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CULTURE: A Fundamental Context for the Stress and Coping Paradigm

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1. INTRODUCTION

The field of stress and coping emerged more than three decades ago from the recognition of the dynamic interaction between person and environment (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Moos, 2002). Over the years, researchers developed a system of objectifying and quantifying people's environment, such as counting the number of major life events or daily hassles that occurred in the past month. Unfortunately, this system of measuring the environment resulted in acontextualizing the stress and coping research paradigm as it does not give much consideration to the meaning of the events that occur in an idiosyncratic life context. In recent years, the field has been trying to introduce more realism to stress and coping research, as the acontextual research of the last two decades yielded few solid findings that made a difference in people's lives (Somerfield & McCrae, 2000). One of the most important neglected contexts is culture. We believe that culture is a fundamental context that helps to shape both the individual and the environment.

There have been growing efforts to examine cross-cultural variations in stress and coping, but these efforts are fragmented and primarily descriptive, and usually lack an overarching conceptual framework. The aim of our overview is to help shape future research to address the generalizability of current models of stress and coping across cultural and ethnic groups. Here we describe a conceptual framework based on Moos' transactional model (1984; 2002) that encompasses the role of culture in stress and coping. Using this conceptual framework, we illustrate how culture serves as a pervasive context for the stress and coping paradigm, and present some empirical evidence on this issue. We conclude by addressing several key issues and assumptions of the current stress and coping paradigm that may have contributed to conceptual confusion and slowed the progress of cross-cultural investigations, and we offer ways to solve these problems.

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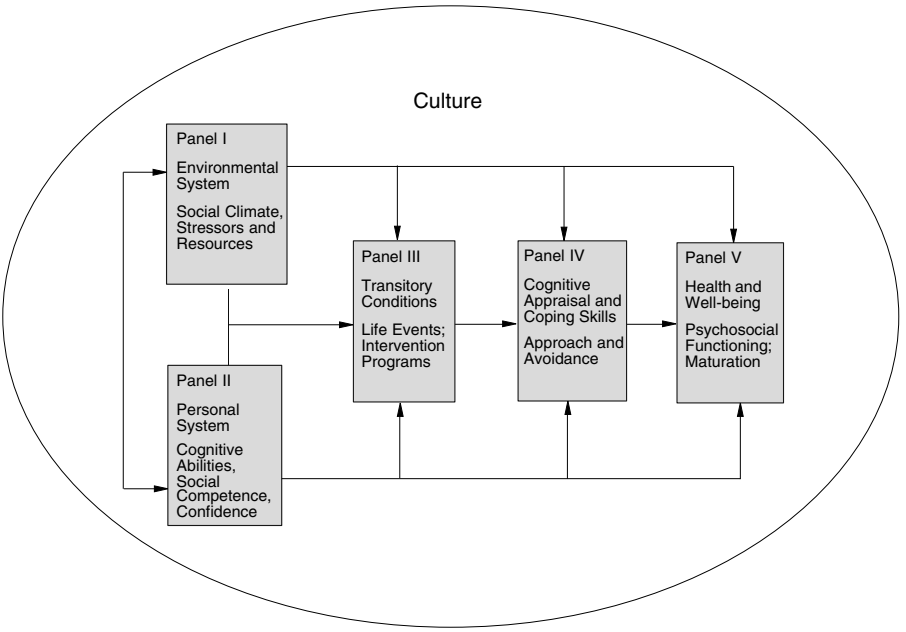
2. A CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF STRESS AND COPING

Stress and coping models have placed varying degrees of emphasis on the role of the contextual factors and transactions between person and environment (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; McCrae, 1984; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978; Wong & Ujimoto, 1998). Moos' model (1984; 2002) places emphasis on both (see Figure 1). It depicts the transactions between the ongoing *environmental system* (Panel I) and the *personal system* (Panel II), and encompasses their joint influences on subsequent *transitory conditions* (Panel III), *cognitive appraisal and coping skills* (Panel IV), and the *health and well-being* (Panel V) of individuals.

More specifically, the environmental system consists of relatively enduring aspects of the environment, such as the social climate and ongoing stressors and resources that arise from settings in different life domains (e.g., family and work). The personal system is composed of individuals' personal characteristics and resources, such as their cognitive abilities, personality traits, social competence, and self-confidence. Transitory conditions include new acute life events and changes that occur in an individual's life; individuals appraise these conditions for their degree of threat or challenge and whether they are equipped with adequate personal and environmental resources to deal with the situation. In turn, appraisal influences the type of coping strategies that will be employed; these strategies can be characterized in terms of their focus (approach/avoidant) and method (cognitive/behavioral). The success of coping subsequently influences the individual's health and well-being.

Figure 1. A model of interplay between context, coping and adaptation.



One of the key strengths of this model lies in its emphasis on the contextual factors in the stress and coping process. The model also depicts the transactional relationships among the five panels, as reflected by bi-directional arrows. For example, the bi-directional arrow between the environmental system and the personal system suggests that the social climate and personality characteristics can influence each other. The model also suggests that, together with the personal system, the ongoing environmental context influences the occurrences of transitional life events, as well as how individuals appraise and cope with the events and how they affect health and well-being.

Culture is one of the fundamental aspects of society that influence both the person and the environment. Although culture is part of the environmental system, it should be distinguished from the more proximal social climate of Panel I, which consists of specific settings (e.g., family, work, and neighborhood) and ongoing stressors and resources. Culture would be better conceptualized as a macro-social or ecological system that permeates the entire stress and coping process. Thus, culture influences all of the panels and serves as an overall context for the model, as depicted in Figure 1. In turn, at a macro-social level, the stress and coping process can also change culture. This role of the cultural system has not been explicitly articulated in most existing stress and coping models with the notable exception of Wong's Resource-Congruence Model (1993), which also emphasizes the influence of the cultural system on the stress and coping process.

2.1. The Role of Culture in the Stress and Coping Paradigm

Culture is best defined as a highly complex, continually changing system of meaning that is learned, shared, transmitted and altered from one generation to another (Triandis, 1995). This system of meaning encompasses the norms, beliefs, and values that provide prescriptions for behavior. While numerous cultural values have been proposed and identified to describe unique and shared elements of various cultures, individualism and collectivism are the most widely studied (see for review Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002). The theoretical and empirical utility of these concepts lies in the fact that they are able to meaningfully differentiate cultures (Hofstede, 1980; Oyserman et al., 2002; Triandis, 1995). In the following sections we illustrate how culture might influence each of the panels in our conceptual model of stress and coping, using the constructs of individualism and collectivism as examples.

2.2. Individualism and Collectivism

Individualism and collectivism consist of a set of values, attitudes, and behaviors that vary in the priority placed on the self versus the ingroup (Hofstede, 1980). In cultures oriented toward individualism, the self is a central unit of society. Consequently, individual rights, a concern for oneself and immediate family, and personal autonomy and self-fulfillment are emphasized. In contrast, in cultures oriented toward collectivism the ingroup forms the central unit of society and binds individuals to its needs, goals, and fate. Accordingly, duty and obligations to the ingroup, interdependence on other individuals within the group, and fulfillment of social roles are emphasized. These orientations have

important ramifications for the environmental and personal systems, and for the extent to which context influences behavior.

While individualism and collectivism are often regarded as opposite poles of a single dimension, they would be better conceptualized as worldviews or orientations that place focus and emphasis on different issues (Kagitçibasi, 1997; Oyserman et al., 2002). Furthermore, as Hofstede (1980) suggested, these two orientations exist both at the individual and societal levels, and the two levels do not necessarily coincide.

Individualism and collectivism have been measured or manipulated in one of three different ways (Oyserman et al., 2002). The first method is based on Hofstede's landmark cross-national study on people who worked for a multinational corporation in 39 nations (Hoftstede, 1980). This study revealed country-level variations in individualism, with respondents in the United States being most individualistic, and respondents in Japan and other East Asian nations being much less individualistic. Subsequent studies have used Hofstede's ratings of country-level individualism as a proxy measure of individualism. Oyserman and colleagues' meta-analysis (2002) confirmed that, in general, people in the United States, especially Euro-Americans, tend to be more individualistic and less collectivistic than individuals of non-Western and/or developing nations.

The second method involves directly measuring the orientations at the individual level using standardized self-report instruments that consist of a list of statements that describe either individualistic or collectivistic attitudes, values, and behaviors (e.g., Matsumoto, Weissman, Preston, Brown, & Kupperbusch, 1997; Singelis, Triandis, Bhawuk, & Gelfand, 1995). One of the limitations of the direct assessment method is that it assesses only the explicit aspects of culture that individuals are aware of, and may not adequately capture subtle and implicit practices (Oyserman et al., 2002). The third method uses experimental priming techniques that manipulate the salience of either an individualistic or collectivistic schema or worldview by experimentally exposing individuals to certain cultural cues. The priming techniques are widely used in cognitive research that examines the role of culture in attention, perception, and memory.

Of the three methods, cross-cultural research on stress and coping tends to rely mostly on the ethnic or country level indices of individualism and collectivism. However, we need to keep in mind that Euro-Americans consist of individuals with very diverse cultural heritage from more than 40 different countries and distinct regions of the European continent, who vary significantly in their cultural beliefs, attitudes, and practices.

2.3. Culture and the Environmental System (Panel I)

Culture can set the tone for the characteristics of the environmental system and thus for dominant aspects of the social climate. In societies that are more individualistic, such as the United States, the social climate tends to value and protect individuals' rights to autonomy and independence. The social norm is to individuate from family at the end of adolescence; thus, cohesion with family and group may be played down. In contrast, the social climate of societies that are more collectivistic tends to promote social conformity and interdependence. Pursuit of individual autonomy is often viewed as selfish and a betrayal of the in-group. Instead, personal sacrifice for the larger community is regarded as an indication of maturity and strong character.

The environmental system partly determines the pressures and demands on individuals (ongoing stressors) and the social resources available to them. The cultural context shapes these ongoing stressors and social resources. More specifically, in individualistic societies, many of the ongoing stressors may stem from the pressure to be autonomous and independent. These pressures occur in early adulthood, when a person may not be ready to individuate or handle all responsibilities alone. The emphasis on independence and autonomy may also be associated with fewer available social resources. In contrast, in collectivistic societies, there is greater pressure to remain interdependent on the in-groups and to meet their demands, sometimes at the expense of the individual's own welfare. In fact, such patterns are easily observable in parent-child relationships. Asian American adolescents were found to be more sensitive to pleasing their parents than Euro-American adolescents (Pang, 1991). Also, in New Zealand parental pressure both motivated and hurt adolescents of Chinese descent when such was not the case for adolescents of European descent (Chung, Walkey, & Bemak, 1997).

Cultural context can also influence the social resources that are available to and accessed by individuals. In individualistic societies, the social network tends to consist of relatively loosely connected members, composed of the nuclear family and some relatives, friends, and acquaintances (Triandis, 1988). Because the distinction between ingroup and outgroup is not strong, social networks tend to be large and diverse, but weak. In collectivistic cultures, family networks include the extended family, but the boundary is often not clear because of its extensiveness. Thus, cross-cultural researchers often face difficulties in appropriately defining a family or household in Asian cultures, both in terms of memberships and residence (Knodel & Saengtienchai, 1999). The Asian household is often more fluid and co-residence among various family members is common and on a continuum. Such cultural differences are manifested in many different ways. For instance, young adults of Latin and Filipino American families tended to live with and contribute financially to the family and reported stronger sense of duty to family compared to their Euro-American counterparts (Fuligni & Pedersen, 2002). Young adults of Chinese- and Indo-Canadian families were also more likely than their British-Canadian counterparts to report a positive attitude towards sharing a home with an elderly parent (Mitchell, 2003).

Cultural differences in the dynamics within the nuclear family have implications for who can provide needed support and resources. Spousal presence was significantly more important for the well-being of American elders than of Japanese elders, whereas presence of children was important only for the Japanese elders (Sugisawa, Shibata, Hougham, Sugihara, & Liang, 2002). Older adults of other Asian cultures such as Cambodia (Zimmer & Kim, 2001), Indonesia (Beard & Kunharibowo, 2001), Korea (Kim & Rhee, 1997), and Thailand (Knodel & Saengtienchai, 1999) tend to live with their adult children or live close to them. The opposite is true for elders in the U.S. where the proportion of elderly living alone has dramatically increased over several decades. Specifically, in 1988 at least half of elders in Korea (65%), Japan (50%), and Taiwan (74%) lived with their adult children whereas only 10% of American elders and 5% of Danish elders lived with their adult children (Korea Gallup, 1990, Japanese Prime Minister's Office, 1990, and Jacobs, 1998; all cited in Kwon, 1999). The majority of elders in the U.S. (80%) and Denmark (90%) lived alone or with their spouse only. This is in part due to the rising income of older adults, but preferences and income levels of children also play an important role in why so many elders live alone (Kotlikoff & Morris, 1988).

In terms of adult sibling relationships, traditional cultures of Asia tend to foster close sibling relationships throughout their adulthood and these relationships tend to be obligatory compared to Western societies such as the U.S. and Australia where the adult sibling relationships tend to be discretionary (Cicirelli, 1994). It is important to note that discretionary relationships do not necessarily indicate lack of contact or closeness. In fact, adult sibling relationships in Western cultures tend to be very close when there is frequent contact.

2.4. Culture and the Personal System (Panel II)

Culture's influence on the personal system has been well-documented. Research has revealed culture-dependent variations in cognitive, behavioral, and emotional components of the personal system, including self-construal, personality traits, attribution, and motivation. These components are integral parts of the personal system in the stress and coping paradigm.

2.4.1. Self-construal and personality traits

According to Markus and Kitayama (1991), culture can influence the ways individuals define themselves in relation to their social context. For example, individualistic cultures tend to cultivate an independent self-construal that defines self as a separate and independent entity with well-defined boundaries and in terms of abstract and general traits. Collectivistic cultures tend to cultivate an interdependent self-construal that defines self in relation to other people with overlapping interpersonal boundaries and in terms of social roles and situations.

Recent studies on ethnic differences in self-descriptors have found that Euro-American college students used more personal trait descriptors and fewer social role descriptors than Asian-American and Korean college students (Rhee, Uleman, Lee, & Roman, 1995). In addition, Euro-American adolescents rated individualistic self-descriptors as more important than collectivistic self-descriptors and used fewer group-focused self-descriptors compared to Mexican-American adolescents (Dabul, Bernal, & Knight, 1995). Even within Euro-Americans, cultural orientation is associated with self-construals. Euro-American college students who scored low on collectivism used fewer social identities to describe themselves than did those who scored high on collectivism (Gaertner, Sedikides, & Graetz, 1999).

These differences in self-construals have implications for how individuals respond to and resist contextual influences. Markus and Kitayama (1991) proposed that individuals with interdependent self-construals are more attentive and sensitive to their social context compared to individuals with independent self-construals. This idea suggests that individuals who have more interdependent self-construals might be more socially competent in that they are more attuned to the social context. But at the same time, such individuals likely would be more field-dependent, have a more external locus of control, and be more affected by environmental demands. Indeed, compared to American college students, Hong Kong Chinese, Korean, and Japanese college students reported greater need for affiliation, nurturance, and sensitivity to social rejection (Hui & Villareal, 1989; Yamaguchi, Kuhlman, & Sugimori, 1995) and more inclinations to meet expectations of

significant others, such as family and friends (Lay, Fairlie, Jackson, Ricci, Eisenberg, Sato, et al., 1998).

Locus of control is a very pertinent personality dimension to coping. Cross-cultural studies have revealed that individuals from individualistic cultures, such as Euro-Americans and New Zealanders, tend to have a stronger sense of internal locus of control than individuals from collectivistic cultures, such as the Japanese (Bond & Tornatzky, 1973; Mahler, 1974), the Chinese (Hamid, 1994), East Indians (Chandler, Shama, Wolf, & Planchard, 1981), and individuals from Zambia and Zimbabwe (Munro, 1979). Such cultural patterns in locus of control have also been found in children; Euro-American children scored higher on internal locus of control than Filipino and Brazilian children did (Paguio, Robinson, Skeen, & Deal, 1987). These results show that cultural values, such as individualism and collectivism, can shape perceptions of the extent of control over one's life and environment.

Rothbaum and colleagues (Rothbaum, Weisz, & Snyder, 1982; Weisz, Rothbaum, & Blackburn, 1984) took this idea of control one step further and proposed that the target of control can be the external environment or the individual. For individualistic persons with independent self-construals, the target of control is likely to lie outside of the person; thus, individualistic people are likely to exercise *primary* control by trying to control or change the external environment. For collectivistic persons with interdependent self-construals, however, the target of control likely will be the self, because the individual needs to fit into the group and protect it. Thus, these individuals are likely to exercise *secondary* control by trying to control or change their mind, emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. The idea of controlling one's self or environment has important implications for how one chooses to cope with stress.

2.4.2. Attribution

Attribution has a special place in the stress and coping paradigm, as it influences how individuals appraise an event or situation, and the specific coping strategies they employ. Because of the emphasis on the individual as an active agent, individualism should be associated with greater tendency to attribute causes of events to the self or other individuals. Collectivism, on the other hand, should be associated with a greater tendency for situational attribution because of its greater reliance on context for definition of motivation. Experimental findings support these hypotheses. In a very clever study on American (primarily Euro-American) and Chinese high school and graduate students, Morris and Peng (1994) demonstrated that American students used more dispositional attribution than situational attributions, especially on social reasoning tasks. Similar attributional differences were also found between Americans and individuals from other nations, such as Hindus (Miller, 1984, 1986; Shweder & Bourne, 1982) and Koreans (Choi & Nisbett, 1998).

Using the theoretical framework of locus of control, Kawanishi (1995) studied the role of culture in causal attribution. She found that Japanese college students were more likely than Euro-American students to make attribution to external chance factors. For example, they were more likely than Euro-American students to attribute successful coping to good luck, and attribute stress to bad luck. Kawanishi suggested that this attribution pattern was observed because of Japanese's common belief in luck, a type of external locus of control, which has been associated with collectivism (Bond & Tornatzky, 1973;

Mahler, 1974). These findings imply that how culture and personality traits, such as locus of control, can influence attribution style.

2.4.3. Motivation

Individuals' stable patterns of motivation have important implications for stress and coping. Many psychological theories are based on the premise of the pleasure principle, which postulates that individuals are motivated to maximize pleasure and minimize pain. Higgins' theory of *regulatory focus* (Higgins, 1997) proposes that there are two types of regulatory foci: *Promotion* and *prevention*. Promotion-focused self-regulation involves having *strong ideals* as desired end-states and working towards achieving these ideals. Promotion-focus leads to sensitivity to the presence (or absence) of positive outcomes and the use of approach as a strategic mean. Thus, people with promotion regulatory focus would be guided by what they would ideally like to do and work towards obtaining positive outcomes. Prevention-focused self-regulation involves having *strong oughts,* or being guided by obligations to oneself or significant others, and working towards meeting these obligations. A prevention-focus leads to sensitivity to negative outcomes and attempts to avoid them. People with prevention regulatory focus are guided by what they ought to do and work to avoid negative outcomes.

Higgins' theory was originally developed to explain individual differences in regulatory focus. However, this theory also has cultural implications because it emphasizes the role of socialization in how one might develop a particular regulatory focus. For example, Lee and Aaker (Aaker & Lee, 2001; Lee, Aaker, & Gardner, 2000) proposed that in a society that values individuals' right to pursue their own dreams and happiness, people would be more likely to be socialized to develop a promotion regulatory focus. On the other hand, in a society that values duty, responsibility, and maintaining stability of the group, people would be more likely to be socialized to develop a prevention regulatory focus. Culture can also shape whose ideals or whose oughts are internalized. As the theory of regulatory focus is meant to explain primarily individual differences, every society will have people with either type of regulatory focus. However, an individualistic person with a prevention focus is more likely to be concerned with minimizing the loss of the self, whereas a collectivistic person with the same prevention focus is more likely to be concerned with minimizing the loss of the in-group.

Using Higgins' regulatory focus theory, Lee and Aaker (Aaker & Lee, 2001; Lee et al., 2000) conducted a series of experiments examining the role of self-construals and cultural orientation in motivation and persuasion. They found that regulatory focus may differ as a function of self-construal. Specifically, college students with independent self-construals had a greater promotion focus and valued information regarding potential gain, whereas students with interdependent self-construals had a greater prevention focus and valued information regarding potential losses. The same relationship between self-construal and regulatory focus was obtained whether self-construal was assessed as individual differences using a self-report measure or as group differences using nationality (American vs. Chinese) as indicators of independence and interdependence. Furthermore, individuals seemed to be able to access both independent and interdependent self-construals through priming, and their regulatory focus shifted according to the dominant self-construal in the moment, demonstrating the relationship between self-construal and regulatory focus. These findings show that the immediate social context sometimes can transcend cultural differences.

The relationship between self-construal and motivation was also demonstrated in children. Iyengar and Lepper (1999) compared the effects of freedom of choice and choice by others on intrinsic motivation in Asian American and Euro-American children. They found that Euro-American children spent more time working on an anagram task when left alone and able to choose the type of anagram to work on compared to when the task was chosen by their mothers. In contrast, Asian American children spent more time on the anagram task when the task was chosen by their mothers than when they chose it themselves. The findings demonstrate that freedom of choice enhances intrinsic motivation in Euro-American children, whereas choice by a trusted authority figures (e.g., mother) enhances intrinsic motivation in Asian American children. The cross-cultural pattern of reliance on self or others for motivation appears to be consistent with that of locus of control. Individuals with independent self-construals tend to believe that the source of control lies within themselves, attempt to change external factors, and are more motivated to take action when they have a choice.

2.5. Culture and Transitory Conditions (Panel III)

Cultural and social factors have a pervasive influence on the occurrence and construal of life events, such as financial hardships, lack of employment, family-related stressors, physical and mental health problems, and discrimination. Cultural attitudes and values shape the types of events and conditions that are typical or common in a society and those that are regarded as stressful or challenging. As such, specific events or conditions are likely to be more common or stressful in individualistic versus collectivistic cultures. Earlier we described findings from cross-cultural research on living arrangement of the elderly. In collectivistic cultures of Asia the elderly tend to live with their adult children, customarily with their eldest son or in a complicated arrangement moving from one adult child's family to the next (Beard & Kunharibowo, 2001; Kim & Rhee, 1997; Knodel & Saengtienchai, 1999; Yoo & Sung, 1997; Zimmer & Kim, 2001), whereas in the U.S. the elderly tend to live alone (Kotlikoff & Morris, 1988). Such different types of normative family arrangements across cultures have implications for the kinds of stressful events that are more likely to occur in each culture.

In individualistic societies, the emphasis on independence and self-reliance can result in social stressors, such as isolation and loneliness in older age. The emphasis on freedom of choice can result in stressors associated with the inability to make choices, such as between following one vocation or another. On the other hand, in collectivistic societies, the emphasis on interdependence can result in an ongoing burden of caring for older or impaired family members. Situations of interpersonal conflict can also be significant stressors. In a collectivistic society, situations that precipitate changes in relationships, such as marriage, are more likely to be stressors due to the need to balance the separation from parents and forming bonds with a new family. In contrast, in an individualistic society, situations that precipitate dependence, such as an elderly person moving in with the family of an adult child, are more likely to be stressors.

Stressful events and conditions can also be categorized along two dimensions that may be differentially salient in individualistic and collectivistic cultures: (1) independent vs. interdependent stressors; and (2) change vs. constancy. First, certain events or conditions can threaten various aspects of the self, including its sense of independence from or

interdependence with others. Heine and Lehman (1995) found that Japanese college students found interdependent events (e.g., "Sometimes in the future you will do something that will make your family ashamed of you.") more severe but more controllable than independent events (e.g., "After growing old, you will find out that you never realized your most important dreams."). The reverse was true for Euro-Canadian college students. Tafarodi and Smith (2001) made similar predictions regarding the differential sensitivity to life events. Their study revealed that collectivistic Malaysian students reported more dysphoria in response to negative social events compared to individualistic British students. These findings suggest that individuals may be more vulnerable to events or conditions that threaten the culturally salient aspects of the self.

Change and constancy are also culturally relevant dimensions of life events. In individualistic societies, which value progress, change is likely to be seen as a positive event because it can offer an opportunity for growth and improvement, whereas constancy may be seen as negative in that it threatens progress. In collectivistic societies, which value security, change can signal potential threat to stability and safety. Constancy is more likely to be viewed as a desirable condition because its predictability allows for better control and management of any given situation. Thus, cultural context can influence transient conditions (Panel III) by influencing the occurrence of specific types of events and by shaping the types of events that people will define as normative or as stressors, and intensifying or attenuating the severity of the threat of specific events.

2.6. Culture and Cognitive Appraisal and Coping Skills (Panel IV)

Panel IV addresses the heart of the coping process: What happens once an individual is faced with an event? This phase encompasses appraisal and coping. The individual first appraises the nature of the stressful event and available coping options. Then, based on the appraisal, coping responses are used to deal with the event. The cultural context can influence individuals' appraisals and their choice of coping strategies. Culture can also shape the goals individuals set for themselves, that is, what they hope to achieve through their coping efforts.

2.6.1. Cognitive Appraisal

Appraisal of a potential stressor is probably the most subjective part of the coping process. Potential stressors are evaluated for the type of negative impact they might have (primary appraisal) and what can be done to manage the situation with available personal and social resources (secondary appraisal). Primary appraisal of stressors includes appraisal for harm/loss, threat, or challenge (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Stressors are appraised as involving harm or loss when tangible damage to the person, whether it be physical, psychological, or both, has already occurred. Threat appraisal concerns anticipated harm or loss that might occur as a result of the stressor, or the potential for further impacts if actual harm/loss has already been sustained. On the other hand, challenge appraisal concerns anticipated positive growth or gains through the experience of the stressor. As in threat appraisal, challenge appraisal may take place even when harm or loss has already been sustained. The key difference between threat and challenge appraisals is their respective focus on potential loss versus gain.

This threat/challenge appraisal typology bears remarkable resemblance to the typology of prevention/promotion regulatory focus described in the discussion of Panel II. According to the theory of regulatory focus, individuals develop a stable regulatory pattern that shapes differential sensitivity to certain aspects of events or conditions (Higgins, 1997). A promotion-focused individual would be most sensitive to the potential "presence or absence of positive outcome" and see the situation as a challenge to attain the positive outcome. On the other hand, a prevention-focused individual is inclined to be most sensitive to the potential "absence or presence of negative outcomes" and see a situation as a threat to security. As noted earlier, Aaker and her colleagues' cross-cultural research (Aaker & Lee, 2001; Lee et al., 2000) demonstrated that Americans with dominant independent self-construal showed promotion-focused regulation, whereas Hong Kong Chinese with dominant interdependent self-construal engaged in prevention-focused regulation. Thus, we can hypothesize that individuals oriented towards individualism are more likely to appraise stressors as a challenge than as a threat, whereas those oriented towards collectivism are more likely to appraise stressors as a threat than as a challenge. In addition, collectivists are more likely than individualists to be sensitive to actual harms and losses incurred by stressors.

Bjork and colleagues (Bjork, Cuthbertson, Thurman, & Lee, 2001) tested similar cultural hypotheses by examining ethnic differences in stress appraisals in Euro-, Korean-, and Filipino-American college students. The students were asked to rate the most stressful situation they experienced in the past week on degree of threat, challenge, and loss. As predicted, Korean-American students appraised their stressors as involving greater losses than did Euro-American students. But contrary to expectation, Korean- and Filipino-American students also appraised stressors as more challenging than Euro-American students did. One explanation for these seemingly paradoxical findings is that Asian American students were more concerned about presenting themselves in a positive light to authority figures such as the researchers. An alternative explanation is the possible role of religiosity in appraisal for the Korean-American and Filipino-American students. Religiosity or spirituality may be an important personal factor influencing appraisal by enabling individuals to evaluate the event in a more positive and purposeful light (e.g., God has a special plan for me through this difficult experience) (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The strong religious affiliation and spirituality of these two Asian-American groups have been well-documented (Agbayani-Siewert & Revilla, 1995; Hurh & Kim, 1990). Consistent with this speculation, the Korean- and Filipino-American students in this study reported greater use of religious coping than their Euro-American counterparts. This study is a good reminder that cultural values are just one of the many determinants of the stress and coping process.

2.6.2. Coping Goals

Coping goals reflect the ultimate outcome that one hopes to achieve upon resolving the stressful situation (e.g., finding a new or better job, making up with a spouse after an argument, fixing a broken car). Coping goals are important to consider because they help to motivate and organize coping efforts, but they are rarely explicitly ascertained or examined in stress and coping research. In fact, ignoring individual and cultural variations in coping goals has contributed to the acontextualization of stress and coping research in the past. We propose that cultural values and beliefs influence coping goals, and there are four

ways that coping goals might vary with individualism and collectivism: (a) focus on the needs of self vs. the needs of others; (b) assert autonomy and independence vs. reinforce relatedness and interdependence; (c) control external environment vs. internal self; and (d) maximize gain vs. minimize loss.

Past research on stress and coping has been based on the prevailing assumption that individuals set coping goals that primarily address their own needs, more specifically, the immediate reduction of their own psychological distress. This assumption reflects an individualistic value orientation where it is more common for people to place greater priority on goals focused on meeting the needs of the individual (self-focused coping goals) than on goals focused on meeting the needs of other people (other-focused coping goals). Unfortunately, such assumption ignores the fact that an immediate reduction of distress may not be the desired outcome for the individual nor an indication that one's coping goal has been met (Menaghan, 1983). Also, there are often multiple, competing goals within a situation (Austin & Vancouver, 1996), and coping goals may vary across situations and persons (Coyne & Racioppo, 2000). In fact, an individual can simultaneously have self-focused and other-focused coping goals; which type of goal becomes more salient or important will depend on the nature of the stressor and the characteristics of the individual. The primary goal of coping may lie in the improvement of other people's well-being or in the quality of interpersonal relationships as well as in the reduction of the individual's distress. For example, for people in nurturing roles, such as parents, caretakers, and clergy, the well-being of the person for whom they are caring may take a higher priority than their own well-being.

This is likely to be especially true for collectivistic individuals whose interdependent self-construal embraces other people as part of the self, making the welfare of the in-group an integral determinant of the welfare of the individual. When other-focused coping goals require some amount of self-sacrifice, this may result in an immediate increase in distress, rather than the decrease that researchers often use as evidence of effective coping. This may explain the frequent findings that Asians and Asian Americans tend to use seemingly ineffective coping strategies that do not reduce their psychological distress (Bjorck et al., 2001; Chang, 1996a, 1996b; Essau & Trommsdorff, 1996; Lee & Liu, 2001; Nakano, 1991; Radford, Mann, Ohta, & Nakane, 1993). The coping strategies known to be effective based on research that uses symptom relief as a measure of successful outcome may not necessarily be those that help achieve other types of desired coping goals.

Cross-cultural theories on interpersonal conflict resolution style have proposed similar cultural variations in coping goals specific to interpersonal stressors. Individualistic coping goals would assert the autonomy and independence of the self, whereas collectivistic coping goals would reinforce interdependence and relatedness between self and others. Markus and Lin (1999) proposed a cultural theory of conflictways, the meanings and practices of interpersonal conflict. Because of their different dominant self-construals Euro-Americans and Asian Americans attribute different meanings to interpersonal conflict and use different strategies to resolve conflict. For Euro-Americans with independent worldviews, interpersonal conflicts arise when there are constraints or restrictions placed on their individual freedom and rights, threatening the individual's sense of autonomy. Thus, the primary goal for conflict resolution is to remove the barrier to their desired outcome and to assert their individuality and autonomy. Compromise and accommodation are regarded as an undesirable conflict resolution strategy because they involve giving up part of one's needs or wishes.

For Asian-Americans with interdependent worldviews for whom self is a relational entity, interpersonal conflict indicates a disruption or disharmony in relationships between people that is an inevitable consequence of being interconnected with others. Thus, the goal for conflict resolution is not necessarily to remove the conflict (because it would be an impossible goal to achieve) but rather to manage the conflict, to "ride it out" without shaming anyone in the process so that the interdependence is reinforced and strengthened. Conflict resolution strategies are chosen with the long-term health of the relationship in mind. In this cultural context, compromise and accommodation are regarded as indication of maturity and tactfulness.

Coping goals also vary along the dimension of control. McCarty and her colleagues (1999) hypothesized that individualists with a more internal locus of control are likely to set *primary control coping goals* to modify or alter the environment to make it better fit their own personal agenda, whereas collectivists with a more external locus of control are likely to set *secondary control coping goals* to modify or alter themselves to fit environmental constraints. Thai children were more likely than American children to have coping goals that reflected secondary control for stressors, but only for stressors that threatened their interdependence with others such as separation from others (McCarty et al., 1999). In addition, compared to Nepali children, American children preferred to use primary control coping strategies that aimed at altering the situation (Cole, Bruschi, & Tamang, 2002).

Lastly, the theory of regulatory focus (Higgins, 1997) offers another way that coping goals might vary across cultures. According to the theory, individuals with promotion regulatory focus choose strategies and actions that maximize pleasure or gain, whereas individuals with prevention regulatory focus choose strategies and actions that minimize pain or loss. Thus, individuals' coping goals should be consistent with their regulatory focus. Individualism and collectivism, which have been found to covary with regulatory focus (Aaker & Lee, 2001; Lee et al., 2000), also have implications for whose gain or loss one tries to promote or prevent. For example, individualists with promotion focus might be most concerned with maximizing their own gains, while collectivists with prevention focus might be most concerned with minimizing the losses of their in-group.

In sum, coping goals can be shaped by culture in multiple ways. To take into account the role of cultural context in the choice of coping goals, researchers would need to assess the specific coping goals individuals set for themselves, widen the probe to include goals that address the needs of the self and relevant others, and evaluate self- and other-focused coping efforts in the larger interpersonal context of the individual's life.

2.6.3. Coping Strategies

Most cultural hypotheses of stress and coping concern cultural differences in normative coping strategies. Specifically, coping strategies that confront and modify external stressors (e.g., behavioral or approach-focused coping strategies) are expected to be more common in individualistic cultures, whereas coping strategies that avoid external stressors and instead modify internal psychological states (e.g., cognitive or avoidance-focused coping strategies) are expected to be more common in collectivistic cultures. These hypotheses were developed based on theorized and observed differences between the two cultures in personality, appraisal, motivation, and coping goals.

Individuals from individualistic cultures, compared to those from collectivistic cultures, have personality traits that reflect greater sense of internal locus of control (Bond & Tornatzky, 1973; Chandler et al., 1981; Hamid, 1994; Mahler, 1974; Paguio et al., 1987) and primary control (McCarty et al., 1999; Weisz et al., 1984), and cognitive styles oriented toward dispositional causal attribution, especially for stressors (Choi & Nisbett, 1998; Kawanishi, 1995; Morris & Peng, 1994). Accordingly, these individuals are expected to use more behavioral and approach-focused coping strategies that reflect their desire to influence the external environment to achieve their coping goals. On the other hand, individuals from collectivistic cultures, who have more external locus of control, greater secondary control, and greater tendency to attribute stressors to bad luck, are expected to rely more on cognitive and avoidance-focused coping strategies that reflect their greater desire to control their internal states to achieve their coping goals. To the extent that these individuals believe that they have control over outcome and are at the mercy of powerful forces or luck or fate, they will most likely feel helpless and thus reliant upon passive or avoidant coping strategies.

Individuals with a collectivistic orientation also may engage in more passive or avoidance coping because of their tendency to appraise stressors as a threat, whereas those with a more individualistic orientation are expected to engage in more active or approach coping because of their tendency to appraise stressors as a challenge. Although this hypothesis was only partially supported by Bjorck et al. (2001), they found that in general threat and loss appraisals were associated with greater escape-avoidance coping.

Differences in coping goals and motivation will also influence choices of coping strategies. For people with individualistic orientations, who place greater priority on meeting self-focused coping goals and more motivation to maximize pleasure (promotion regulatory focus), coping efforts are more likely to be directed at controlling the environment to suit their personal needs. Thus, they will be more likely to confront or approach the problem and try to solve it directly. For individuals with collectivistic orientations, who place greater priority on meeting other-focused coping goals and more motivation to minimize loss (prevention regulatory focus), coping efforts are more likely to be directed at protecting interpersonal relationships and other resources (Wong & Ujimoto, 1998).

In general, empirical investigations of normative coping strategies across cultures have yielded somewhat mixed evidence. However, overall there is more support for the association between a collectivistic orientation and the use of avoidance-focused coping than for the association between an individualistic orientation and the use of approach-focused coping. Specifically, adults and children of collectivistic cultures, such as Korean Americans, Malays, and Ghanaians were more likely to use passive coping (Bjorck et al., 2001; Essau & Trommsdorff, 1996), avoidant coping (Bjorck et al., 2001; Chang, 1996a, 1996b, 2001; Cheung, Lee, & Chan, 1983; Radford et al., 1993; Trubisky, Ting-Toomey, & Lin, 1991), emotion-focused coping (Eshun, Chang, & Owusu, 1998; Essau & Trommsdorff, 1996), and covert coping (McCarty et al., 1999), whereas adults and children of individualistic cultures, such as Euro-Americans and Germans, were more likely to use action-oriented and problem-focused coping (Cole et al., 2002; Essau & Trommsdorff, 1996; Radford et al., 1993).

Some studies examined the within-group variations in coping style with respect to acculturation. Using place of birth as a proxy for cultural orientation, Yoshihama (2002) compared coping of battered Japanese-American women born in the United States and in

Japan. As expected, the women born in the Unites States used more active coping and perceived it to be more effective than did the women born in Japan. Also, Taylor and colleagues (Taylor, Sherman, Kim, Jarcho, Takagi, & Dunagan, 2004) found that second generation Asian American college students (born in the United States) were in between the foreign-born Asian and Asian Americans students and the Euro-American students in how likely they were to seek family support to cope with stress.

Although less common, some studies found opposite patterns with individuals from more individualistic North American countries reporting greater use of certain emotion-focused coping strategies such as wishful thinking (Essau & Trommsdorff, 1996), and covert strategies when coping with physical injury (McCarty et al., 1999). There are also findings of no significant cultural differences in active or direct coping (Bjorck et al., 2001; Chang, 1996a; Lee & Liu, 2001) and in indirect coping (Lee & Liu, 2001). Overall, it is important to note that people rely on multiple coping strategies (Bjorck et al., 2001; Essau & Trommsdorff, 1996; Lee & Liu, 2001; Wong & Ujimoto, 1988) and that observed cultural (ethnic or national) differences are in terms of relative magnitude, not an absolute dichotomy. Furthermore, the contrary evidence is important as it can reveal the strong influence of changes due to acculturation and how individual and situational factors can at times override cultural influences.

Lastly, it is important to distinguish *collective coping strategies* (i.e., mobilizing group resources) from *collectivistic coping style* (i.e., normative coping style of collectivistic individuals). It is commonly hypothesized that collectivistic people, compared to individualistic people, would utilize more collective coping strategies such as support seeking because of their interconnectedness with the in-group. On the other hand, it has also been hypothesized that these individuals' desire to protect group harmony and not to become a burden on the group may discourage support seeking. Taylor and colleagues (2004) tested these two competing cultural hypotheses about collectivism and seeking social support. They found that Koreans, Asians, and Asian Americans were less likely to utilize social support than European Americans were; in addition, concern about their relationships with others (e.g., desire to protect group harmony and to save face and embarrassment) predicted lower likelihood of seeking support. These findings suggest that collectivistic individuals do not always engage in more collective coping. For collectivistic individuals under duress, choosing appropriate coping strategies appears to involve striking a delicate balance between taking care of the needs of the individual, maintaining the well-being of the in-group, and protecting the relationship between the individual and the group. This balance may result in the type of coping that appears to be individualistic, such as forbearance and self-reliance. Contextualized stress and coping research would investigate how personal and environmental factors together influence which coping strategies are utilized.

2.7. Culture and Health and Well-being (Panel V)

Culture has two important implications for this last panel of our stress and coping model, *Health and Well-being*. The primary issue deals with how coping outcome is defined and assessed. Traditional coping research has focused primarily on health outcomes with the assumption that individuals cope to enhance their own health and well-being. This assumption is problematic when the reduction of own distress is not the

primary goal of coping, as it may be for individuals with collectivistic orientation who are likely to have other-focused coping goals. As a way of contextualizing coping, it has been argued that a broader set of evaluation criteria of coping effectiveness should be derived from the individual's coping goals (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000). These criteria should include an assessment of the quality of person-environment fit reflected in the domains of physical, emotional, and social functioning (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). There is also recognition that multiple coping goals might compete with each other, and that coping responses may be effective in achieving one goal (e.g., interpersonal harmony) at the expense of other goals (e.g., reduction of own distress) (Somerfield & McCrae, 2000).

Another issue is the question of how individuals experience and display health and well-being. Culture can shape socially acceptable and normative ways of experiencing and expressing distress. Thus, mental health outcomes should include cultural idioms of distress. For example, gender roles in the United States may partially account for the greater prevalence of depression in women and greater prevalence of alcohol use disorders in men (Robins, 1984). Similarly, cross-cultural and cross-ethnic investigations have revealed some culture-dependent variations in health outcomes, such as the greater tendency for reporting somatic symptoms in Asian, Latino, and African cultures compared to Western and Euro-American cultures (Brown, Schulberg, & Madonia, 1996; Chun, Enomoto & Sue, 1996; Farooq, Gahir, Okyere, & Sheikh, 1995; Oltjenbruns, 1998).

For certain cultural groups measures of somatization, such as neurasthenia, may be better indicators of psychological distress than traditional indicators such as depression. For example, in an epidemiologic study of Chinese Americans living in greater Los Angeles area, Takeuchi and his colleagues (Takeuchi, Chun, Gong, & Shen, 2002) found that stressors were associated with neurasthenia symptoms but not with depressive symptoms. The high prevalence of somatization and its stronger link to stressors in Asians and Asian Americans have been attributed to a cultural environment that encourages expression of somatic symptoms (Chun et al., 1996). In part, this is due to a holistic view of the mind and body, whereby psychological symptoms are regarded to have physical origin and thus can be alleviated by treating the physical organs. In addition, strong shame and stigma are associated with expressions of emotional distress because it is regarded as a sign of mental weakness and immaturity. Using a context-specific, multidimensional set of outcome criteria will help to address cultural variations in coping outcomes and to better assess the full impact of stressors on health and well-being.

3. FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR CONTEXTUALIZING STRESS AND COPING RESEARCH

Thus far we have attempted to illustrate the role of culture as a fundamental context for the stress and coping paradigm. We have cited theories and empirical studies to depict how enduring and transient environmental conditions, internal personal make-up and resources, appraisal and coping, and health and coping outcomes can systematically vary by culture. We now conclude this chapter by examining some common misconceptions about the role of culture in stress and coping and offering suggestions for better grounding stress and coping research in cultural contexts.

3.1. Cultural Salience

In addressing culture, it is tempting to overemphasize the role of culture and assume that cultural differences in coping are large or ubiquitous. However, that is not necessarily the most parsimonious approach to examining individual differences in stress and coping. McCarty and her colleagues (1999) argued that the influence of culture would be most obvious when the essential cultural values and beliefs are "salient" in the stressful situation. "Cultural salience" is an important idea that can guide cross-cultural research to identify the conditions in which cultural differences are most relevant. In the context of coping, this idea suggests that the nature and extent of cultural differences in the use of various types of coping strategies should partly depend on the nature of the stressful situation. For example, the contrast between people who are more individualistic or collectivistic may be most observable when they are confronted with independent or interdependent stressors that threaten the most salient part of their self-construal.

Heine and Lehman (1995) compared the perceptions of independent and interdependent events in Euro-Canadian college students (known to have an independent self-construal) and Japanese College students (known to have an interdependent self-construal). They found that, within each group, Euro-Canadian college students rated independent events (e.g., "Sometimes in the future you will become an alcoholic.") to be more severe than interdependent events (e.g., "Sometime in the future you will do something that will make your family ashamed of you."). The opposite was true for the Japanese college students. When the two groups were compared to each other, the Japanese students rated the interdependent events to be more severe than the Euro-Canadian students, but the two groups rated independent events similarly. Furthermore, compared to the Euro-Canadian students, the Japanese students were more pessimistic about events that were threatening to interdependent selves.

In general, pessimism is associated with less problem solving; however, for Asian Americans pessimism is associated with more problem solving (Chang, 1996a). Chang explains that pessimism may be helpful in collectivistic cultures because anticipating negative interpersonal outcomes, such as shaming friends (an interdependent event), may help individuals take actions that prevent such negative outcomes from occurring. This view is consistent with the prevention-oriented self-regulation style observed in individuals from more collectivistic cultures, such as Asian Americans and Hong Kong Chinese (Aaker & Lee, 2001; Lee & et al., 2000). Recognizing such cultural tendencies of Asians and Asian Americans, Wong (1993) emphasized the role of proactive coping for anticipatory stressors. Identifying conditions in which cultural differences are likely to be salient could yield more fruitful knowledge about how people of all backgrounds cope with stressors.

3.2. Developing Culturally Sensitive Research Paradigm

Another way that stress and coping research can be contextualized is by addressing the lack of consensus in terminology and some underlying ethnocentric assumptions. The stress and coping literature is replete with dichotomous typologies of coping strategies. These typologies emphasize different characteristics of coping strategies, such as the movement of coping actions (direct vs. indirect) towards or away from problem (approach vs. avoidant), the primary focus of coping (problem vs. emotion), the intensity of coping

efforts (active vs. passive), and the observability of coping responses (overt vs. covert). These terms are often used interchangeably, with the former category of each pair connoting more engaging and confrontative coping strategies and the latter category connoting more disengaging and avoidant coping strategies.

There are also some conceptual overlaps among these categories that create confusion for cross-cultural research on coping. For example, certain cognitive coping strategies, such as positive reframing (Yoshihama, 2002), have been categorized as a passive type of coping in some studies (Essau & Trommsdorff, 1996; McCarty et al., 1999; Yoshihama, 2002) and as an active type in others (Chang, 1996b; Lee & Liu, 2001). This type of conflicting or inconsistent categorization is partly due to the fact that many cross-cultural studies categorized coping strategies empirically using exploratory factor analytic methods and then labeled the factors/components by examining the factor solutions. More important, the inconsistent categorization may also be an indication that the current dichotomous categorization of coping strategies does not adequately capture the full complexity of cultural variations in coping.

Part of this problem stems from the prevailing assumption that approach coping is overt, constructive, and adaptive, whereas avoidance coping is covert, passive, and maladaptive because it connotes lack of motivation and effort. Empirical findings, mostly on American and European samples, support this view as approach coping strategies are usually associated with better physical and psychological outcomes than are avoidance coping strategies (e.g., Chung, Langenbucher, Labouvie, Panadina, & Moos, 2001; Hack & Degner, 2004; Holahan, Valentiner, & Moos, 1995; Penedo et al., 2003). However, when a stressor is uncontrollable or unavoidable, approach strategies may be ineffective.

Moreover, palliative or avoidance strategies may be more effective in some cultural contexts where the norm is to "fit in" with the social and physical environment. In the Eastern collectivistic cultures, the worldview is more holistic and the separation between person and environment is considered artificial and meaningless. When problems arise between the self and the environment, the cause is perceived to be neither within the person nor in the external world, and a "mature" person would take actions to control the self to make it fit better with the environment. Hence, coping strategies that focus on exercising secondary control, in other words, controlling one's own internal states and behaviors, are deemed desirable and may be more effective in achieving coping goals. Such coping efforts are neither passive nor avoidant; in reality they require intense effort and concentration on the target of control, the mind and behaviors of the self.

In fact, recent studies challenge the assumption that coping strategies that actively confront stressors are generally more adaptive than coping strategies that do not actively confront stressors. Chang (2001) examined the normative coping strategies of Euro-American and Asian-American college students and their relationships to positive and negative psychological outcomes. Compared to Euro-American students, Asian American students reported greater use of problem avoidance and social withdrawal. Consistent with past findings, the use of these avoidant strategies was associated with less life satisfaction and more depression in Euro-Americans. However, it was not associated with either of these outcomes in Asian Americans.

Similarly, Yoshihama (2002) found that the perceived effectiveness of passive coping strategies was associated with lower psychological distress in the more collectivistic

Japanese-American women born in Japan, whereas the perceived effectiveness of active coping strategies was associated with lower distress in their more individualistic counterparts born in the United States. Furthermore, active coping appeared to have deleterious effects on the psychological well-being of the Japan-born women. These studies suggest that for Asian Americans, higher usage and perceived effectiveness of avoidant and passive coping strategies may reflect the fact that Asian Americans do not have or perceive much control over their social reality. Avoidant strategies may be maladaptive only for people who have control but choose to avoid.

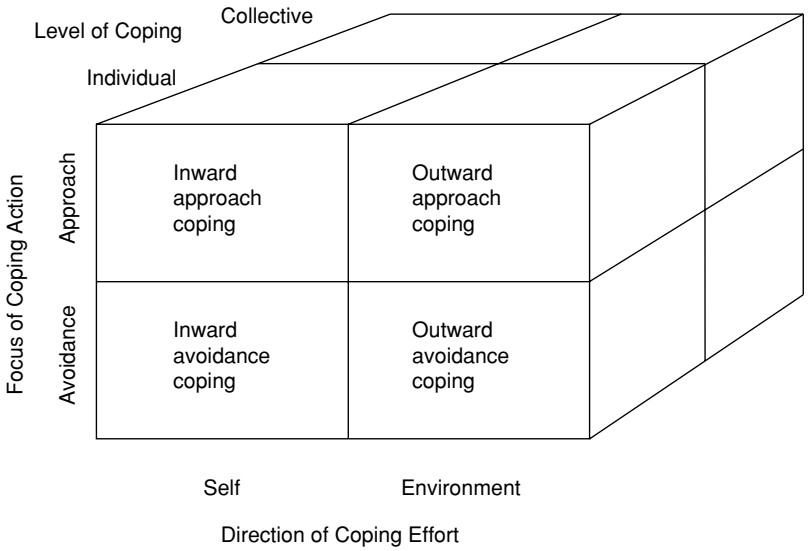
Another common assumption is that being more mindful of others and placing priority on their well-being leads to passive or indirect coping that demands quiet self-sacrifice and entails controlling or suppressing one's desire and needs. However, that is not necessarily true. If the in-group's welfare is challenged, it may lead to increased active and problem-focused coping on behalf of the in-group. In fact, a person with a collectivistic worldview may engage in *collective coping* aimed at primary control on behalf of the in-group (Wong & Ujimoto, 1998).

On the surface, collective coping appears to be very similar to utilizing social support, but that is not necessarily true as social support is only one of the many ways that collective coping can take place. In individual coping, individuals seek support to boost their ability and resources to cope with the stressor. In collective coping, the stressor *becomes* an in-group problem, and every member takes an active role in tackling the problem with a sense of responsibility that is different from providing emotional or instrumental support as a third party who is not directly affected by the stressor. In interpersonal conflict situations, it is often the responsibility of an in-group member to mediate the conflict. Thus, when coping is examined at the individual level, the individual may be engaging in seemingly passive and avoidant coping, but active mediation may be going on at the group level. Collectivistic individuals may take a more indirect or avoidant coping strategy for their own personal problems, but a more direct or approach coping strategy for in-group members' problems.

To expand the present typologies of coping strategies, we propose a distinction between coping that occurs at the individual level versus the collective level (see Figure 2). Within each level of coping (individual vs. collective), coping strategies can be categorized by (a) focus of coping action and (b) direction of coping effort. The focus of coping refers to whether coping is geared toward approaching or avoiding the stressor. The second dimension has to do with whether the coping efforts are directed toward the external environment or the self. Coping may be directed toward external circumstances that need to be managed to make them better fit the individual's agenda (assimilative coping) or toward managing the self to better fit the environment (accommodative coping). This distinction is similar to the distinction between primary and secondary coping (Rothbaum et al., 1982; Weisz et al., 1984), but we chose not to use these terms because of the embedded assumption that controlling the external environment is more basic and fundamental (primary) than controlling the inner self (secondary) (Azuma, 1984; Kojima, 1984).

Based on these two dimensions, coping strategies can be conceptualized with respect to four broad categories– inward and outward approach coping and inward and outward avoidance coping (see Table 2). At the individual level of coping, *inward approach* coping strategies attempt to deal with the stressor by controlling the self. Some strategies that would fall into this category, such as meditation, transcendental acceptance, and existential

Figure 2. Conceptual framework for contextualizing coping.



or spiritual coping, sometimes are miscategorized as avoidance coping. We believe that these strategies should be conceptualized as approach coping because they are active strategies targeted on controlling the self and trying to find meaning and peace in a troubling life situation. *Outward approach* coping strategies aim to deal with the stressor by reconstruing or controlling the external environment; problem solving and seeking social support would fall into this category.

Inward avoidance coping consists of strategies that are used to avoid dealing with the stressor by disengaging from the self. These strategies typically involve either denying reality or resigning oneself to being the victim of the stressor. *Outward avoidance* coping consists of strategies that are used to avoid dealing with the stressor by disengaging from the stressor, such as social withdrawal and venting affect.

At the collective level of coping, these categories can be applied in a similar fashion. But the focus is on how the in-group appraises the problem and chooses to cope with it. The family may engage in group denial of the individual's problematic situation by pretending there is no problem (inward avoidance coping) or alter it by helping the individual change the external situation that caused the problem (outward approach coping). Collective appraisal and coping may or may not be congruent with what happens at the individual level. Coping can occur at either or both levels in any cultural setting. Persons suffering from substance abuse may fail to cope with addiction problems on their own, and their family members may decide to intervene with or without their consent or knowledge. There is variation across cultures in the extent of collective coping efforts and how much weight or influence the individual or the society will allow for the collective efforts to complement or even supplant the individual coping efforts.

Culture's influence on what an individual does to obtain the desired outcome is most likely to be indirect by shaping the personal and environment systems. Our proposed framework attempts to resolve some of the existing conceptual problems in cross-cultural research on stress and coping and outline specific ways to integrate context into the stress and coping paradigm. But the framework is limited in the scope of the stress and coping process that it covers, as coping can occur in response to current stressors, in preparation of known upcoming stressors, and in anticipation of future potential stressors (Wong, 1993). People are dynamic and complex, often holding multiple realities shaped by different social contexts that might collide with one another. While certain individual traits and propensities prevail and surface consistently across situations, others are heavily determined by specific circumstances. Recognition of complex inter- and intra-personal realities allows for the possibilities that individuals conduct themselves in seemingly inconsistent and even paradoxical manners (Wong & Sproule, 1984). This is especially important to consider for individuals who tend to be collectivistic or field-dependent. Only when we place individuals in their full social contexts can we fully appreciate the complexity of human mind and behavior.

4. CONCLUSION

We have shown that culture provides a fundamental context for the stress and coping paradigm. Individualism and collectivism were used as examples of cultural constructs that can influence each component of stress and coping: the ongoing environmental and personal systems, transient life conditions, cognitive appraisal and coping, and health and well-being. We tried to base our discussion on available empirical findings. However, there is more extensive evidence on the role of culture in certain components, such as the personal system and appraisal and coping than in other components, such as the environmental systems and transient life conditions. Nevertheless, we believe that it is essential to evaluate the role of culture in stress and coping, especially when there is cultural salience. We also made some suggestions for developing more culturally sensitive research paradigms that can facilitate systematic and theory-driven investigations on the role of culture.

It is important to note that culture is not a static entity, but rather a dynamic system that evolves over time. This is especially true in modern times with instant world-wide communication in which events and opinions in one country can quickly influence attitudes and beliefs in other countries. Cultural changes also occur in many domains, with changes occurring faster and more dramatically in the political, educational, and economic systems, and slower and more gradually in family structures, religion, and some personal practices (Divale & Seda, 2001). As researchers who want to identify predictable patterns of behaviors, we need to continually examine and test our assumptions about people and the world, if our explanations of human behavior are to reflect current reality. Unfortunately, to illustrate the relevance of culture in stress and coping, we have simplified and treated culture as a static entity and emphasized cultural differences at the expense of cultural similarities. Also, as the primary focus of this chapter was to illustrate the influence of culture on human behavior, we have neglected ways in which coping, especially collective coping, can affect cultural attitudes and beliefs. From a historical perspective, we should recognize that culture and coping influence each other in an ever-evolving mutual relationship.

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