

Philosophies of Happiness and Mental Health: A Cross-Cultural Exploration of Emotional Wellness

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ABSTRACT

A global human phenomenon, happiness is imagined and wished for differently in every culture, building paradigms of mental health as well as individual aspirations. The philosophical roots of happiness in various world cultures—Western, Eastern, Indigenous, and African—are examined here, as is their influence on mental health attitudes and practices. Buddhist and Confucian worldviews put greater stress on internal tranquillity, concord, detachment, and moral obligation than Western frameworks, which generally map happiness to individual success, self-regulation, and emotional health. Indigenous worldviews are more likely to connote happiness in terms of environmental balance and religious membership, while African philosophies like Ubuntu augment relational harmony, communal happiness, and communal well-being. By cross-cultural comparison of philosophical and mental models—e.g., African Ubuntu, Stoic resilience, Japanese Ikigai, and Bhutanese Gross National Happiness—the paper contends that culturally responsive mental health care is required in the globally connected world today. It also balances the risks of exporting mental health models that will fail to honour local values and emotional norms. Lastly, the article calls for cross-cultural philosophies to be used in practice within mental health to build psychological resilience, empathy, and healthy well-being among populations. Through integrating philosophical, psychological, and anthropological perspectives, this paper argues for culturally sensitive mental health practices respecting diverse paradigms of happiness. It strives to discover an inclusive paradigm that acknowledges human flourishing in multiplicity, enriching therapeutic processes and cross-cultural notions of well-being. By posing this question, the study adds to the ongoing debate on culture-sensitive care and provides directions to more holistic and compassionate approaches to mental health towards the diverseness of philosophies surrounding happiness around the world.

Keywords:

Philosophy of happiness, Cross-cultural Psychology, Mental Health, Emotional Well-being, Eastern Philosophy, Western Thought, Ubuntu, Ikigai, Gross National Happiness, Cultural Sensitivity, Psychotherapy, Mindfulness

INTRODUCTION

Happiness, while everywhere desired, is not everywhere understood. Throughout the world, more affluent cultural, historical, and philosophical context has resulted in diverse responses to what a good and satisfying life might entail. These responses, founded upon the assumptions and values of given societies, direct not only individual goals but also shape social systems and paradigms of mental health. In an increasingly globalized world, it is increasingly important to become aware of the complex and culture-based constructions of happiness in order that human-diversity-valuing mental health systems may be developed which promote emotional welfare for everyone. More recent psychological and psychiatric discourse has traditionally relied upon Western ideals of individualism, autonomy, and emotional well-being, where success and self-actualization have tended to reside at the epicentre of psychological welfare (**Christopher & Hickinbottom, 2008**). But these paradigms, as influential as they are, fail to encompass the entire range of human experience. For most non-Western societies, the way to

happiness and mental equilibrium is inextricably linked to spiritual development, social cohesion, ecological interdependence, and moral accountability. Hence, the transference of a monolithic, culture-specific construct of happiness may not only distort other cultures but also let down the mental health requirements of multicultural communities.

Philosophical schools of thought worldwide provide a rich variety of understanding of happiness and mental well-being. Eastern philosophies like Buddhism and Confucianism provide a focus on inner harmony, non-attachment to desires, righteous living, and role relationships. For instance, Buddhism encourages mindfulness, compassion, and the end of suffering based on the Eightfold Path with a focus on inner peace and not riches (**Dalai Lama, 1998**). Confucianism, on the other hand, promotes social harmony and moral cultivation as means to personal and societal flourishing (**Yao, 2000**).

Likewise, African philosophies like Ubuntu hold that an individual's happiness is equated with their relationship and harmony of society. Ubuntu, which can be translated freely as "I am because we are," shifts the attention from individual success to communal living and interdependency (**Mbiti, 1969; Metz, 2011**). Happiness, in this sense, derives from a sense of responsibility fulfilled to society, compassion, and societal balance. Indigenous cultures worldwide tend to define well-being in terms of harmony with nature, spirituality, and communal systems of kinship, establishing a triadic relationship between the self, nature, and God (**Kirmayer et al., 2003**).

In contrast, Western philosophical tradition has habitually located the location of happiness in people. From Aristotelian eudaimonia to contemporary subjective well-being models, the Western tradition relies on a rational agency, moral virtue, and psychological satisfaction model of flourishing. Aristotle's eudaimonia—way of living in accordance with reason and virtue—is still influential in positive psychology today (**Ryan & Deci, 2001**). The stoic school of ancient Greek philosophy emphasizes challenge management and handling adversity, setting the cognitive behavioural therapy premise and foundations for stress management procedures in the present day (**Robertson, 2019**).

Japanese philosophy, for example, provides the idea of Ikigai, or "a reason for being"—an equilibrium convergence of passion, mission, vocation, and profession. Such a paradigm has been accepted in contemporary definitions of significant life and has been applied within occupational therapy, aging studies, and life satisfaction (**Garcia & Miralles, 2017**). Bhutan's GNH indicator, which is state-led, is a qualitative counter to GDP indicators in that its emphasis is on spiritual, psychological, and ecological well-being in preference to economic productivity (**Ura et al., 2012**).

The cross-cultural analysis in this essay highlights the need for culturally responsive mental health treatment. To impose a monolithic model of mental health on diverse cultures is to risk alienating people whose worldview and values are other than those assumed by dominant models. For example, Western psychotherapy's focus on verbal expression and self-disclosure can be at odds with cultures that prize silence, restraint, or collective identity (**Sue & Sue, 2016**). Cultural sensitivity, then, is not merely an issue of inclusiveness—it is an obligation of sound practice.

Secondly, integrating cross-cultural philosophies into mental health practice has utilitarian advantages. It facilitates the creation of therapeutic modalities consonant with clients' belief systems, assists in decolonizing psychological practices, and builds empathy and intercultural competencies among mental health professionals. Integrative therapies (mindfulness-based on Buddhist meditation-influenced), narrative therapy (story-telling based on Indigenous oral tradition), and community healing practices (such as in African and Native American communities) have been effective in fostering mental well-being (**Kirmayer et al., 2011; Choudhury, 2019**).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The roots of Western conceptions of happiness trace back to Ancient Greece. Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* proposed *eudaimonia* as the highest human good, often translated as "flourishing" rather than mere pleasure. For Aristotle, happiness is not a transient emotional state but a life of virtue and rational activity: "Happiness is the meaning and the purpose of life, the whole aim and end of human existence" (Aristotle, trans. 2009). This teleological view influenced the development of virtue ethics, emphasizing character and moral development as central to well-being. Unlike hedonistic models, *eudaimonia* focuses on long-term fulfilment through personal growth and social contribution.

Contemporary psychologists such as Martin Seligman have revived Aristotelian ideas in the Positive Psychology movement. Seligman's (2011) PERMA model—comprising Positive emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment—echoes Aristotle's notion that a meaningful life is central to well-being.

Hedonism, another influential Western perspective, views happiness as the presence of pleasure and the absence of pain. This idea was refined by thinkers like Epicurus and later developed by Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill into utilitarianism. Bentham's (1789) "felicific calculus" proposed quantifying happiness to determine moral action: "It is the greatest happiness of the greatest number that is the measure of right and wrong."

Bentham's utilitarianism laid the foundation for cost-benefit analyses in public policy, including mental health economics. Mill, while also a utilitarian, emphasized "higher pleasures"—those involving intellect and moral sentiment—as superior to base pleasures: "It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied" (Mill, 1863). This distinction introduced a qualitative dimension to happiness, influencing later debates on the subjective versus objective components of well-being.

In mental health practice, these ideas resonate in cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), where reducing distress (pain) and enhancing satisfaction (pleasure) are key goals (Beck, 1976). However, the emphasis on individual pleasure may marginalize collective or spiritual aspects of mental health, limiting cultural applicability.

In the 20th century, existentialist philosophers like Søren Kierkegaard, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Viktor Frankl challenged earlier notions of happiness as pleasure or fulfilment of desires. Instead, they emphasized authenticity, personal responsibility, and the confrontation with existential anxiety. Frankl (1946), a Holocaust survivor and psychiatrist, argued in *Man's Search for Meaning* that human beings are primarily driven by a "will to meaning," not a will to pleasure or power: "Happiness cannot be pursued; it must ensue... as the unintended side effect of one's personal dedication to a cause greater than oneself."

Frankl's logotherapy, rooted in existentialism, has been influential in meaning-centered therapies, especially for patients facing terminal illness, grief, or depression. Research by Wong (2012) supports the effectiveness of meaning-making approaches in reducing existential distress and enhancing psychological resilience. Thus, existentialist philosophy contributes a vital dimension to mental health by framing suffering not as an aberration but as a potential gateway to deeper fulfilment.

The Enlightenment period ushered in a new emphasis on reason, autonomy, and individual rights. Thinkers such as Immanuel Kant and John Locke shaped Western ideals of personal agency and moral responsibility. For Kant (1785), happiness was not the ultimate goal of moral action; instead, duty and moral law were central. Nevertheless, personal autonomy—defined as the capacity to act according to rational principles—became a cornerstone of Western liberal democracies.

In mental health contexts, this emphasis on autonomy underpins therapeutic models that prioritize client self-determination, such as humanistic therapy. Carl Rogers (1961),

influenced by Enlightenment ideals, viewed the self-actualizing tendency as fundamental: “The good life is a process, not a state of being. It is a direction, not a destination.”

This humanistic approach is evident in contemporary person-centred therapies, where the therapist facilitates the client’s journey toward self-fulfilment and psychological growth. However, critics argue that overemphasis on autonomy can neglect systemic factors such as poverty, discrimination, or trauma, leading to victim-blaming in therapeutic settings (**Prilleltensky, 2003**).

In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, Positive Psychology emerged as a field aiming to scientifically study human strengths and well-being. **Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000)** positioned the field as a corrective to psychology’s traditional focus on pathology: “Psychology is not just the study of disease, weakness, and damage; it also is the study of strength and virtue.”

Positive Psychology builds on earlier philosophical frameworks—particularly virtue ethics and humanistic psychology—but grounds them in empirical research. Tools like the Satisfaction with Life Scale (**Diener et al., 1985**) and the Flourishing Scale (**Diener et al., 2010**) attempt to quantify subjective well-being.

This evidence-based approach has had widespread influence on mental health interventions, education, and policy. For example, resilience training and strengths-based therapy have been integrated into schools and workplaces to enhance psychological well-being (**Seligman et al., 2009**).

However, some scholars caution against the commodification of happiness and the pressure to feel positive, which can pathologize normal emotional experiences (**Ehrenreich, 2009**). Moreover, the Western focus on individual achievement may limit the applicability of Positive Psychology in collectivist cultures.

While philosophical frameworks have emphasized virtue, meaning, and autonomy, contemporary Western culture is heavily shaped by neoliberal capitalism, which equates happiness with material success, consumerism, and productivity. This socio-economic model promotes individual responsibility for well-being, often ignoring structural inequalities (**Cederström & Spicer, 2015**).

Psychological distress is increasingly medicalized, and happiness becomes a product to be purchased or optimized. **Illouz (2008)** critiques this trend in *Saving the Modern Soul*, arguing that therapeutic culture has become intertwined with capitalist ideologies: “The self has become a project of optimization, marketability, and performance.”

Such views have led to critiques of mental health care systems that emphasize pharmaceutical interventions or self-help over community support and systemic change. **Foucault’s (1977)** analysis of power and normalization remains relevant in understanding how mental health discourses regulate behaviour. Moreover, scholars like **Christopher and Hickinbottom (2008)** argue for a culturally embedded approach to positive psychology that recognizes the diversity of human values and experiences. In response, there is growing interest in integrative models that draw from both Western and non-Western traditions, including mindfulness, indigenous healing practices, and community psychology (**Walsh, 2011**).

Eastern philosophies have long offered profound insights into the nature of happiness and mental well-being. Unlike Western paradigms that often emphasize individual achievement and hedonic pleasure, Eastern traditions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, Confucianism, and indigenous practices prioritize harmony, balance, and interconnectedness. Buddhism emphasizes that true happiness arises not from external conditions, but from inner peace and the cessation of suffering (*dukkha*). This inner state aligns with Viktor E. Frankl’s existential view, where happiness is seen not as something to be directly pursued, but rather as a by-product of meaningful engagement. Frankl writes, “Happiness cannot be pursued; it must

ensue... as the unintended side effect of one's personal dedication to a cause greater than oneself" (**Frankl, 2006, p. 12**).

In Buddhist terms, this could be likened to living in accordance with dhamma, where virtuous actions, meditation, and insight naturally lead to a tranquil mind. At the core of this pursuit is the development of mindfulness (*sati*) and equanimity (*upekkhā* or *tatramajjhataṭṭā*). *Tatramajjhataṭṭā*, a Pali term often translated as "even-mindedness" or "equanimity," is particularly central in Theravāda Abhidhamma teachings. **Bhikkhu Bodhi (2003)** defines this mental factor as the quality that "conveys consciousness and the mental factors evenly," and notes its function as preventing "deficiency and excess, or partiality" (p. 86). This suggests that equanimity is not indifference or apathy, but a profound balance that allows one to engage with life's experiences—whether pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral—without being overwhelmed or reactive.

This mental equipoise fosters clarity and resilience, allowing individuals to perceive the transient nature of phenomena without clinging or aversion. According to the *Visuddhimagga*, equanimity balances compassion and wisdom, offering emotional steadiness that is "neither elated nor depressed in the face of gain or loss, praise or blame, fame or disrepute, pleasure or pain" (**Buddhaghosa, 5th century CE/2010**).

From a psychological perspective, modern research supports the notion that equanimity plays a crucial role in mental health. **Desbordes et al. (2015)** note that equanimity, cultivated through mindfulness practices, is associated with reduced emotional reactivity and greater psychological well-being. Similarly, **Hadash et al. (2016)** suggest that the cultivation of non-reactivity—central to equanimity—buffers against depression and anxiety by breaking the cycle of rumination.

Furthermore, **Davidson and Goleman (2017)** emphasize the long-term neuroplastic benefits of equanimity training in experienced meditators, particularly in terms of emotional regulation and stress resilience. Their work indicates that practices aimed at cultivating equanimity may change the brain's response to fear and anger, promoting a more balanced and compassionate outlook.

In Hindu philosophy, Ananda represents a state of spiritual bliss achieved through self-realization and union with the divine. Practices such as yoga, meditation, and devotion (*bhakti*) are pathways to this state. "True happiness, or 'Ananda,' is considered a state of spiritual bliss that transcends material pleasures" (**Lifoholic Shalini 2024**).

Studies in transpersonal psychology suggest that spiritual experiences, including those resulting from meditation, yoga, and devotional practices, are associated with decreased anxiety, depression, and a stronger sense of purpose (**MacDonald & Friedman, 2002**). These align with Ananda's transformative quality—bringing about peace, contentment, and emotional resilience.

Neuroscientific studies have found that long-term meditation can alter brain structures related to emotional regulation, including increased activity in the prefrontal cortex and decreased activity in the amygdala, thereby supporting psychological states aligned with Ananda (**Lazar et al., 2005**).

Ananda also resonates with ideas in other spiritual and psychological frameworks. For instance, **Abraham Maslow (1964)** described peak experiences as moments of intense joy, unity, and self-transcendence—experiences which mirror the non-dual bliss of Ananda. Similarly, the concept is comparable to the Buddhist idea of nirvana, although Ananda is more affective and positive in tone, emphasizing divine union rather than cessation.

In clinical settings, integrating spiritual practices derived from Hindu traditions—such as mindfulness meditation or mantra chanting—has shown promise for enhancing emotional wellness (**Tirch, 2010**). In multicultural societies, such practices offer culturally inclusive tools for well-being that go beyond Western biomedical models.

Confucianism centers on the cultivation of virtue and the maintenance of social harmony. Mental health is seen as a product of ethical living and fulfilling one's roles within society. "The practice of different virtues is not valuable by itself, unless it leads to the harmonious combination of these virtues, so that 'harmony results in happiness'" (**Liu 2003, p. 71**)

Confucian ethics stresses that mental well-being emerges from moral development, self-cultivation, and right conduct within relationships. Harmony (he), a central Confucian ideal, is not merely the absence of conflict but a dynamic balance of differing roles and values, maintained through ritual, respect, and empathy (**Tu, 1985**).

Mental health, in the Confucian context, is less about achieving individualistic happiness and more about becoming a morally upright person who contributes to the balance and order of society. This emphasis on social embeddedness aligns with findings from cross-cultural psychology, which show that in collectivistic cultures, emotional wellness is more closely tied to fulfilling social roles and responsibilities (**Markus & Kitayama, 1991**).

In clinical settings, this orientation implies that therapeutic practices rooted in Confucian values may focus on moral reflection, restoring social relationships, and re-establishing one's duties toward others. For instance, **Kim et al. (2006)** argue that therapeutic models in East Asia often prioritize restoring interpersonal harmony over the pursuit of personal insight, reflecting a Confucian worldview that prioritizes relationality and ethical roles.

Moreover, studies have demonstrated that Confucian beliefs about virtue and harmony can act as protective factors for mental health. For example, a study by **Yang and Lu (2009)** found that the practice of filial piety (xiao) among Chinese adolescents was associated with reduced depressive symptoms and increased life satisfaction, as it fostered a sense of meaning and belonging.

Recognizing the Confucian model of happiness and well-being opens up new possibilities for culturally sensitive interventions. As **Wong and Cowden (2022)** suggest, mental health professionals working in East Asian or Confucian-influenced contexts should be aware of the relational nature of selfhood and the moral dimensions of emotional life. Techniques such as family therapy, narrative therapy, or virtue-based counselling can be adapted to integrate these cultural values.

The Japanese concept of Ikigai, often translated as "a reason for being," represents a profound psychological framework that encompasses one's passions, mission, vocation, and profession. Rooted in traditional Japanese culture, Ikigai is not merely about achieving success or happiness, but about discovering a deeply personal sense of purpose that brings meaning and fulfilment to life (**Garcia & Miralles, 2017**).

Wilkes et al. (2023), in their study "Can Ikigai Predict Anxiety, Depression, and Well-being?", found significant correlations between a strong sense of Ikigai and improved mental health outcomes. Specifically, individuals reporting a well-defined Ikigai exhibited lower levels of anxiety and depression and higher life satisfaction compared to those without a clear purpose. This aligns with broader psychological theories suggesting that meaning-making acts as a buffer against emotional distress (**Steger, 2009**).

Moreover, a longitudinal study by **Mori et al. (2021)** among older Japanese adults reported that those with a strong Ikigai were less likely to suffer from cognitive decline, loneliness, and chronic illness. These findings emphasize Ikigai as not just a philosophical ideal, but a measurable psychological construct with tangible health benefits.

From a neuroscientific perspective, Ikigai can be linked to positive affect and intrinsic motivation, which are associated with dopaminergic reward systems in the brain (**Ryff & Singer, 2008**). Individuals who align their daily activities with their values, strengths, and passions often report greater psychological resilience and reduced vulnerability to mental health disorders.

In therapeutic settings, fostering Ikigai could serve as a preventive intervention strategy. For instance, narrative therapy, logotherapy (Frankl, 1959), and values-based behavioral interventions can help clients identify their sources of purpose and meaning. Interventions that guide individuals to explore the intersection of what they love, what the world needs, what they are good at, and what they can be paid for—the four circles of Ikigai—can enhance motivation and life satisfaction (**Mathews, 2020**).

Furthermore, educational and workplace settings have begun integrating the Ikigai framework to improve student engagement and employee well-being. Studies show that employees who find meaning in their work report higher levels of engagement, creativity, and productivity (**Pink, 2009**).

Taoism emphasizes living in harmony with the Tao—the fundamental principle that is the source of all existence. The concept of Wu Wei, or effortless action, encourages individuals to align with the natural flow of life. The Yin-Yang philosophy further illustrates the importance of balance: “Yin and yang represent opposing yet interconnected forces that coexist in balance, affecting every aspect of life, including mental wellness” (**Verywell Mind 2023**). By embracing these principles, individuals can achieve mental clarity and emotional equilibrium. Sufism, the mystical branch of Islam, views suffering as a means to attain spiritual closeness to God. Embracing hardship is seen as a path to purification and enlightenment. “The self will not go in gladness and with caresses, it must be chased with sorrow, drowned in tears” (**Vaughan-Lee 1994, p. 90**). This perspective encourages acceptance and transformation through adversity, promoting resilience and inner peace.

African philosophies, particularly the concept of Ubuntu, offer a fundamentally different approach to happiness. The notion of Ubuntu affirms that happiness and emotional well-being are inextricably tied to social harmony, community relationships, and mutual care. **Metz (2011)** argues that “the essence of Ubuntu is to value communal relationships, or the capacity to identify with others and exhibit solidarity with them,” which provides individuals with a deep sense of purpose, belonging, and dignity (p. 535). In this worldview, happiness is not a personal achievement but a communal state, fostered by ethical conduct, empathy, and the recognition of one’s role within a social matrix.

This communal focus has profound implications for mental health. Rather than conceiving mental illness as a private, internal disorder, African epistemologies view psychological suffering as a disruption of relational or spiritual harmony (**Kirmayer et al., 2003**). Healing, therefore, requires restoring balance within the community and re-integrating the person into the social and moral fabric.

As **Wiredu (1997)** notes, “in African cultures, the individual's moral and psychological health is often conceived as a function of their embeddedness within a network of supportive, respectful, and reciprocally responsible relationships.” The presence of elders, kin, and community leaders in therapeutic interventions is common, reflecting the belief that collective wisdom and solidarity are essential to recovery.

Spirituality plays a central role in African understandings of happiness and mental well-being. The holistic conception of the self in many African traditions includes not just mind and body, but also spirit and ancestors. Happiness, therefore, involves maintaining harmony across all dimensions of life—physical, emotional, social, and spiritual (**Mbiti, 1990**).

Ancestor veneration is a prominent element in African spirituality. The ancestors are considered active participants in the lives of the living, offering protection, guidance, and moral oversight. Disconnection from one’s ancestral lineage or failure to fulfill spiritual obligations can be perceived as causes of psychological distress (**Ngubane, 1977**).

Modern African mental health systems are increasingly recognizing the need to integrate traditional practices with contemporary clinical models. In countries like South Africa, Kenya, and Nigeria, efforts have been made to include traditional healers in community-based mental

health care, especially in rural areas where access to psychiatric services is limited (**Patel et al., 2011**). This pluralistic approach supports culturally congruent healing while addressing systemic gaps in care.

Furthermore, the Ubuntu philosophy is gaining attention in global discourses on ethics, education, and psychology. Scholars like **Tutu (1999)** have argued for the relevance of Ubuntu in promoting global peace, restorative justice, and community resilience. In psychological terms, Ubuntu aligns with the relational turn in psychotherapy, which stresses the importance of interdependence, empathy, and narrative in human development (**Jordan, 2000**).

This philosophy highlights that mental health is supported by a sense of belonging, respect, and contribution to the community. In African societies, mental health care often involves community-based practices, such as storytelling, collective rituals, and communal support systems, which help individuals navigate emotional distress (**Kirmayer et al., 2003**). Thus, healing is a collective process, with individuals finding emotional wellness through interconnectedness with others.

Furthermore, African approaches to happiness often emphasize spiritual well-being. Traditional African healing practices, which incorporate spiritual rituals, ancestor veneration, and connection to nature, are integral to maintaining mental health (**Kirmayer et al., 2011**). For example, the practice of prayer, divination, and herbal medicine has long been used to address psychological and emotional challenges, emphasizing the importance of a holistic approach to well-being that integrates physical, emotional, and spiritual health.

RESULTS & IMPACT

Eastern philosophies have greatly influenced Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapies (MBCT), yoga, and meditation techniques used globally. These practices have shown strong efficacy in treating anxiety, depression, and stress (Hofmann et al., 2010). The Western approach has contributed significantly to the medicalization and therapeutic structuring of mental health. However, critics argue that it often overemphasizes autonomy and personal achievement, neglecting social and existential factors (**Christopher & Hickinbottom, 2008**). Research into the neurobiological effects of mindfulness and meditation has found significant changes in brain structure and function. For example, regular mindfulness meditation has been shown to increase gray matter in brain regions associated with emotion regulation, self-awareness, and executive functioning, such as the prefrontal cortex and the hippocampus (Hölzel et al., 2011). These brain changes are thought to contribute to improvements in emotional regulation and overall psychological well-being. A growing body of literature supports yoga as an effective complementary treatment for mental health issues. In a comprehensive review, Cramer et al. (2013) found that yoga was associated with improvements in symptoms of anxiety, depression, and PTSD. They noted, "Yoga interventions may offer beneficial effects for reducing symptoms of depression and anxiety, as well as improving overall well-being" (p. 168).

Various forms of meditation, particularly transcendental meditation and loving-kindness meditation, have also been found to reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety. For instance, a study by Reibel et al. (2001) found that participants who engaged in mindfulness meditation had significantly lower levels of anxiety and depression compared to those in a waitlist control group.

There is increasing interest in integrating these philosophies into hybrid models — combining psychotherapy with mindfulness, community support, and spiritual practices (**Koenig, 2012**). These models show promise in addressing global mental health challenges with cultural relevance. Public health policies are slowly adopting pluralistic mental health approaches. Educational curricula now include mindfulness programs (Eastern) and social-emotional

learning (Western), while some development organizations fund community mental health initiatives in Africa (WHO, 2013).

DISCUSSION

While Western philosophies have contributed richly to our understanding of happiness and mental health, they are not without limitations. The individualistic bias in many Western models can overlook cultural, relational, and ecological dimensions of well-being. For instance, Markus and Kitayama (1991) highlight differences between independent and interdependent self-construal suggesting that Western approaches may be ill-suited for collectivist societies. Eastern philosophies are often holistic and process-oriented, emphasizing being over doing. Western paradigms prioritize control, predictability, and quantification. These ontological and epistemological differences can complicate integrative therapy models (Monteiro, Musten, & Compson, 2015).

The Western commercialization of Eastern practices like yoga and meditation has raised ethical questions. Hyland (2017) cautions that “when mindfulness is stripped of its ethical and soteriological roots, it becomes vulnerable to exploitation” (p. 5). This detachment can erode the transformative and moral intent behind such practices. Adapting Eastern techniques into Western psychiatric frameworks risks oversimplification. For instance, Zen koans or Taoist paradoxes resist logical interpretation, which may be misread in a cognitive-behavioral framework. As **Kirmayer (2007)** explains, “culture shapes not only the experience of suffering but the idioms used to express and heal it” (p. 241).

African philosophical thought brings an often-overlooked but profound contribution to global mental health. Rooted in Ubuntu — “I am because we are” — African traditions emphasize communal identity, interdependence, and the spiritual interconnectedness of life. Mental distress is often seen not as an isolated disorder but a breakdown in social or ancestral harmony. Healing involves community rituals, elders’ guidance, and often spiritual cleansing. **Sodi and Bojuwoye (2011)** state, “In many African contexts, effective mental health interventions require integrating indigenous knowledge systems that consider spiritual and social dimensions of distress” (p. 32). The challenge, however, lies in the marginalization of African worldviews in mainstream psychological literature. Global mental health discourse tends to privilege Eurocentric norms, underestimating the richness of indigenous and non-Western practices. As **Patel et al. (2011)** argue, “Global mental health must be rooted in cultural competency, not just biomedical advancement” (p. 386).

A further challenge involves epistemic injustice, where the knowledge and experiences of non-Western communities are dismissed or undervalued. According to Bhatia and Ram (2009), this epistemological bias can lead to the systematic exclusion of indigenous voices in mental health policy and practice. Western-trained therapists may lack familiarity with culturally embedded practices such as trance healing, ancestor consultation, or spiritual possession, leading to misdiagnosis or inappropriate intervention.

Addressing these challenges requires a pluralistic and dialogic approach to mental health—one that respects cultural variation while striving for cross-cultural integration. Researchers like Gone (2010) argue for a “culture-as-resource” model, where cultural practices are not merely obstacles to be managed but are actively drawn upon for healing and resilience. This model encourages the inclusion of storytelling, rituals, music, and other indigenous forms of meaning-making in therapeutic contexts.

CONCLUSION

The integration of Eastern philosophies, particularly mindfulness, yoga, and meditation, with Western therapeutic practices has had a significant impact on global mental health care. Eastern

approaches emphasize mindfulness, emotional regulation, and interconnectedness, while Western practices focus on individual autonomy and the medicalization of mental health. By combining these philosophies, therapists can provide a more comprehensive, culturally sensitive, and holistic approach to mental health treatment, benefiting individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds.

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