

# Strength Versus Compassion: Cultural Disparities in Personal Growth

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## Introduction

Collectivist and Individualistic cultures have differing values and ideas about the self.

- Focusing on your inner feelings is perceived as a virtue in individualistic cultures, and as selfish and immature in collectivist cultures (Suh, Diener, Oishi, & Triandis, 1998).

Collectivist cultures define self in relation to others – success is maintaining harmony with others and following social norms.

Individualistic cultures define self as individual internal attributes that separate self from others – success is differentiating yourself from others and accepting inner goals/emotion.

Posttraumatic growth: Positive psychological changes resulting from a highly stressful situation (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996)

## Do these cultural differences translate to differences in perceptions of personal growth?

- Personal growth representative of changes experienced as posttraumatic growth

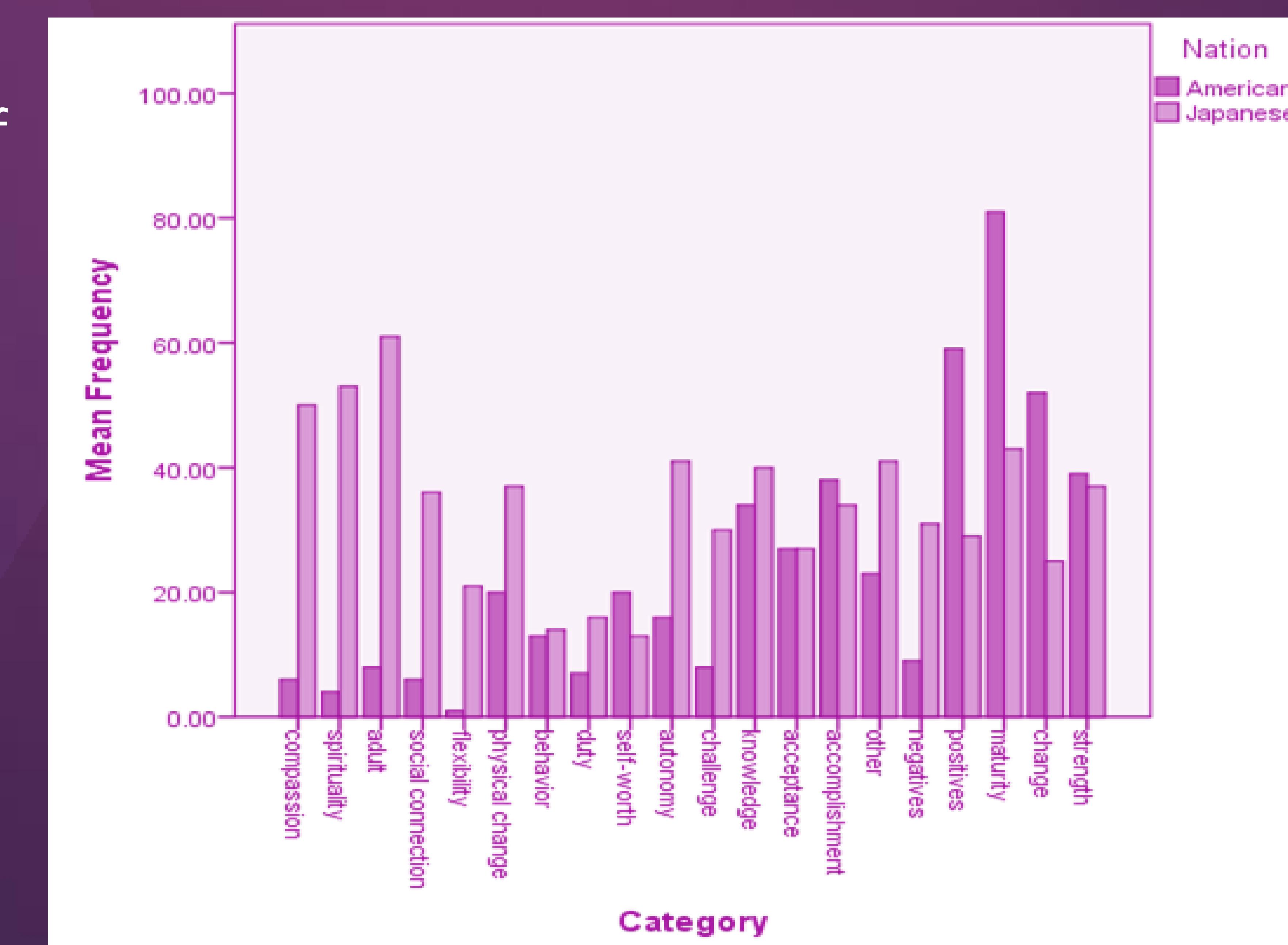
## Method

- 2 independent raters condensed 443 words into 20 categories
- Five independent raters re-classified the original words into the 20 categories (Cronbach's Alpha = .79)
- A chi-square test was run comparing category by Nation

	Japanese	American
Participants	283	171
Gender	68.1% female	73.1% female
Age	16.38 (SD = .88)	15.75 (SD = 1.13)

## Results

- Chi-Squared (19) = 209.32,  $p < .001$
- Japanese were more likely to generate:
  - Compassion (6.08 odds)
  - Spirituality (9.89 odds)
  - Adult (5.82 odds)
  - Flexibility (16.0 odds)
- Americans were more likely to generate:
  - Change (3.25 odds)
  - Positives (3.21 odds)
  - Maturity (3.07 odds)
  - Strength (1.56 odds)



## Discussion

- Japanese adolescents produced significantly more words relating to interpersonal relationships and respect for elders
- Collectivist cultures focus on maintaining harmony between the self and others – perception of personal growth is related to factors that optimize interpersonal relationships
- American adolescents produced significantly more words relating to strength, positive changes, and maturing
- Individualistic cultures idealize personal differences and individuality – growth is individual strength and changes
- American thinking tends to be binary, things are either “positive” or “negative”, whereas Japan focuses more on maintaining balance between positives and negatives (Lu, Gilmour, & Kao, 2001)
- Limitations: Only included participants with 3 words indicating personal growth- strong understanding of growth could result in fewer words needed to describe
- Future Directions: Expand to multiple collectivist and individualistic cultures

## References

Lu, L., Gilmour, R., Kao, S.-F. (2001). Cultural values and happiness: An East-West dialogue. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 141, 477-493.

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