

Brooding Russians: Less distressed than Americans

Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy portrayed Russians as a brooding, complicated people, and ethnographers have confirmed that Russians tend to focus on dark feelings and memories more than Westerners do. But a new University of Michigan study finds that even though Russians tend to brood, they are less likely than Americans to feel as depressed as a result.

"Among Westerners, focusing on one's negative feelings tends to impair well-being, but among Russians, that is not the case," said U-M researcher Igor Grossmann, who co-authored a study to be published in the August issue of *Psychological Science*, with Ethan Kross, a faculty associate at the U-M Institute for Social Research and an assistant professor of psychology.

"Russians focus more on their negative feelings than Americans do, but they spontaneously distance themselves from their emotions to a greater extent than Americans, who tend to immerse themselves in their recalled experiences."

Grossmann, a doctoral candidate in psychology, is a native of Ukraine. He is the winner of the 2010 Daniel Katz Dissertation Fellowship in Psychology, supported by ISR.

The article reports on the outcomes of two separate studies conducted with funding from the National Institute of Mental Health. In one study, the researchers examined the prevalence of self-reflection and depression among 85 U.S. students and 83 Russian students. Participants completed tests designed to measure their levels of brooding, and their level of depressive symptoms. The researchers found that Russians were more likely to brood, but that doing so was associated with fewer depressive symptoms than the Americans.

In the second study, 86 U.S. and 76 Russian students were asked to recall and analyze their "deepest thoughts and feelings" about a recent unpleasant interpersonal experience. The researchers measured their level of distress after this exercise. Then participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they adopted a self-immersed perspective (seeing the event replay through their own eyes as if they were right there) versus a self-distanced perspective (watching the event unfold as an observer, in which they could see themselves from afar) while analyzing their feelings.

Compared to the Americans, the Russians showed less distress after recalling the experience, and were less likely to blame the other person in their analysis of the experience. Importantly, Russians also indicated that they were more likely than Americans to spontaneously distance themselves from their experience while analyzing their feelings. And this tendency to self-distance was linked with lower levels of distress and blame.

According to Grossmann, the overall findings of both studies suggest that culture modulates the emotional and cognitive consequences of reflecting over negative experiences. The findings also suggest why this is the case---some groups of people may spontaneously distance themselves more when analyzing negative experiences than do other groups.

"These findings add to a growing body of research demonstrating that it's possible for people to reflect on negative experiences either adaptively or maladaptively," Grossmann said.

More information: Step back to move forward emotionally, study suggests - <http://www.physorg.com/news141392515.html>

Provided by University of Michigan

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