

ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION: Chinese Individuals' Emotions In Psychotherapy: A Qualitative Study

STUDENT: Yuye Zhang

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COLLEGE: College of Health

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Culture can affect how people experience, interpret, and regulate emotions. Many psychotherapists also view emotion as a critical component in treatment. However, the research on how culture impacts the therapeutic processes is lacking. Chinese culture is a relevant culture to investigate as it differs from Western culture which has been the focus of most previous research on the role of emotion in therapy. In the current study, fifteen experienced psychotherapists in China participated in qualitative interviews and discussed their observations on patterns of Chinese adult clients' expression of emotions, common difficulties they encountered when working with Chinese adult clients' emotions, and strategies in their work with their clients' emotions. A hybrid approach of inductive and deductive thematic analysis was used, and thirteen themes (e.g., *Social Norms and Values on Emotion*; *Emotion Expression* and *Localization of Western Theories to Address Emotions in Counseling*) emerged from the coding process that involved a team of four female undergraduate coders at a university in China. The findings supported some prior theories that posit a holistic view of well-being in Chinese culture and the importance of moderation in emotion regulation among Chinese people. The findings also revealed some cultural factors related to the norms and values about emotions in Chinese

society (e.g., historical trauma; intergenerational transmission of inhibitory tendency). As a result of these cultural factors, every participant discussed Chinese adult clients restricted or no expression of emotion in their everyday life as well as in counseling. This restriction affected the participants' approaches to working with Chinese adult clients' emotions. For example, many interviewees stressed the importance of eliciting and focusing on their clients' emotions in the moment. Findings from this study have implications for the practice of counseling with Chinese individuals, the training of Chinese clinicians, and research on emotion and psychotherapy.

Keywords: emotion, culture, counseling, psychotherapy, China