

Abstract

Somatization, the tendency to express emotional distress in somatic rather than psychological form, was considered to be a phenomenon specific to the Chinese population. This study aimed at investigating whether Chinese incline to employ a body mode to communicate emotion in general. Six hundred and twenty one university students from Hong Kong, Beijing and the United States (U.S.) responded to an open-ended questionnaire comprising of six interpersonal scenarios. Their emotional responses toward self and the protagonist were separated into somatic/body and psychological categories for coding independently. Results indicated that Chinese students did not employ more body terms in emotion expression compared to American students. However, Chinese demonstrated significant difference from Americans in psychological scoring, which shed light into cultural differences on the conceptualization of relationships. The issue of hierarchy in interpersonal relationships and the impact on emotional expression were discussed cross-culturally.