16.7: A Final Thought

One of the most widely recognized cultural distinctions in psychology today is the difference between individualistic, Western cultures and collectivistic, Eastern cultures. In Western societies, such as the United States of America, the individual not only has the freedom to seek purely personal advancement, it is expected of them. In contrast, the individual in countries such as China is expected to subordinate their own desires and ambitions for the good of the family and their community. With regard to a broad view of the African personality, we find a middle ground. There is significant individual freedom, but individuals are expected to serve their family and community. As a result, the individual also benefits from the overall success of the family and community. Thus, there is an ongoing interplay between the value of the individual and the values of family and community.

When this system works to its best potential, the results are people who flourish and can be proud of themselves. In the words of Dr. J. A. Sofola:

…the philosophy, the world-view, values and thought-patterns that form the ingredients or the building-blocks of the African Personality are live-and-let-live; the emphasis on wholesome human relations; the belief of the universality of man and communality of the people in the community; the historic sense of the unity of the human society as consisting of the ancestors, the living and the future generations yet unborn; spiritual attitude to life and attachment to communal life with communal responsibilities; a keen sense of rhythm; the conception of man as one roaming spirit in the chain of spirits in the universe…This is the personality which in its expression of an inward peace and stillness maintains an external composure and gait, head and chin raised high, and with deliberate, calculated dignified steps proclaims to the world: “Black is beautiful” and “I am black and proud of being so.” (pp. 143-144; Sofola, 1973)