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ETHNIC VARIATION IN EMOTION REGULATION: DO CULTURAL DIFFERENCES END WHERE PSYCHOPATHOLOGY BEGINS?

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Introduction: Emotion regulation (ER) via cognitive reappraisal (CR) has been shown to be superior to the use of expressive suppression (ES) in terms of several aspects of mental well-being. However, a cultural perspective suggests that the consequences of ES may be moderated by cultural values (Western/individualistic vs. Eastern/collectivistic values).

Objective: To test this hypothesis that ES may be associated with better outcomes in collectivistic cultures (e.g. Turkey) than in individualistic cultures (e.g. Germany) not only in healthy individuals but also in patients with mental disorders.

Aim: This study aims to gather knowledge to what extent associations of ER strategies and mental health are universal or rather culturally specific.

Methods: We investigated healthy (n=30) and depressed (n=30) German women and healthy (n=30) and depressed (n=30) Turkish immigrants living in Germany. Groups were compared in terms of frequency of ER strategies (CR and ES) and their consequences for different aspects of mental well-being.

Results: Healthy Turkish immigrants exhibited a greater ER flexibility (frequent use of ES plus frequent use of CR) what was associated with more positive outcomes of ES in Turkish than in German women. None of these differences were found between patient samples, both of which showed a greater use of ES than CR.

Conclusions: Results suggest that cultural moderation of ES consequences are associated with a greater ER flexibility in healthy Turkish individuals. Depressed Turkish patients may not profit from ES due to their more rigid use of ES.