CHAPTER

9

Creativity and Humor Across Cultures: Where Aha Meets Haha

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An Englishman, a Frenchman, a Spaniard, and a German are watching a street performer juggling. Noticing that the four gentlemen may have a poor view, the juggler asks, "Can you all see me OK?"

"Yes"
"Oui"
"Sí"
"Ja"
(Yes, we see ya.)

Creativity and humor are two "hardwired" characteristics of human beings (Darwin, 1872/1965; Maslow, 1943). A wide range of research has studied creativity and humor, both as isolated constructs and in relation to each other (e.g., Freud, 1928; Hennessey & Amabile, 2010; Martin, 2007). Evidence suggests that creativity and humor are closely connected: First, they are positively associated (Kellner & Benedek, 2017; Martin, 1998; Murdock & Ganim, 1993). Second, they share common antecedents (e.g., cognitive flexibility; Nijstad, De Dreu, Rietzschel, & Baas, 2010; O'Connell, 1976). Third, they produce similar

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-813802-1.00009-0

consequences (e.g., leadership emergence; Ensari, Riggio, Christian, & Carslaw, 2011; Stogdill, 1948). Integrating past research, this chapter advances our understanding of creativity and humor by deconstructing them from a cultural perspective.

To understand how creativity and humor vary across cultures, we first examine their key commonalities in Section 1 of this chapter. We propound that both creativity and humor (1) involve appropriate violations of norms and (2) require cognitive flexibility. Given that norms and cognitive styles differ across cultures, Section 2 details cultural differences in both creativity and humor. We systematically review how and why Eastern and Western cultures differ in both creativity and humor, and analyze how cultural differences in creativity often mirror cultural differences in humor.

Finally, Section 3 explores how *cross-cultural experiences* (e.g., studying abroad, intercultural social relationships) shape individuals' creativity and humor. Specifically, we summarize recent research on how cross-cultural experiences facilitate creativity, and hypothesize how these experiences may analogously facilitate humor.

SECTION 1: THE COMMONALITIES BETWEEN CREATIVITY AND HUMOR

Creativity is defined as the generation of ideas that are novel yet appropriate (Amabile, 1983). Humor is defined as an amusing social experience that "benignly" violates norms (Warren & McGraw, 2015, 2016). From these definitions, it is clear that both creativity and humor involve *appropriate* violations of norms, which are shared expectations about how things ought to be (Morris, Hong, Chiu, & Liu, 2015). For example, puns are creative and humorous because they violate linguistic rules (e.g., "Reading while sunbathing makes you *well-red*"; "I *relish* the fact that you've *mustard* the strength to *ketchup* to me"). Critically, both creativity and humor entail subjective social evaluation: whether a norm violation is "appropriate" is subjective and in the eyes of the beholder. Because a new idea or a joke may be perceived as inappropriate, both creativity and humor are risky.

Both Creativity and Humor Are Appropriate Violations of Norms

A novel idea is only creative if it is also perceived as appropriate (or useful, feasible, relevant; Amabile, 1983). A wildly original idea that "loses touch with reality" is likely to be deemed crazy rather than creative. To take one example, Vincent van Gogh, a paragon of artistic

creativity, only received critical acclaim after his death; in fact, he only managed to sell one out of over 1000 paintings during his lifetime because his art was perceived as too removed from the artistic norms of his era (www.vangoghgallery.com). Importantly, individuals have different thresholds for what is appropriate. Individuals who are more open to new experiences and more tolerant of ambiguity are more likely to view novel ideas as appropriate, and thus, are more receptive to them (Feist, 1998). For example, at the advent of the bikini, while many people criticized it as salacious and inappropriate, others embraced it as creative and fashionable (Alac, 2012).

In a similar vein, a humor attempt is funny only if it is perceived as appropriate (or benign; Warren & McGraw, 2015, 2016). Humor involves violations of communication, logic, or social norms, occurring in multifarious forms such as paradoxes (Lynch, 2002), illogicalities (Berlyne, 1972), surprises (Morreall, 1982), and sarcasm (Huang, Gino, & Galinsky, 2015). Such violations, however, are humorous only if they are appropriate. For example, rough-and-tumble play provokes laughter when it is perceived as friendly and benign, but not when it is perceived as aggressive and malevolent. Analogous to the subjective nature of creativity, a joke is funny only if it is appraised as benign by the perceiver, and different perceivers may react very differently to the same joke. For example, sexist jokes may be hilarious to some individuals, but offensive to others (Thomas & Esses, 2004). Similarly, children will laugh at their parents' silly facial expressions, exaggerated sound effects, and abnormal body movements, but may cry out of fear if the same behaviors are exhibited by a stranger.

Because both creativity and humor involve appropriate violations of norms, and because what is considered "appropriate" is subjective, expressing novel ideas and expressing humor are both risky. The notion that creativity is inherently risky is well captured by a famous remark from Oscar Wilde that "an idea that is not dangerous is unworthy of being called an idea at all." Giordano Bruno was burned at the stake for his unorthodox discovery that the Earth circles the Sun. For the same reason, Galileo Galilei was sentenced to house arrest until his death. Creative ideas are risky not only because it is uncertain how they will be received, but also because it is uncertain whether they will succeed (Dewett, 2004). Indeed, studies have found that although people desire creativity, they often reject creative ideas—particularly when motivated to reduce the uncertainty in their environment (Mueller, Melwani, & Goncalo, 2012). This ambivalence toward novel ideas may help explain why the failure rate of entrepreneurships—for which creative ideas are the "lifeblood" (Ward, 2004, p. 174)—is as high as 90% in contemporary society (Griffith, 2014).

Just like creativity, humor is risky, as it can fail in many ways (Bitterly, Brooks, & Schweitzer, 2017). The expresser must understand

the norm to correctly gauge what an audience may perceive as appropriately funny. On the one hand, if the humor is too mild (i.e., benign), then the audience may not even register it as a humor attempt or may consider it dull. On the other hand, if the humor pushes the envelope, it may upset the audience.

Given the risky nature of creativity and humor, it is unsurprising that individuals who are risk-averse tend to be low on both creativity and humor. For example, a study by Proyer and Ruch (2009) found that self-ratings of gelotophobia (or the fear of being laughed at) and creativity were negatively associated. Moreover, individuals tend to exhibit less creativity when primed with a risk-averse cognitive style than when primed with a risk-taking one (Friedman & Förster, 2001). Furthermore, Hodson and colleagues (2010) found that personal need for structure was negatively associated with the use of aggressive humor.

Both Creativity and Humor Require Cognitive Flexibility

Creativity and humor, in both their expression and interpretation, require cognitive flexibility. That is, creativity and humor require the individual to access and switch between different cognitive schemas, which are mental representations of knowledge or knowledge structures that guide human behaviors (Fiske & Taylor, 1984). Cognitive flexibility has long been identified as a prerequisite for creativity (Lu, Akinola, & Mason, 2017a, 2017b; Lu, Brockner, Vardi, & Weitz, 2017; Nijstad et al., 2010) and humor (O'Connell, 1976), as both require the juxtaposition of seemingly unrelated or conflicting cognitive schemas. The "Yes, Oui Sí Ja" joke in the opening example exemplifies the importance of cognitive flexibility. In order to understand this creative joke, one must juxtapose two seemingly unrelated cognitive schemas: (1) the semantic schema that "Yes", "Oui", "Sí", and "Ja" all represent an affirmative response in their respective languages, and (2) the phonetic schema that the combination of the four words sounds like "Yes, we see ya" in English.

Creative thinking is hardly possible without cognitive flexibility. Consider the famous Duncker's (1945) candle problem—a popular creativity measure—in which people are given a candle, a pack of matches, and a box of tacks, and challenged to affix the candle to the wall so that the candle burns properly without dripping wax (Fig. 9.1, left figure). The solution involves emptying the box of tacks and affixing it to the wall as a candle holder (Fig. 9.1, right figure). This puzzle is challenging because people often fixate on the tack box's typical function as a repository for tacks, and fail to realize that the tack box also has other functions. Another widely used creativity measure—the nine-dot puzzle

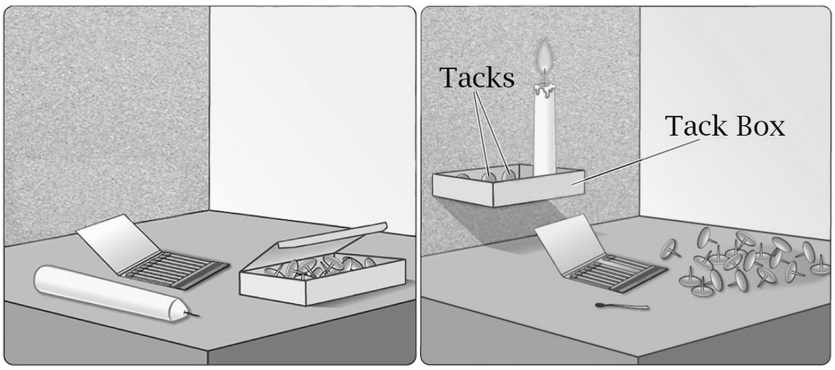

FIGURE 9.1 Duncker's candle problem. Left figure = puzzle, right figure = solution.

(Kershaw & Ohlsson, 2004; Lu et al., 2017a; Lu, Hafenbrack, et al., 2017)—asks people to draw four straight lines to connect all nine dots without lifting their pen from the paper (Fig. 9.2, left figure). The nine-dot puzzle is difficult because people tend to be blinded by a wrong assumption—that they can only draw lines *within* the nonexisting box made of the eight outer dots. In fact, the solution requires people to think flexibly and literally "outside of the box" (Fig. 9.2, right figure).

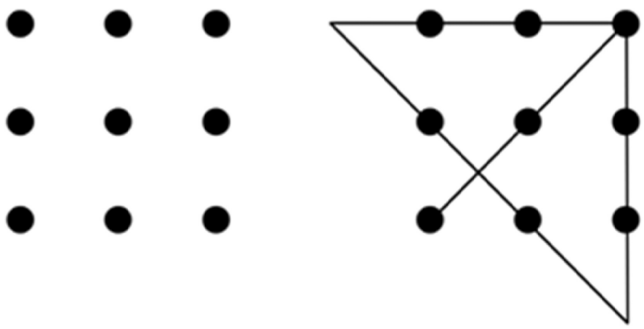

FIGURE 9.2 The nine-dot puzzle. Left = puzzle, right = solution.

Innovations often originate from flexibly combining elements from disparate contexts: The popular "ice-cream mooncake" was created by combining the Western invention ice cream and the Chinese traditional dessert mooncake. Whiteout (i.e., white correction fluid for covering writing errors) was invented when Bette Nesmith Graham realized that writing errors could be covered up in the same way that canvas painting errors are by white paint. Firearm accuracy increased fivefold when gunmakers, observing that an arrow flies straighter if its feathers make

it spin in flight, carved spirals inside gun barrels to rotate the bullets (Cabane & Pollack, 2017).

Cognitive flexibility also plays a key role in humor (Martin & Lefcourt, 1983). As O'Connell (1976) remarked, "the humorist is skilled in rapid perceptual-cognitive switches in frames of reference" (p. 327). Humor requires the resolution of seemingly incongruent cognitive schemas. The process of humor unfolds by placing the stimulus of humor in one mental context (i.e., frame of reference), and presenting the punchline in a different mental context (Martin, 2007). Take the following joke:

> "Is the doctor at home?" the patient asked in his bronchial whisper. "No," the doctor's young and pretty wife whispered in reply. "Come right in."

The first part of the joke activates a typical "doctor" script, where the patient has come to see the doctor for his bronchial throat, but the doctor is not there. Based on the common "doctor" script, the reader likely assumes that the wife would respond with something like "Please come tomorrow," and therefore is surprised when reading the incongruent response "Come right in." To understand the situation, the reader must resolve this incongruity by invoking the "lover" script from the cues that the wife is young and pretty, that she whispered, and that she invited the patient in *despite* the absence of her husband (Martin, 2007). Therefore, individuals will only find this joke funny if they can resolve the incongruity between the two cognitive scripts by flexibly switching from the doctor script to the lover script. Similarly, the joke "How does a train eat?—It goes chew chew" requires one to flexibly connect the cognitive schemas of trains, the sounds they make (choo choo), and eating (chew chew).

The necessity of cognitive flexibility for humor is further demonstrated by the finding that individuals who have difficulty in switching between cognitive schemas tend to have trouble in understanding humor (Ozonoff & Miller, 1996). Specifically, individuals with Asperger syndrome are unable to switch between cognitive schemas flexibly (Asperger, 1944) and thus unable to comprehend certain forms of humor (Samson & Hegenloh, 2010).

SECTION 2: CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN CREATIVITY AND HUMOR

Culture refers to a system of values, beliefs, and norms shared by a collection of interconnected individuals. The desires to be creative and humorous appear to be universal across different cultures (Erez & Nouri, 2010). However, given that both creativity and humor involve

appropriate violations of norms and require cognitive flexibility, and given that norms and cognitive styles vary across cultures, it is likely that creativity and humor differ systematically across cultures as well (Niu & Kaufman, 2013). In this section, we focus specifically on cultural differences between the East and the West.

Cultural Differences in Creativity

A common perception in the contemporary world is that Easterners are less creative than Westerners (Mahbubani, 2002; Ng, 2001; Wong & Niu, 2013). A tally of Nobel prizes—the epitome of scientific creativity—reveals that Eastern countries lag far behind Western countries, particularly in the domain of science (www.nobelprize.org). For example, Japan, a world economic giant for decades, pales in comparison with smaller and less populous Western countries like Switzerland. The Needham Question (or "*Li Yuese nanti*" in Chinese), a conundrum raised by the historian Joseph Needham, asks why China's scientific innovation, once so progressive, waned in the middle of the 15th century (*The Economist*, 2008). After all, the Four Great Inventions—compass, gunpowder, papermaking, and printing—appeared hundreds of years in China before they were adopted by the Europeans. The Needham Question has inspired scholars to publish thought-provoking bestsellers such as *Why Asians Are Less Creative Than Westerners* (Ng, 2001) and *Can Asians Think?* (Mahbubani, 2002), and prompted Asian policy makers to develop programs to elevate creativity (Morris & Leung, 2010).

However, it is noteworthy that "creativity" in these contexts often centers on the "novelty" dimension rather than the "usefulness" dimension. Importantly, whereas Western cultures tend to prioritize the novelty of ideas, Eastern cultures tend to prioritize the usefulness of ideas (Erez & Nouri, 2010). For example, although both Westerners and Chinese individuals regard "imagination" and "inventiveness" as components of creativity, Chinese individuals are also inclined to view "contribution to the progress of society" as an important component (Rudowicz & Hui, 1997).

Cultural psychologists have attributed these cultural differences to differences in cultural norms and cognitive styles (Hofstede, 2001; Morris & Leung, 2010; Nisbett & Miyamoto, 2005). Below we discuss four fundamental dimensions—Collectivism-Individualism, Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, and Regulatory Focus—that can shed light on cultural differences in creativity.

Collectivism-Individualism

Western and Eastern cultures differ on the collectivism-individualism dimension (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). In essence, individualism is a

worldview that centers on the self, whereas collectivism is a worldview that centers on the social (Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002). In Western cultures, an individualistic norm prevails and encourages uniqueness and independence; in Eastern cultures, collectivism dominates and emphasizes tradition and interdependence (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

Western cultures reward accomplishments that make individuals stand out, such as creative discoveries and individual talents. In contrast, Eastern cultures prefer to embed individuals within a larger group and discourage group members from standing out. For example, Easterners tend to associate creativity with characteristics that carry negative social connotations, including "self-centered," "rebellious," "arrogant," and "opinionated" (Chan & Chan, 1999). In one study, Nouri, Erez, Rockstuhl, and Ang (2008) randomly assigned Israelis and Singaporeans to complete an idea generation task, either alone or as part of a dyad. In the alone condition, creative performance was comparable between the two cultural groups. In the dyadic condition, however, Israeli participants generated significantly more novel ideas, whereas Singaporean participants elaborated more on the usefulness of their ideas. This cultural difference was possibly because the presence of a peer activated the individualistic norm predominant in Israeli culture (which favors novelty) but activated the collectivistic norm predominant in Singaporean culture (which favors usefulness; Erez & Nouri, 2010).

Power Distance

Western cultures tend to be lower on power distance, or "the extent to which inequality among persons in different positions of formal power is viewed as a natural (and even desirable) aspect of the social order" (Brockner et al., 2001, p. 302; Hofstede, 1980). Low power distance is indicative of the value of equality, which can empower low-power individuals to express their original ideas and deviate from the status quo (Erez & Nouri, 2010). Individuals in low power-distance cultures tend to focus their effort more on cognitive task involvement and less on impression management, which may be conducive to creativity (Yuan & Zhou, 2015). In contrast, Eastern cultures high on power distance socialize individuals to follow the extant norms and conform to a hierarchy where "everyone has a place." Low-power individuals in high power-distance cultures face greater risk of norm violation for two reasons. First, low-power individuals in these cultures have a narrower range of acceptable behaviors (Galinsky, 2016), which means that they are more prone to norm violation if they are not vigilant and careful. Second, when they step outside of that narrow range of acceptable behaviors, they face harsher sanctions. As a result, individuals in Eastern cultures

may be less likely to challenge conventional thinking and more likely to prioritize the appropriateness of ideas.

Uncertainty Avoidance

Eastern cultures are higher on the dimension of uncertainty avoidance, or "the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations" (Hofstede, 2001, p. 161). Research has found that on average, cultures low on uncertainty avoidance exhibit a higher level of risk-taking (Li, Griffin, Yue, & Zhao, 2013). Low uncertainty-avoidance Western cultures tend to be more risk-taking and more comfortable with unstructured situations and changing environments (Hofstede, 2001). In contrast, high uncertainty-avoidance Eastern cultures are more inclined to rely on plans, laws, and regulations that enforce existing ideas. Therefore, it is not surprising that Easterners are more apt to avoid novel ideas and instead prioritize ideas high on appropriateness and usefulness.

Regulatory Focus

People in different cultures differ in their regulatory focus, which refers to an individual's strategic orientation in how to regulate his or her behavior in pursuit of desired outcomes (Higgins, 1998). *Promotion focus* regulates one's cognition and behavior to attain positive outcomes, whereas *prevention focus* does so to avoid negative outcomes (Higgins, 1998). Promotion-focused individuals are generally more risk-taking and open to change, whereas prevention-focused individuals are more vigilant and stability-oriented (Crowe & Higgins, 1997; Hamstra, Bolderdijk, & Veldstra, 2011; Liberman, Idson, Camacho, & Higgins, 1999).

Research has shown that Westerners tend to be more promotion-focused and Easterners tend to be more prevention-focused (Lee, Aaker, & Gardner, 2000). These cultural differences in regulatory focus are likely related to cultural differences in cognitive styles. Compared to prevention-focused individuals, promotion-focused individuals are more likely to identify commonalities or abstract relationships among seemingly disparate entities, and thus more likely to integrate existing ideas to generate novel ones (Zhu & Meyers-Levy, 2007). In addition, promotion-focused individuals are apt to engage in more exploratory processing, which is also conducive to novel ideation (Friedman & Förster, 2001). For example, when presented with ambiguous stimuli, prevention-focused individuals tend to generate fewer hypotheses than promotion-focused individuals to vigilantly minimize the possibility of generating erroneous ones (Liberman, Molden, Idson, & Higgins, 2001).

Cultural Differences in Innovation

As highlighted earlier, Western cultures tend to favor the novelty dimension of creativity, whereas Eastern cultures tend to favor the usefulness or appropriateness dimension of creativity. This differential emphasis on novelty versus usefulness is also well observed in the innovation literature. Innovation is typically defined as the successful implementation of creative ideas (Hennessey & Amabile, 2010). By definition, innovations are deemed high on the dimension of usefulness (or appropriateness). Because innovations can differ in their novelty levels, there is a distinction between radical innovation and incremental innovation. A radical innovation (or breakthrough innovation) is one that is so novel that it disrupts routines by introducing a substantively different product, procedure, or service (Schumpeter, 1934). In contrast, an incremental innovation is one that builds upon a substantively similar, existing product, procedure, or service. For example, the invention of the digital camera was a radical innovation, as such a device had never existed before, but a camera upgrade from 10 to 20 megapixels would merely be an incremental innovation. Importantly, a radical innovation often catalyzes a whole system of incremental innovations (Dunlap-Hinkler, Kotabe, & Mudambi, 2010).

Due to the aforementioned cultural differences, radical innovations tend to be more common in the West, whereas incremental innovations tend to be more common in the East (Morris & Leung, 2010). For example, the camera was a radical innovation produced by Westerners, but it was incrementally refined by the Japanese (e.g., sensor upgrade, weight reduction). A multitude of incremental innovations—as opposed to radical innovations—spurred the rise of Japan as a technology powerhouse in the late 20th century. In fact, research has revealed that the average time for newer versions of a product to take off is much faster in Japan than in any other country, partly due to its emphasis on incremental but constant improvement (Chandrasekaran & Tellis, 2008). This cultural difference in preference for radical versus incremental innovation is also reflected in Western versus Eastern human resource practices. A wealth of evidence suggests that radical innovations often emerge from interdisciplinary collaborations (Blackwell, Wilson, Street, Boulton, & Knell, 2009), which are ubiquitous in the West. In contrast, Japanese organizations are known for their norm of lifetime employment (or "shushin koyo" in Japanese), which may be more conducive to incremental innovations that require long-term knowledge and expertise.

The novelty-versus-usefulness contrast is also reflected in how Western and Eastern organizations allocate resources in the classic tradeoff between radical "exploration" and incremental "exploitation"

(March, 1991). According to a cross-cultural inventor survey (Nagaoka & Walsh, 2009), research and development (R&D) projects for cultivating "seeds" are significantly more prevalent in the United States than in Japan (24% vs 8% of R&D), whereas R&D projects for improving existing businesses are significantly more prevalent in Japan than in the United States (66% vs 48% of R&D). Relatedly, inventions in the United States are significantly more often serendipitous by-products of an R&D project than in Japan (11% vs 3.4%; Nagaoka & Walsh, 2009). As a well-known example of serendipitous innovation, when a British research laboratory failed to find the hypothesized cardiovascular effects of Sildenafil, the researchers swiftly adapted its surprising side-effect into a remedy for impotence and patented it under the name of Viagra (Terrett, Bell, Brown, & Ellis, 1996).

The findings reviewed earlier reveal key cultural differences in creativity: The West prioritizes novelty, radical innovation, and exploration, whereas the East prioritizes appropriateness, incremental innovation, and exploitation of existing practices and products.

Cultural Differences in Humor

Along with the perception that Easterners are less creative than Westerners, there is also a common perception that Easterners are less humorous than Westerners (Jiang, Yue, & Lu, 2011; Liao, 2001). Surveys on American and Chinese students have found that both groups think that Americans are funnier than Chinese (Jiang et al., 2011). Complementing this finding, Canadians have been found to behave more humorously than their Chinese counterparts (Chen & Martin, 2007). As Judge John C. H. Wu wittily put, "whereas Westerners are seriously humorous, Chinese people are humorously serious" (as quoted in Kao, 1974, p. xviii).

Compared to the burgeoning literature on cross-cultural differences in creativity, relatively little research has investigated cultural differences in humor. However, given that humor—just like creativity—involves appropriate violations of norms which vary systematically across cultures, we propose that cultural differences in humor will mirror those differences in creativity. Consider two famous incidents (as cited in Yue, Jiang, Lu, & Hiranandani, 2016):

> On December 14, 2008, an Iraqi journalist chucked his shoe at U.S. President George W. Bush at a press conference. Bush brushed off the incident with humor, "if you want the facts, it's a size 10 shoe that he threw" (*BBC*, 2008). In a similar fashion, on February 2, 2009, a German student threw a shoe at Chinese Premier, Wen Jiabao, during his speech at Cambridge University. In response, Premier Wen stated solemnly, "this despicable behavior cannot stand in the way of friendship between China and the U.K." (*The Telegraph*, 2009).

Two similar incidents, two very different reactions. These disparate reactions might reflect profound cultural differences in humor. Westerners tend to view humor as a highly positive personality trait that distinguishes oneself (Yue et al., 2016). As in the case of Bush, humorous individuals are admired as charismatic and creative (Ziv, 1984). In contrast, humor is generally ranked low among elements of the ideal East Asian personality (Yue, 2010).

Below we discuss how two cultural dimensions that matter for creativity—Collectivism-Individualism and Power Distance—can also shed light on cultural differences in humor.

Collectivism-Individualism

As in the case of creativity, cultural differences in collectivism-individualism can help to explain the different prioritization of humor. Eastern cultures high on collectivism emphasize conformity to the group, formality, and appropriateness—as demonstrated by the stern response of Premier Wen. Thus, Easterners tend to hold a more negative attitude toward humor and view jokers as "nails that stick up." In Chinese, there is a phrase "hua zhong qu chong" that literally lambastes individuals who try to stand out by means of humor. In one study, Chen, Rubin, and Sun (1992) found that Canadian children viewed humor as an attribute of "sociability-leadership," but Chinese children regarded humor as indicative of "aggression-disruption." In another study, Jiang et al. (2011) revealed that compared to American students, Chinese students were more likely to associate humor with unpleasant adjectives and seriousness with pleasant adjectives in the Implicit Association Test (IAT). As another telling example that highlights the role of collectivism-individualism, a multinational analysis of TV ads found that the number of key individuals in humorous ads was higher in collectivistic cultures (Korea and Thailand) than in individualistic cultures (Germany and the United States; Alden, Hoyer, & Lee, 1993). Moreover, people in individualistic cultures are more likely to use self-enhancing humor, whereas people in collectivistic cultures are more likely to use self-deprecating humor (Chen & Martin, 2007).

Power Distance

Cultural differences in power distance may also help to explain cultural differences in humor. As discussed earlier, low-power individuals in high power-distance cultures face both a narrower range of acceptable behaviors and greater punishment when they step outside of that acceptable range (Galinsky, 2016). As a result, attempting to be funny carries greater risk in high power-distance cultures. Confucianism—the dominant philosophy in East Asia that underlies its

high power-distance culture—asserts that the stability of society is based on five *unequal* relationships between individuals: ruler/subject, father/son, older brother/younger brother, husband/wife, and older friend/younger friend (Hofstede & Bond, 1988). In other words, social formality and proper decorum are critical (Yao, 2000). As pointed out by Kao (1974), "Confucianism, with its precept of the moral man, has molded the serious thoughts and habits of the Chinese gentleman for all time" (p. 3).

To command respect and ensure that they will be taken seriously, Eastern leaders tend to refrain from cracking jokes with their subordinates. At the same time, Eastern subordinates are less inclined to display humor in front of their leaders for fear of offending them. In contrast, in low power-distance Western cultures, the skilled use of humor signals confidence and competence, which in turn can enhance status (Bitterly et al., 2017). In a survey of nearly 100 Western CEOs, humor was ranked above honesty and loyalty as their strongest personality asset (Center for Creative Leadership, 2014). In another study on Westerners (Decker, 1987), supervisors who were rated as more humorous by their subordinates were also rated as more intelligent and effective.

SECTION 3: THE EFFECTS OF CROSS-CULTURAL EXPERIENCES ON CREATIVITY AND HUMOR

This chapter's final section examines how cross-cultural experiences shape individuals' creativity and humor. Recent research has identified cross-cultural experiences as an important driver of creativity. Although research has not explored how cross-cultural experiences affect individuals' humor, we offer some initial hypotheses in light of the aforementioned commonalities between creativity and humor.

The Effects of Cross-Cultural Experiences on Creativity

Due to the rise of globalization, cross-cultural experiences, such as working abroad and intercultural dating, are increasingly common. One well-established empirical finding is that cross-cultural experiences can increase individuals' creativity (Godart, Maddux, Shipilov, & Galinsky, 2015; Hellmanzik, 2013; Lu, Hafenbrack, et al., 2017; Maddux & Galinsky, 2009). For instance, an archival study of the world's top fashion houses found that the foreign work experiences of fashion directors positively predicted the creativity of their firms' fashion lines (Godart et al., 2015). In another study, Lu, Hafenbrack, and colleagues (2017) found that close intercultural romantic relationships and friendships are

conducive to individuals' creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship. As further evidence, studies have found that bicultural individuals who have integrated both cultures into their identity tend to exhibit higher creative performance than their mono-cultural counterparts (Cheng, Sanchez-Burks, & Lee, 2008; Tadmor, Galinsky, & Maddux, 2012). This is because such biculturals can simultaneously activate both cultural identities and integrate the cognitive schemas of both cultures (Cheng et al., 2008).

Cross-cultural experiences can enhance creativity by shaping both the *content* and the *processes* of creative cognition (Leung, Maddux, Galinsky, & Chiu, 2008; Lu, Hafenbrack, et al., 2017). In terms of the *content* of creative cognition, cross-cultural experiences afford opportunities for individuals to learn about diverse ideas from different cultures. Importantly, these ideas tend to be substantively different from the ideas that individuals acquire within their home countries (Ritter et al., 2012). The more cross-cultural experiences someone has, the more diverse "dots" he or she will possess to generate novel and useful insights (Maddux, Adam, & Galinsky, 2010). For example, after visiting Japan many times and studying Japanese Zen Buddhism intensely, Steve Jobs instilled the "simplicity" philosophy of Zen Buddhism into Apple's design mantra, fueling Apple's success (Isaacson, 2011).

Regarding the *processes* of creative cognition, cross-cultural experiences can increase cognitive flexibility (Lu, Quoidbach, et al., 2017). Cross-cultural experiences push individuals outside their realm of normal cognitive patterns (i.e., associative context), leading them to think more flexibly and creatively (Ritter et al., 2012). When people are immersed in their home culture, their creativity tends to be constrained by its conventions and routines. By contrast, when individuals are exposed to a foreign culture, they are prompted to scrutinize the different underlying assumptions and schemas in both cultures. For instance, an amusing commercial captures the miscommunication between a British guest and a Chinese host due to their cultural differences (HSBC "Eels" Ad): The Brit keeps finishing all the food on his plate because British culture views leaving food on one's plate as a disapproval of the meal. But each time the Brit empties his plate, the Chinese host keeps refilling it with bigger portions, because in Chinese culture, leaving food on one's plate is a signal of gratitude that one has been well fed (Seligman, 1999). Cross-cultural experiences enable individuals to recognize that different cultural scripts may underlie the same surface behavior and, as a result, to approach future situations with greater cognitive flexibility (Lu, Hafenbrack, et al., 2017; Tadmor et al., 2012). Indeed, research has found that individuals with more cross-cultural experiences tend to be more receptive to ideas that originated from foreign cultures (Leung & Chiu, 2010).

The Hypothesized Effects of Cross-Cultural Experiences on Humor

Although there is little existing empirical research on this topic, we hypothesize that cross-cultural experiences may similarly have a positive effect on a person's sense of humor. This hypothesis is rooted in the well-established finding that cross-cultural experiences increase cognitive flexibility, which is necessary for humor. Moreover, since humor involves appropriate violations of norms, cross-cultural experiences should help attune people to cultural differences in norms and what would constitute an appropriate norm violation. Thus, we propose that cross-cultural experiences will facilitate humor comprehension, humor usage, and humor production.

The old adage "Humor doesn't travel" captures the idea that humor comprehension is difficult for cultural outsiders. As a simple example, an English beginner would not be able to understand why "Reading while sunbathing makes you *well-red*" is a funny pun. Similarly, a person would not be able to appreciate our opening "Yes, Oui Sí Ja" joke if he or she did not comprehend the phonetic English equivalents of the four words (Yes, we see ya). Through cultural learning—or the acquisition of understanding about the assumptions, beliefs, customs, norms, values, or language of another culture (Adam, Obodaru, Lu, Maddux, & Galinsky, 2018; Lu, Hafenbrack, et al., 2017; Maddux et al., 2010)—individuals can expand their repertoire of humor elements. As a result, they may be able to better relate when others tell a joke—even when the joke is in their mother tongues.

In terms of humor usage, because humor involves appropriate violations of norms, one needs to be familiar with cultural norms to know *when* it is appropriate to use *which kind of* humor with *whom*. For example, in China, it is common to tell a friend or a family member that he or she has become fatter after a relaxing vacation because such comment is considered humorously intimate and caring (or "xin kuan ti pan" in Chinese). However, this behavior might be offensive to many Westerners.

In terms of humor production, individuals who have absorbed more dots from other cultures will be more likely to create humorous content by connecting those dots. For example, after a dinner toast, a well-traveled polyglot might make a joke about the sound "chin-chin," which means "cheers" in French and Italian, "kiss" in Chinese, and "penis" in Japanese.

Taken together, there is a strong rationale to hypothesize that cross-cultural experiences can elevate individuals' humor comprehension, humor usage, and humor production. In other words, humor should travel as long as the individuals themselves are well traveled. This hypothesis awaits future investigation.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have deconstructed creativity and humor from a *cultural* perspective. In Section 1, we revealed several key commonalities between creativity and humor: (1) both involve *appropriate* violations of norms; thus, both are risky because whether something is appropriately creative or humorous is in the eyes of the beholder, and (2) both require cognitive flexibility.

In Section 2, we then reviewed how creativity and humor systematically differ between the East and the West. To demystify the common perception that Easterners are less creative and less humorous than Westerners, we analyzed how cultural differences in collectivism-individualism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and regulatory focus can translate into cultural differences in creativity and humor. Furthermore, in light of the commonalities between creativity and humor, we explored how cultural differences in creativity often *mirror* cultural differences in humor.

In Section 3, we discussed how *cross-cultural experiences* (e.g., studying abroad, intercultural social relationships) can enhance individuals' creativity and humor. We first summarized recent research on how cross-cultural experiences cultivate creativity by shaping both the content and the processes of creative cognition. Considering the commonalities between creativity and humor, we then formulated testable hypotheses that cross-cultural experiences can also promote humor comprehension, humor usage, and humor production.

By analyzing the close links between creativity and humor, we have demonstrated how cultural differences can produce marked differences in both creativity and humor between the East and the West. Whether it is the land of the dragon or the land of the bald eagle, Aha truly meets Haha across the globe.

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