Ethnic Variation in Emotion Regulation: Do Cultural Differences End Where Psychopathology Begins?

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Abstract

Emotion regulation (ER) via cognitive reappraisal has been shown to be superior to the use of expressive suppression regarding several aspects of mental well-being. However, a cultural perspective suggests, that the consequences of emotional suppression may be moderated by cultural values. In order to examine whether this also applies to clinical samples, we investigated healthy and depressed German women and healthy and depressed Turkish immigrants living in Germany. Groups were compared in terms of frequency of ER strategies (cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression) and with which different aspects of mental well-being the same are associated. Healthy Turkish immigrants exhibited a greater ER balance (frequent use of suppression plus frequent use of reappraisal), which was associated with more positive outcomes of expressive suppression in Turkish than in German women. None of these differences were found in patient samples, both of which showed a greater use of emotional suppression than cognitive reappraisal. Results suggest that the cultural moderation of the link between emotional suppression and well-being is associated with a greater ER balance in healthy Turkish individuals. Depressed Turkish patients may not profit from suppression due to their more rigid use of it.