

INFLUENCE OF CULTURAL VALUES ON EMOTION REGULATION AND WELL-BEING: A STUDY OF THAI UNIVERSITY STUDENTS*

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Abstract: Several strategies can be employed in face of an event that requires one to change the resulting emotion. It was suggested that the choice of a strategy is influenced by one's culture and may also influence one's well-being (Matsumoto, 2007). Findings demonstrate that in response to emotional eliciting event individuals of Asian cultures do not exhibit emotion that may disrupt the status-quo. This suppression of emotion was found to be detrimental to one's well-being. Poles apart, when facing a similar event, individuals of American and European cultures change the way they think about the event. This reappraisal of the event was found to be beneficial to one's well-being (Gross & John, 2003). In line with recent studies that suggest suppression may not be detrimental to well-being when it takes place in a culture where it is the norm, the purpose of the current study was to examine the influence of Thai cultural values on the choice of an emotion regulation strategy and well-being. Lack of instruments that allow the measurement of these variables for the Thai population, a preliminary study that consisted of a translation and validation of suitable instruments was performed. Results demonstrate the specific characteristics of Thai cultural values and cognitive emotion regulation strategies. While suppression was found to have a detrimental influence on well-being it was relatively minor, therefore suggesting that cultural norms do in fact play a role in this process.

Keywords: Cultural Values, Emotion Regulation, Well-Being

Introduction

Societies can be differentiated from each other along a number of cultural dimensions (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1989). One such differentiation is the manner in which one relates to others in the society. This pattern of relationship between the individual and the collective (such as a family group, work group, tribal group, etc.) is termed 'collectivism versus individualism' (Hofstede, 1980; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). A basic assumption of individualism is that the individual is independent from others (Oyserman,

Coon, & Kimmelmeier, 2002). Rights are assumed to be more important than duties, self-fulfillment and personal autonomy are desired, and the concern is for oneself and the immediate family (Hofstede, 1980). This worldview puts the individual in the center in terms of personal control, personal uniqueness, and personal goals (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1995). A basic assumption of collectivism is that groups bind and mutually obligate individuals (Oyserman, Coon, & Kimmelmeier, 2002). Social units with common fate, common values, and common goals are in the center, and the individual may be seen as a component of these units (Triandis, 1995). This worldview focuses on a social way of being and an orientation towards the group one belongs to.

It was suggested that culture provides a meaning and information system with regards to the expected norms and behaviors by way of developing *cultural values*, such as the dimension of collectivism versus individualism (Matsumoto, 2007). This cultural value, which received added attention in early studies, was conceptualized as a continuum and operationalized by comparing European American culture as representing one pole and Asian culture as representing the opposite pole (Hofstede, 1980, Hui, 1988). Accordingly, Asian cultures were characterized as collectivistic and in order to comply with the above mentioned social demands its individuals were said to try and control their emotion in order to exhibit the required emotional response (Matsumoto, et al., 2008). This ability to modify emotion or control its expression in order to achieve a desired outcome is known as *emotion regulation*. Gross (2007) proposed a process model of emotion regulation that has been widely accepted as one of the foundations for the theoretical framework describing cultural values influence on emotion regulation. The model identifies five stages (originally termed categories) of emotion regulation creating an emotion regulation sequence: (a) Situation selection, referring to taking action to achieve a desirable emotion; (b) Situation modification, referring to efforts to modify the situation in order to change emotion; (c) Attention deployment, referring to paying attention to a certain aspect of the situation in order to change emotion; (d) Cognitive change, referring to changing one's appraisal of the situation in order to change emotion; and (e) Response modulation, referring to decreasing the emotion expressive behavior.

The cognitive change and response modulation stages received added attention and were each

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