impotent in relation to the fixed nature of the physical surroundings. Western art by English speakers or Europeans, in contrast, often excludes people from paintings of landscapes. Clearly, links between art and psychology are difficult to draw, but the parallels are instructive. The culture that in art portrays humans as small figures within a large dominating uncontrollable environment seems to perceive the world as difficult to change.

We know of no direct tests of whether manipulating entity beliefs about the world influences coping behavior (though there is evidence that manipulating entity beliefs about the self influences coping; Dweck, 2000). Nonetheless, one could expect that an entity view of the world could motivate efforts to adapt the self to the environment rather than vice verse because efforts to change an unchangeable world will be less efficacious than efforts to change the self.

Thus, one would expect cultures high an entity view of the world (e.g., East Asian cultures) to focus on efforts to change the self in response to stressful circumstances. Indeed, that is exactly the effect that has been observed, though admittedly the available data is still somewhat limited. In particular, Tweed, White, and Lehman (2004) asked respondents to describe their biggest problem of the last 6 months. The respondents then completed the Ways of Coping Checklist (WOCC; Folkman and Lazarus, 1985) and some other coping questions. The WOCC lists a number of coping responses (e.g., "I stood my ground and fought for what I wanted"), and respondents rated the extent to which they engaged in each strategy. As hypothesized, the participants influenced by East Asian cultures were more likely than the Euro-North Americans to assert that they coped by attempting to control themselves. In particular, East Asian cultural influence was associated with strategies of accepting the problem, distancing oneself from the problem, and waiting. Each of these strategies includes efforts to control the self rather than directly controlling the external world.

3.4. Belief in a Benevolent Purpose for Events

The theory that events have a benevolent purpose may also be relevant to coping. Traditional religious instruction in Western English speaking areas and in Europe suggests that events, even events causing suffering, work for the good of righteous people (Erickson, 1983; Simundson, 1985; Thiessen and Doerksen, 1979). This belief that events have a benevolent purpose differs somewhat from the related Chinese traditional belief that persistence in the face of hardship brings benefits. In the former, it is the events themselves that induce the benefit, but in the latter, it is the individual's response that brings the benefit either because of the personal growth resulting from perseverance or because the situation may become more favorable and the perseverance may thus produce benefits. The Buddhist tradition, in contrast to both of these perspectives, teaches that attachment to the physical world brings suffering. From the Buddhist perspective, suffering is not conceived of as serving a positive purpose; a major goal is to escape this suffering by minimizing ego and personal desire.

One could wonder whether the traditional Western belief in a benevolent purpose for events still has relevance for people in modern Western cultures, but Janoff-Bulman (1992) found in congruence with this teaching that among North American samples the assumption of a benevolent world was central to the human response to trauma. In particular, she found that trauma causes people to question this assumption and that coping requires rebuilding this and other assumptions shattered by the trauma. Likewise, many anecdotal reports suggest that construing benefits from tragedy is a common response to suffering in North America (e.g., Affleck and Tennen, 1996; Lehman et al, 1993; McFarland and Alvaro, 2000; Sittser, 1996).

In a direct cross-cultural comparison, Tweed, White, and Lehman (2004) found evidence that Euro-North American respondents coped in this way more often than did Japanese respondents. In particular, they examined the positive reappraisal scale of the Ways of Coping Checklist which operationalizes benefit finding (Folkman and Lazarus, 1985). The scale's items ask whether the respondent personally grew, rediscovered the important things in life, found faith, or became a better person as a result of the tragedy. The results thus support the hypothesis that Western English speakers will believe there to be, and thus will cope by seeking benefits in the midst of trauma.

Though religious traditions may be largely inactive, seldom accessed, or even barely understood for many people, the religiously influenced assumption that events do or do not have benevolent purpose still can serve as an implicit belief that influences coping responses. (It is worth keeping in mind that the vast majority of the people on earth still claim a religious affiliation, so we do not wish to underemphasize the *explicit* role religion plays).

3.5. Values (Individualism / Collectivism; Traditional Chinese Values; Standing Out)

Values, one could argue, are particular types of beliefs. To be more specific, values can be defined as principles regarding the importance of certain life outcomes (e.g., Schwartz et al., 2001). For example, some cultures may tend to value confrontation in business meetings while other cultures may value harmony. Some cultures may value hedonic behavior more than do other cultures.

Individualism / Collectivism: Hofstede (1980; for other traditions of values research see Chinese Culture Connection, 1987; Schwartz et al., 2001; Smith and Schwartz, 1997) conducted a massive study to determine the nature of culturally-influenced values. Some have criticized the methodology by which he factor analyzed country scores on a 32-item work values survey (Heine et al., 2002), but his first dimension, individualism-collectivism, has become central to much cross-cultural psychology. He concluded that cultures valuing individualism "assume individuals look primarily after their own interests and the interests of their immediate family" (Hofstede, 1984, p. 390). Collectivistic societies, in contrast, assume precedence will be given to group goals. Although the exact nature of cultural differences on individualism/collectivism is the source of much debate (Oyserman et al., 2002), it is clear that these differences exist in some capacity, and that they have consequences on behavior and psychological functioning (e.g., Conway et al., 2001; Smith et al., 1996; Triandis, 1996).

These values may influence coping. For example, collectivistic values may induce additional effort to preserve in-group harmony. Individuals from collectivistic cultures have been shown to select coping strategies such as compromise and self-adjustment that are less likely to disrupt social connections, (Coates, 1968; Kirkbride et al., 1991; Trubisky et al., 1991; Tweed, White, Lehman, 2004; Willmann et al., 1997). Lebra (1984) provided a richly detailed discussion of Japanese nonconfrontational conflict strategies which preserve in-group harmony. One such strategy, which Lebra argued is especially common in Japan, is to accept a situation rather than to openly express anger. A mode of Japanese therapy titled Morita therapy has been built up from this practice of accepting difficult situations. Clients in Morita therapy learn to accept their world and learn that they can adapt to their world by accepting difficulty rather than by trying to change the world. Traditional Morita therapy (see Ishiyama, 2003) includes, of course, much more than a simple exhortation to accept difficulty, but acceptance is nonetheless central. Morita therapy begins with an inpatient treatment in which patients are inactive for a time, but then slowly return to more strenuous work. During the treatment, the patients learn to accept their situation and their symptoms and even to transform the energy from their symptoms in a positive direction. The method is rooted in Buddhist assumptions about the value of detachment from worldly concerns. This focus on acceptance of difficulties also is evident in a proverb some mothers in Japan quote to children when they fight: "To lose is to win" (Kojima, 1984). The message of the proverb is that the one who becomes aggressive and possibly angry and dominates in conflict actually loses. The winner of the conflict is the one who controls emotion and aggression and accepts the difficult situation with maturity. Unrestrained display of anger and aggression indicates personal failure. Lebra (1984) also reports that third party intervention is common in Japan, and this strategy likewise may serve to preserve harmony. Person A, who is in conflict with person B approaches a higher status person X who can act as a mediator for the conflicting parties. The third party may take responsibility for the conflict and apologize on behalf of person A. Alternatively, if the reconciliation is slow in coming, the intermediary may call on persons A and B to "save my face" by becoming reconciled and saving the intermediary from the embarrassment of failing in the reconciliation effort. Lebra also claims that self-blame is often used to avoid interpersonal conflict. A Japanese therapy labeled Naikan therapy builds upon this tendency to blame the self. The client meditates on how much others have done for him or her and how little has been given in return. This practice is intended to produce new joy and purpose by motivating the client to strive to pay back some of these debts. Thus, the client can regain joy in living

and manage perceived conflict with others without engaging in open confrontation with other people but instead by blaming the self.

Traditional Chinese Values: Other research also suggests that values may influence coping responses. For example, adherence to traditional Chinese values (civic harmony, industry, and prudence) is associated with coping via defensive pessimism in response to SARS-related fears (Chang and Sievam, 2004; see also Bond et al., 2004). This means that traditional Chinese values are associated with strategically being somewhat pessimistic about one's future in order to avoid disappointment. The exact nature of the relation (i.e., causal, mediated, direct) between these values and defensive pessimistic coping is not, however, yet known.

According to Wong and Ujimoto (1998), East Asian cultures tend to be influenced by Taoist thinking which values passive acceptance of difficulties. Tweed, White, and Lehman (2004) included an acceptance scale in their coping study, and as was suggested by Wong and Ujimoto, they found Japanese scored higher on acceptance than did North Americans. Tendency to cope by accepting difficulty could also be measured by the existential scale on Wong's Inventory of Coping Schemas (Peacock and Wong, 1996).

Traditional Chinese teachings (see Wong and Ujimoto, 1998) also value preservation of particular relationships. Confucius, for example, assumed that proper societal functioning depended on individuals maintaining appropriate relations with others. Appropriate relational behavior according to traditional Chinese values includes honor to those of higher status and care for those of lower status. Aggressive confrontation would be seen as unacceptable in most circumstances because of the potential cost to others' dignity. Devotion to family is also valued. Wong and Ujimoto (1998) argue that for many East Asians, preserving harmony is more important than solving many problems. Thus, Asian values could cultivate a tendency to follow the Confucian tradition of courageously persevering in the face of difficulty rather than potentially disrupting stable relations with others.

Value of Standing Out or Standing In: Weisz, Rothbaum, and Blackburn (1984) argued compellingly that Americans value standing out from others, but Japanese value standing in. Thus, Americans are more likely to seek attention, but Japanese are more likely to seek to match the surrounding crowd. This distinction obviously oversimplifies the cultural difference, as we warned in the introduction to this chapter, but nonetheless the distinction draws our attention to important cultural realities. Two proverbs cited by Weisz, Rothbaum, and Blackburn illustrate their point. According to a common American proverb, the squeaky wheel gets the grease. The American proverb teaches that drawing attention to oneself brings benefits. In contrast, according to a Japanese proverb, the nail that sticks out gets pounded down. The Japanese proverb teaches that setting oneself apart from one's peers, even if one is reaching higher than one's peers, leads to pain from being banged back into one's place. Japanese students have reported to us that performing far above average in school compared to their peers would bring them great discomfort. North American students in contrast reported to us that they had a hard time understanding the Japanese perspective. Bellah et al. (1985) discussed this cultural distinction in their classic book entitled "Habits of the Heart." In that work, they discussed the expressive individualism tradition in North America which purports that "each person has a unique core of feeling and intuition that should unfold and be expressed…" (p. 334).

Western English speaking cultural beliefs in the value of standing out (or standing in) are congruent with, and possibly account for, important coping differences across cultures. People seeking to stand out would be expected draw attention to their unique problems for the sake of having the attention of others. In keeping with this expectation, preliminary data suggests that North Americans more frequently cope by telling others about their feelings than do Japanese (Tweed and Lehman, unpublished data). This tendency fits with a belief in the value of standing out, of drawing attention to one's uniqueness, and in this case, particularly to one's emotional experience.

Those seeking to stand in would seek to avoid drawing attention to their problems and uniqueness unless there is good reason to do otherwise. Yeh and Inose (2002; see also Wong and Ujimoto, 1998) found evidence that East Asian participants frequently cope with silent perseverance. For the East Asian students, keeping to oneself and enduring were not uncommon coping strategies. Also, there is preliminary evidence that when East Asian participants do seek social support, they seek, not attention, but instead concrete

assistance (Tweed and Lehman, unpublished data). Wong (1993) called this "collective coping": In collective coping, social support is activated, not merely by providing emotional support or attention to an individual's problem, but instead by having the group focus on providing practical help to solve the problem of an individual member.

3.6. Belief in the Ubiquity of Change

Another fundamental theory about the world, belief in the ubiquity of change, was explored by Li-Jun Ji (2001). She found that her Chinese participants were more likely to affirm that change is ubiquitous in the world than were her Euro-American participants. Thus, Chinese shown graphs of trends in cancer rates, economic growth, and other trends were more likely than Americans to predict a reversal in the direction of change. Even when predicting their own happiness in the future as compared to the change in their happiness over time in the past, Chinese participants (though not any more or less optimistic than Americans) were more likely to predict a change in the direction of the trend. She also provided some evidence that those who expect reversals of fortune are perceived as wise by others of Chinese cultural background.

This high expectation of change and of change in the direction of change (reversal of trends) coheres with the Taoist tradition of China. The Tao Te Ching (Lao Tzu, 1989) thought to have been written in approximately 400 BCE by Lao Tzu, a central figure in Taoism, includes numerous texts about the ubiquity of change. For example, chapter 77 of the Te asserts that the Way is like a flexing bow that springs back to where it started. The Way gives to those who do not have enough, but takes away from those who have excess; it elevates the lowly and brings down those who are high (Lao Tzu, 1989). Thus, reversal of fortune is to be expected. The Christian Bible also asserts that reversals of fortune should be expected (e.g., Jesus said "many who are first will be last and many who are last will be first" Matthew 19:30; New International Version), but those reversals are often expected to occur in the afterlife. In contrast, Lao Tzu taught his readers to expect many reversals of fortune in this life.

Ji (2001) suggested that Chinese anticipation of reversals may promote persistence in the face of temporary hardship. She suggests that those who anticipate reversals of fortune (e.g., lost games for athletes or failed tests for students) will not be as surprised by the setbacks and will be more likely to expect that persistence may bring a further reversal back to good fortune. The belief in the ubiquity of change, and in particular, the belief that trends will reverse, would thus be interesting to further explore in relation to coping. Further research could explore whether it is true, as Ji (2001) suggests, that people from cultures endorsing this belief will be less distressed by setbacks when trying to achieve their goals. Lin Yutang (1939) provided an anecdotal account of the prototypical older Chinese person who will neither be surprised by setbacks, nor overly excited by successes. He called this type of person the "old rogue" (p. 52) and argued that the old rogue character is central to Chinese culture. As is often the case in cultural psychology, a rich anecdotal account written by a non-scientist foreshadowed the findings derived from good empirical research.

3.7. Beliefs about Illness

Cultural beliefs about health and illness will also influence coping. For example, the Kmer culture passes on beliefs in kyol goeu, a fainting syndrome said to be a response to rushes of air inside the body (Hinton, 2001). This specific belief about illness produces catastrophizing in response to certain autonomic sensations, and thus influences how individuals cope with these sensations. This belief will thus influence behavior. Likewise, many Japanese are familiar with the concept of taijin kyofusho (Ono et al., 2001), a particular syndrome including fear of social relations. People familiar with the construct may assume that if they experience some of the symptoms, then the others will be forthcoming. The beliefs about which symptoms co-occur may thus influence future coping such as by avoiding anxiety provoking social situations. These and many other culture-specific constructs of illness could be explored further.

3.8. Belief in the Utility of Personal Preparation

The belief in the utility of personal preparation could also be examined further. Confucius taught his disciples that if they prepared well by mastering the basics of his teaching (which included being transformed into morally upstanding individuals), then they could be assured of exemplary performance

in future demanding situations. We expect that this belief may have ongoing influence in Chinese-influenced cultures. In particular, we expect that Chinese culture cultivates belief in the utility of personal preparation to assure that future events turn out well. As a result, we expect that Chinese-influenced individuals will more frequently engage in conscious preventive coping (Wong, 1993) in which they gather personal resources to assure positive outcomes in the future. As of yet, though, this hypothesis is somewhat speculative and in need of quantitative examination.

4. THE BENEFITS OF MULTI-CULTURAL EXPERIENCE: THE COPING TOOLKIT

We have so far documented various dimensions of culturally-influenced beliefs, how cultures differ on those beliefs, and what consequences these differences might have on coping styles. We have thus behaved like a caricature artist by focusing on distinctives rather than similarities. There is, of course, much variability within cultural groups and there are many people who will not fit these cultural patterns (see, e.g., Conway et al., 2001; Tweed et al., 1999).

Also, individuals will likely vary over time in the extent to which they express particular implicit beliefs. Hong et al. (2000) presented compelling evidence that cognitive priming can influence whether cultural belief systems influence behavior. They exposed Hong Kong students to primes associated with Western nations (e.g., Eiffel Tower, Superman, White House) or to primes associated with Chinese culture (Chinese opera singer, Confucius) and asked participants to complete a questionnaire for which Chinese and American participants are known to differ. Participants were not aware of the purpose of the study, but nonetheless, those primed with Western images were more likely to respond as if they were from America than were those primed with Chinese images. Thus, situational primes may influence whether cultural belief systems are expressed in coping.

To this point, we have discussed primarily the impact of cultural beliefs on coping strategies, without considering explicitly the impact of different cultural beliefs on coping *outcomes.* Some of the consequences of coping strategies are perhaps obvious. Sometimes, particular culturally-influenced beliefs may encourage coping strategies that are maladaptive. For example, the implicit belief in "catharsis" held by many Americans leads them to adopt a "venting" strategy to cope with their anger – they lash out, not at the object of their anger, but at some other animate or inanimate object. However, research suggests that this strategy of dealing with anger is counterproductive by almost any standard (Bushman, 2002; Bushman et al., 2001).

Of course, the picture for most coping strategies is rarely that simple. One may be tempted to ask whether coping strategies more prototypical of certain cultural groups (e.g., Chinese) are more or less adaptive than coping strategies more prototypical of a second cultural group (e.g., North American). Such a question would pose some interesting research possibilities, but we expect that in most cases, such a question would be overly simplistic. The adaptiveness of a coping strategy may depend on the nature of the cultural environment. For example, departure from coping norms for a particular cultural context (whether those norms be for seeking social support, or for persevering, or for externally-targeted control) could create social disharmony with one's valued peers. Thus, there may be value in examining which strategies are most adaptive, but these effects may be moderated not only by the problem-type, but also by the cultural context.

The very idea of what makes a good "outcome" is itself subject to cultural variability, and researchers should be wary of over-applying particular measures of psychological coping success (e.g., increases in self-esteem) in cultures where these measures have less meaning for that purpose. Also, the success of a particular coping strategy is almost certainly contingent on multiple factors.

At this point, we are not far enough along in coping research to make many specific recommendations about which culturally-influenced coping strategies are most effective in various cultural contexts. However, instead we would like to make a more general point about the potential usefulness of cultural contact.

Culture has been viewed by some researchers as providing a toolkit (Chiu and Hong, in press). Cultural socialization provides beliefs and repertoires of behavioral responses available to individuals. The greater the diversity of persons we encounter, the more likely we are to increase the range of potential responses we may have because exposure to multiple cultures seems to induce a greater

repertoire of value systems and cognitive processes (Ervin, 1964; Hong et al., 2000). Consistent with this, group essays often have higher levels of complexity than individual essays (Gruenfeld and Hollingshead, 1993); the process of group involvement almost by default necessitates increasing one's complexity to deal with diversity. This is especially true when those other persons have an entirely different cultural background.

Likewise, in the coping domain, exposure to multiple cultures may provide a greater repertoire of responses to activate when coping with stress, thus providing a bigger toolkit of possible coping responses. One lesson from previous work related to coping is that an ability and willingness to employ multiple strategies for coping may lead to more satisfactory outcomes than a singular focus on one strategy. Cheng (2003) conducted an interesting study suggesting that flexibility in coping may promote better personal adjustment. Tendency to use different coping responses in different situations was associated with better adjustment.

This suggests that there may, as a general rule, be coping advantages to multi-culturalism. Although no work to date that we are aware of directly addresses this hypothesis, Essau and Trommsdorff (1996) presented some interesting data that point in that direction. They compared the coping strategies of Malaysian respondents to the coping strategies of Americans and Germans. The Malaysians were more likely to use emotion-focused coping than Americans and Germans. However, more interesting was their finding that Americans and Germans who coped more like the Malaysians reported fewer physical symptoms than other Americans and Germans. Malaysians who coped more like Americans and Germans reported fewer physical symptoms than other Malaysians. The data are limited, but provide preliminary support that those who learn the coping strategies of other cultures (whether this be through cross-cultural contact or not) may gain benefits by so doing.

5. CONCLUSION

The primary purpose of this chapter was to suggest the potential of culturally influenced beliefs as resources for developing hypotheses about culture and coping. In thus painting this caricature of different cultures, we hoped to highlight the ways in which beliefs across cultures sometimes differ, and to illustrate how these different beliefs can have consequences for coping. An examination of individualism and collectivism, belief in an entity view of the world, in a benevolent purpose for events, in the ubiquity of change, in traditional Chinese values, in the utility of personal preparation, in the value of standing out, in the utility of effort, in a variety of religious doctrines, and in particular categories of illness suggests hypotheses about coping, a number of which have received some empirical support. Further examination could explore the cultural differences in coping responses suggested by these and other culturally-influenced beliefs about the world. For example, future researchers could examine the extent to which Confucian beliefs in the value of preventive coping persist as implicit beliefs in East Asian cultures and the extent to which these beliefs influence behavior. Researchers could also further examine entity views of the world. So far, there is some evidence that an entity view of the world is associated with internally-targeted control in responses to stress, but an experimental study manipulating this belief (see Chiu, Hong, and Dweck, 1997b; Levy, Stroessner, and Dweck, 1999) could assess the contexts within which this belief influences coping behavior. An additional series of studies could examine what happens when apparently contradictory cultural beliefs are made simultaneously salient. For example, Chinese cultures apparently cultivate beliefs in the utility of effort and ubiquity of change while simultaneously cultivating an entity view of the world. Of course similar apparent contradictions could be found in the beliefs taught in any culture, but the interesting question would be how individuals cope when these apparent contradictions are made salient.

Furthermore many relevant beliefs have not been discussed here (e.g., Wong and Ujimoto, 1993), so exploratory research could seek to identify the implicit beliefs on which people from various cultures rely when making coping decisions. Perhaps because the relations between cultural beliefs and coping are still relatively unexplored, open-ended exploratory research on implicit beliefs (e.g., Wong, 1998) may be especially valuable.

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