



People in more individualist cultures are more motivated to make others feel better

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In many Western cultures, trying to make others feel better is considered critical for psychological health and social relationships. However, given that people think about emotions and relationships differently across cultures, the desirability, means, and benefits of making others feel better may also vary by culture. In two multicountry survey studies (Study 1: $N = 3,154$, 13 countries; Study 2: $N = 3,503$, 17 countries) and in a daily diary study (Study 3: $N = 243$, 2 countries), we assessed motivation and strategies used for influencing others' and one's own emotions. To test whether potential cross-cultural differences in motivation and strategies in emotion regulation are unique to social interactions, we compared cultural differences in making others feel better to making oneself feel better. Across studies, cultural differences in influencing others' emotions were greater than those in influencing one's own emotions. Members of more individualist (vs. collectivist) cultures were more motivated to make others (but not themselves) feel better, were more likely to express care and less likely to encourage others to suppress their emotions or to ruminate. These patterns, in turn, were linked to an index of relationship closeness in an individualist (but not a collectivist) culture. These findings suggest that helping others feel better may not be equally desirable across cultures.

emotion regulation | culture | motivation | relationships | interpersonal emotion regulation

When someone close to you is distressed, how likely are you to try to decrease their unpleasant emotions? Interpersonal emotion regulation is the process by which one person tries to influence the emotions of another (1). This process is triggered and shaped by emotion regulation goals—namely, the direction in which people want to influence the emotions of others (2, 3). In Western cultures, the most common emotion regulation goal is to make people feel better, by decreasing their unpleasant emotions (4, 5). In these cultures, especially when people try to make others feel better, interpersonal emotion regulation can help others deal with emotional distress (6, 7) and strengthen social bonds (8). These patterns, however, do not necessarily extend beyond Western cultures (9). Given that people differ across cultures in how they think about emotions and about social relationships (10, 11), how people want to influence the emotions of others and the strategies they use to do so may also vary across cultures. Our investigation, therefore, tested whether people differ across cultures in how much they want to influence the unpleasant emotions of others, the strategies used to do so, and their social implications. To understand whether potential cultural differences are specific to the interpersonal context, we compared the regulation of others' emotions (i.e., interpersonal emotion regulation) to the regulation of one's own emotions (i.e., intrapersonal emotion regulation).

The Motivation to Decrease Unpleasant Emotions Might Vary across Cultures

We sought to test whether the desire to influence the unpleasant emotions of others differs across cultures. How motivated people are to influence the emotions of others, in turn, may depend on their reasons for doing so. Prior research has shown that people want to influence emotions for various reasons (12). Some of these reasons are *hedonic*—namely, to decrease immediate pain or increase immediate pleasure. Other reasons are *instrumental*—namely, to gain benefits other than immediate pleasure or pain. These could include

Significance

In many Western cultures, it is assumed that trying to make others feel better is desirable and beneficial, but is this true across cultures? We suggest that the motivation, means, and benefits of trying to make others feel better vary across cultures. People in more individualist cultures were more motivated to make others feel better and more likely to use strategies that were consistent with this motivation. Being motivated to make others feel better and using emotion regulation strategies accordingly were linked to closer relationships with romantic partners in more individualist cultures. Cultural differences were greater in regulating others' emotions than one's own. These findings indicate that trying to make others feel better may not be equally desirable across cultures.

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facilitating desired or appropriate behaviors, self-growth, increasing harmony and balance, improving social connections, or enhancing cognitive processes, knowledge, or meaning (12). For example, people may want to decrease unpleasant emotions (i.e., make themselves or others feel better) to feel less immediate pain (i.e., for hedonic reasons) or to make a more positive social impression (i.e., for instrumental reasons). How people want to influence their own and others' unpleasant emotions, therefore, may depend on hedonic and instrumental reasons.

Hedonic reasons are considered largely consistent across cultures, partly because mechanisms of pleasure and pain may be biologically based and potentially universal (e.g., ref. 13). For instance, unpleasant emotions may be more painful than pleasant emotions across cultures (14). In contrast, instrumental reasons differ greatly by culture, because what is considered desirable, appropriate, or valued varies across cultural contexts (14–17). For instance, unpleasant emotions are considered less valuable in some cultures than in others (11, 18).

Cultures higher in individualism (vs. collectivism) tend to prioritize the well-being of the individual over the well-being of the group, when the two are in conflict (19, 20). Such cultures typically foster viewing the self as stable and independent and prioritize personal success and happiness (21). In such cultures, unpleasant emotions are considered a sign of personal weakness and failure in achieving goals (22). In cultures higher in individualism, therefore, people consider unpleasant emotions as less conducive to culturally salient instrumental goals (22, 23).

In contrast, cultures higher in collectivism (vs. individualism) tend to prioritize the well-being of the group over the well-being of the individual (19, 20). Such cultures typically foster viewing the self as flexible and interdependent and prioritize social connections and self-improvement (21). In such cultures, unpleasant emotions are not necessarily considered a sign of failure in achieving goals, and are sometimes assumed to carry instrumental benefits (18). For example, cultures higher in collectivism may foster beliefs that unpleasant emotions help people work harder to achieve their goals, understand what they did wrong, solve problems that caused their emotions, or live fuller lives (24–26). Cultures higher in collectivism may also foster beliefs that unpleasant emotions bring people together and increase harmony and balance (25). In cultures higher in collectivism, therefore, people may consider unpleasant emotions as more conducive to culturally salient instrumental goals (18, 26–28).

If people regulate emotions for purely hedonic reasons, people across cultures should be equally motivated to decrease unpleasant emotions to decrease pain. However, because people also regulate emotions for instrumental reasons, and such reasons vary across cultures, people may differ in how much they want to decrease unpleasant emotions, depending on the perceived instrumental value of unpleasant emotions in their culture (18, 22). Given that people in more individualist (vs. collectivist) cultures consider unpleasant emotions to be less instrumental, they may be more motivated to decrease them.

Cultural Differences in Regulating Emotions May Be Stronger When Regulating Others' Emotions than One's Own

People try to influence emotions for both hedonic and instrumental reasons (4, 29–32). However, there are reasons to assume people give more weight to instrumental than hedonic reasons when influencing others' emotions (vs. one's own). Studies show that people give more weight to instrumental than hedonic reasons when influencing others' behavior than when influencing their

own behavior (33). For example, people are likely to encourage others to eat healthy but less tasty food, which is potentially more instrumental but less pleasant. Meanwhile, people are more likely to eat unhealthy but more tasty food themselves, which is less instrumental but more pleasant (34). We speculated that this pattern may extend from influencing others' behaviors to influencing others' emotions. Consistent with this assumption, people are more likely to influence the emotions of others for instrumental reasons, such as improving one's relationship with the person being regulated or making a good impression on them, than they are to influence the emotions of others for purely hedonic reasons (5).

Building on the assumptions that instrumental reasons carry more weight when regulating others' emotions than one's own and that instrumental reasons are more likely to motivate people to decrease unpleasant emotions in individualist (vs. collectivist) cultures, we hypothesized that individualism (vs. collectivism) would be more positively linked to the motivation to decrease unpleasant emotions in others than in oneself. Conversely, we hypothesized that individualism (vs. collectivism) would be more negatively linked to the motivation to increase unpleasant emotions in others than in oneself.

How People Influence Others' Emotions Might Vary across Cultures

People can implement various strategies to influence others' emotions (35). For instance, they can show others they care about them (i.e., express care), help them accept their emotions without judgment (i.e., acceptance), or listen to them. People can also encourage others to repeatedly think about the negative event, its causes and implications (i.e., ruminate) or to hide their emotional expressions (i.e., expressive suppression). What people do to influence emotions partly depends on what they are trying to achieve (36, 37). For instance, in individualist cultures, when people want to make others feel better, they are more likely to listen to them and encourage them to accept their emotions (36, 38), which have been found to be effective in making others feel better in these cultures (35, 39). Also, in individualist cultures, when people are less motivated to make others feel better, they are more likely to encourage them to suppress the expression of their emotions (38), which tends to make others feel worse in these cultures (40, 41).

The direction in which one wants to influence others' emotions may impact the strategies they use to do so, leading them to prioritize certain strategies over others. Research on links between emotion regulation goals and strategies has been conducted primarily in individualist cultures. In this investigation, therefore, we tested in a bottom-up fashion, whether strategies in interpersonal emotion regulation were positively or negatively linked to the motivation to decrease others' unpleasant emotions. We tested which strategies were positively linked to the motivation to decrease others' unpleasant emotions. We hypothesized that people in more individualist (vs. collectivist) cultures would be more likely to use these strategies. Furthermore, we tested which strategies were negatively linked to the motivation to decrease others' unpleasant emotions. We hypothesized that people in more individualist cultures would be less likely to use these strategies.

What People Want and Do to Regulate Others' Emotions Might Have Different Social Implications across Cultures

Regulating emotions in a way that matches cultural values is associated with psychosocial benefits (10, 42–44). For instance, when people experience emotions that fit their cultural norms, they feel

more socially connected to others (42). If trying to decrease others' unpleasant emotions is consistent with values of more individualist (vs. collectivist) cultures, then the motivation to do so and the use of strategies that are linked to such motivation may be associated with better relationships in these cultures. Consistent with this possibility, compared to Chinese Americans, European Americans expected to feel more supported by their partners, when imagining their partners trying to decrease their unpleasant emotions (45).

Therefore, we hypothesized that the motivation to make others feel better (i.e., stronger motivation to decrease unpleasant emotions and weaker motivation to increase unpleasant emotions) would be linked to better relationships in more individualist (vs. collectivist) cultures, and these links would be stronger than links with the motivation to make oneself feel better. Similarly, we tested which strategies were positively linked to the motivation to decrease others' unpleasant emotions and hypothesized that using these strategies more would be related to better relationships in more individualist (vs. collectivist) cultures. We also tested which strategies were negatively linked to the motivation to decrease others' unpleasant emotions and hypothesized that using these strategies less would be related to better relationships in more individualist (vs. collectivist) cultures.

The Current Investigation

We conducted three studies to test our hypotheses. We tested how much people in cultures higher in individualism (vs. collectivism) wanted to make themselves and others feel better, and which strategies they used to do so. Studies 1–2 were conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic (2020 and 2021, respectively), as people experienced unpleasant emotions alongside close others (46). These studies targeted diverse countries that vary along the individualism–collectivism dimension, representing distinct cultural regions (i.e., Anglo, Latin American, Confucian, West European, Sub-Saharan African, East Central European, and South-Asian). In both studies, participants indicated how motivated they were to decrease others' and their own unpleasant emotions in the past week. In Study 1, we targeted 13 countries, assessing motivation in emotion regulation. In Study 2, we targeted 19 countries, assessing both motivation and strategy use. In both studies, we tested whether individualism–collectivism was more strongly related to the motivation to decrease unpleasant emotions in others (vs. oneself).

Participants in Study 2 also rated how much they used various emotion regulation strategies to influence others' and their own emotions. We tested whether certain interpersonal strategies were positively linked to the motivation to decrease unpleasant emotions in others, and whether people in cultures higher in individualism (vs. collectivism) used such strategies more. Similarly, we tested whether certain interpersonal strategies were negatively linked to the motivation to decrease unpleasant emotions in others, and whether people in cultures higher in individualism (vs. collectivism) used such strategies less. Finally, we tested whether these potential differences were greater than the corresponding differences in strategies used to decrease one's own unpleasant emotions.

In Study 3, we tracked regulation as it occurred in daily life in participants in romantic relationships using daily dairies. We compared a country relatively high in individualism (i.e., Germany) to a country relatively high in collectivism (i.e., South Korea). First, we tested whether Germans were more motivated to decrease unpleasant emotions in their partners (but not in themselves), compared to South Koreans. We also tested whether Germans were less motivated to increase unpleasant emotions in their partners (but not in themselves), compared to South Koreans. Second, we tested which interpersonal emotion regulation strategies were

potentially positively and negatively linked to the motivation to decrease partners' unpleasant emotions. We further tested whether Germans were more likely than Koreans to regulate their partners' emotions using strategies that were positively linked to such motivation and less likely to do so using strategies that were negatively linked to such motivation. Third, we tested whether in Germany (vs. Korea), people who were more motivated to decrease their partners' unpleasant emotions had better relationships with their partner. Conversely, we tested whether people who used interpersonal strategies that were positively linked to the motivation to decrease their partner's unpleasant emotions more and who used strategies that were negatively linked to this motivation less had better relationships with their partner.

We focused on the dimension of individualism–collectivism, building on existing research linking this dimension to differences in the valuation of unpleasant emotions (e.g., refs. 22, 47, and 48). We tested differences by individualism–collectivism at the country-level across studies. Sampling multiple countries in Studies 1–2 allowed us to explore whether our findings might be accounted for by some other cultural dimensions, by repeating key analyses with other potential cultural dimensions, including relational mobility, power distance, competition vs. empathy, uncertainty-avoidance, short-term vs. long-term orientation and indulgence vs. restraint. However, country-level differences in individualism–collectivism can be, but are not necessarily, reflected at the person-level (49). Therefore, to better understand the nature of potential cultural differences in the motivation to decrease unpleasant emotions in others (vs. one's self), in Study 3, we also assessed individualism at the person-level. We did so by measuring two types of individualist–collectivist values—namely, how much participants value independence and personal freedom (vs. interdependence and social restrictions), and how much people consider the self as monumental and stable (vs. flexible and malleable). We then tested whether people who endorsed more individualist values were more motivated to decrease unpleasant emotions in their partner, less motivated to increase unpleasant emotions in their partner, used strategies that were positively linked to the motivation to decrease unpleasant emotions in one's partner more and used strategies that were negatively linked to such motivation less.*

Thus, we tested hypotheses regarding cultural differences in three different ways. First, we compared multiple countries that vary along the individualism–collectivism dimension in a cross-sectional survey, allowing us to examine various cultural dimensions. Second, we assessed experiences in daily life in participants from an individualist and a collectivist country, enabling us to measure emotion regulation in a more ecologically valid way. Third, we assessed individualist–collectivist values at the individual level, allowing us to test whether our effects were replicated at both the country-level and at the person-level.

Results

Country-Level Individualism Is More Strongly Linked to the Motivation to Decrease Unpleasant Emotions of Others' than One's Own. In Studies 1–2, we tested our hypotheses by predicting motivation from an interaction between individualism–collectivism and regulation target (other vs. self). Regulation target was nested within participants with random intercepts and within countries with a random slope, and participants were nested within countries with a random intercept. In Study 1, as predicted, individualism was more positively linked to the

*Across studies, when possible, we tested the robustness of our effects when controlling for different covariates, such as gender, age, experienced emotions, GDP per capita, and whether people lived alone or with others/target of regulation (SI Appendix).

motivation to decrease unpleasant emotions in others than in oneself (see Fig. 1A; $\beta_{interaction} = -0.21, P = 0.037$; betas presented are standardized). Higher individualism was associated with a stronger motivation to decrease unpleasant emotions in others ($\beta_{individualism} = 0.18, P = 0.048$), but unrelated to the motivation to decrease unpleasant emotions in oneself ($\beta_{individualism} = 0.03, P = 0.435$; full models reported in SI Appendix, Table S4).

In Study 2, as predicted, individualism was more positively linked to the motivation to decrease unpleasant emotions in others than in oneself (see Fig. 1B; $\beta_{interaction} = -0.14, P = 0.010$). Higher individualism was associated with a stronger motivation to decrease others' unpleasant emotions ($\beta_{individualism} = 0.15, P = 0.044$), but unrelated to the motivation to decrease one's own unpleasant emotions ($\beta_{individualism} = 0.03, P = 0.596$; full models reported in SI Appendix, Table S5).

To test whether these effects were accounted for by other cultural dimensions, we repeated our analyses in both studies,

replacing individualism–collectivism with other cultural dimensions, including relational mobility, power distance, competition vs. empathy, degree of uncertainty-avoidance, short-term vs. long-term orientation and indulgence vs. restraint. None of these other cultural dimensions were significantly related to how motivated people were to decrease others' vs. their own unpleasant emotions (Study 1: $P \geq 0.234$, Study 2: $P \geq 0.078$).

In Study 3, we predicted emotion regulation motivation from an interaction between country (Germany vs. South Korea; Germany = 1, South Korea = 0) and regulation target (other vs. self). As predicted, countries varied more in the motivation to influence others' emotions than one's own (see Fig. 1C; decrease unpleasant emotions: $\beta_{interaction} = -0.19, P = 0.008$; increase unpleasant emotions: $\beta_{interaction} = 0.37, P < 0.001$). Germans were more motivated than Koreans to decrease their partners' unpleasant emotions ($\beta_{country(Germany)} = 0.29, P = 0.004$), but these samples did not differ in the motivation to decrease one's own unpleasant

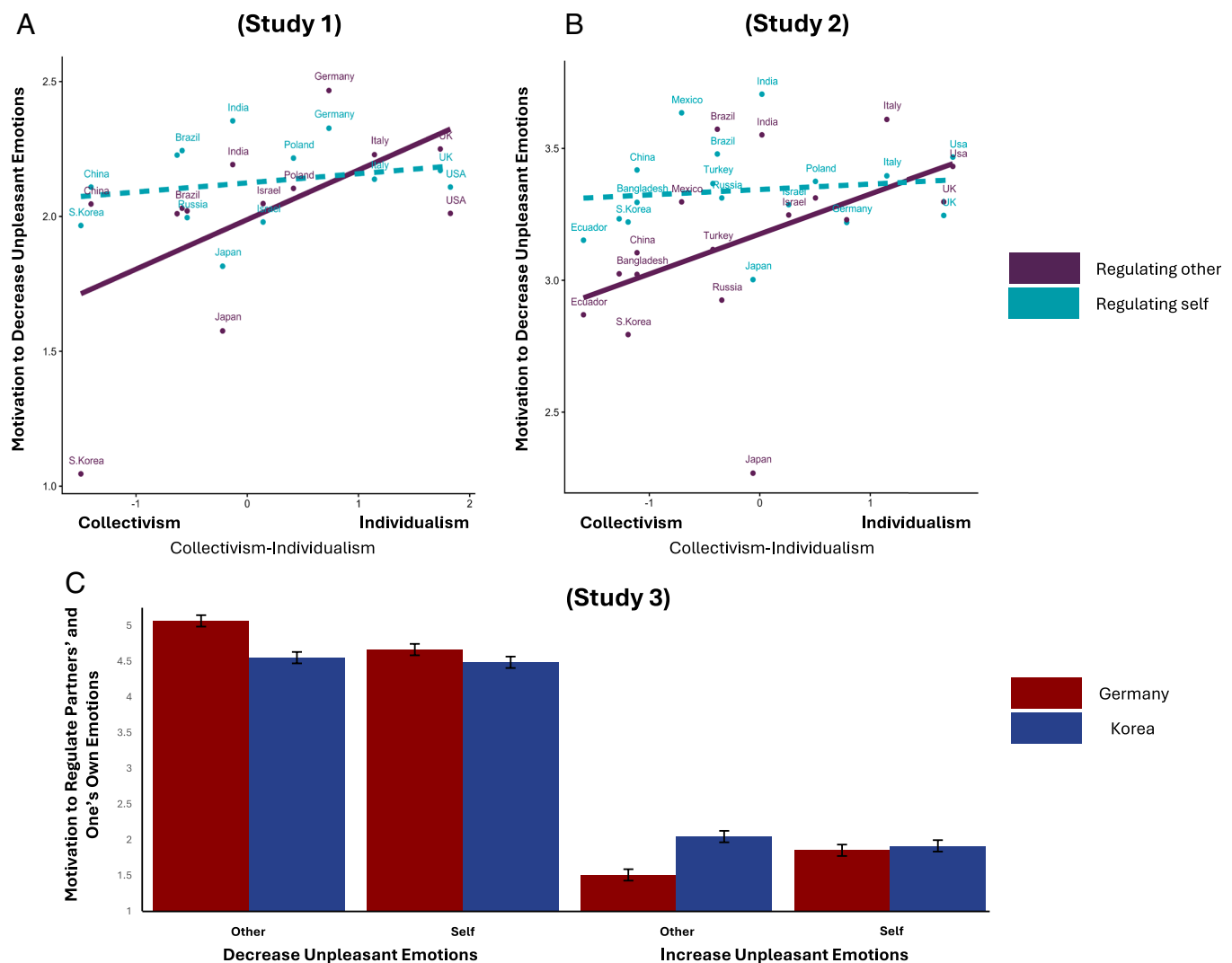


Fig. 1. Individualism is more strongly linked to the motivation to make others feel better vs. oneself (Studies 1 to 3). (A) (Study 1). (B) (Study 2). (C) (Study 3) Note. In A and B, we predicted motivation to decrease others' and one's own unpleasant emotions from an interaction between country-level individualism and regulation target (others vs. self) in multilevel models. We found that individualism was more positively linked to the motivation to decrease others' unpleasant emotions, than the motivation to decrease one's own unpleasant emotions. Individualism (vs. collectivism) in these figures is z-scored around the mean of all countries. Lines reflect estimated slopes for individualism and motivation to decrease others' and one's own unpleasant emotions. In C, we predicted daily motivation to decrease one's partner's and one's own unpleasant emotions from an interaction between country (Germany vs. Korea) and regulation target (partner vs. self) in a multilevel model, and repeated the same analysis for motivation to increase one's partner's and one's own unpleasant emotions. We found that cross-cultural differences were greater for the motivation to influence partners' emotions than one's own emotions, and Germans (vs. Koreans) were more motivated to decrease their partners' unpleasant emotions and less motivated to increase their partners' unpleasant emotions. Bars reflect mean motivation to influence others' and one's own emotions in Germany and Korea. Error bars reflect SE.

emotions ($\beta_{\text{country (Germany)}} = 0.14, P = 0.138$; Fig. 1C). Germans were also less motivated than Koreans to increase their partners' unpleasant emotions ($\beta_{\text{country (Germany)}} = 0.38, P < 0.001$), but no country differences emerged in the motivation to increase one's own unpleasant emotions ($\beta_{\text{country (Germany)}} = -0.02, P = 0.807$; Fig. 1C; full models reported in *SI Appendix, Table S9*).

Country-Level Individualism Is Linked to the Strategies Used to Regulate Others' Emotions. In Study 2, hypotheses regarding strategies were tested using the same analytic approach that was used to examine cultural differences in motivation, controlling for the overall level of strategies used to regulate others' emotions or one's own. We first tested which strategies used to decrease others' unpleasant emotions were positively or negatively linked to the motivation to do so. As predicted, people in more individualist countries used strategies that were positively linked to the motivation to decrease others' unpleasant emotions more, and used strategies that were negatively linked to this motivation less.

The motivation to decrease others' unpleasant emotions was positively linked to expressing care, using acceptance, situation selection, and cognitive reappraisal, and negatively linked to expressive suppression and rumination (P 's ≤ 0.001). To regulate others' emotions, people in more individualist cultures expressed more care ($\beta_{\text{individualism}} = 0.14, P = 0.002$), and used more acceptance ($\beta_{\text{individualism}} = 0.06, P = 0.016$), but less expressive suppression ($\beta_{\text{individualism}} = -0.26, P = 0.005$) and less rumination ($\beta_{\text{individualism}} = -0.26, P < 0.001$). As expected, individualism was more positively linked to using these strategies when regulating other's emotions than one's own (care: $\beta_{\text{interaction}} = -0.14, P < 0.002$, intrapersonal care: $\beta_{\text{individualism}} = 0.04, P = 0.128$; acceptance: $\beta_{\text{interaction}} = -0.06, P = 0.047$, intrapersonal acceptance: $\beta_{\text{individualism}} = 0.02, P = 0.191$; suppression: $\beta_{\text{interaction}} = 0.13, P = 0.008$, intrapersonal suppression: $\beta_{\text{individualism}} = -0.07, P = 0.043$; rumination: $\beta_{\text{interaction}} = 0.31, P < 0.001$, intrapersonal rumination: $\beta_{\text{individualism}} = 0.08, P = 0.036$; Fig. 2A). Full models and models for remaining strategies reported in *SI Appendix, Tables S6 and S7*).

When testing other cultural dimensions, relational mobility, competition vs. empathy, degree of uncertainty-avoidance, short-term vs. long-term orientation and indulgence vs. restraint were unrelated to how much suppression, rumination, care, and acceptance people used to decrease others' (vs. their own) unpleasant emotions ($P \geq 0.078$). Power distance was unrelated to how much people used expressive suppression and acceptance to regulate others vs. themselves (P 's = 0.111 and 0.193, respectively), but was linked to how much people used care and rumination (P 's = 0.004, and 0.036, respectively). However, these associations were no longer significant when controlling for individualism (P 's = 0.118 and 0.858, respectively; see *SI Appendix, Table S8*).

In Study 3, to test our hypotheses, we predicted strategies from country, nesting assessments within participants with random intercepts. We focused on strategies that were significantly linked to the motivation to decrease others' unpleasant emotions. When people were more motivated to decrease their partners' unpleasant emotions, they used more receptive listening and expressed more care, and they used less interpersonal expressive suppression and less rumination (P 's ≤ 0.041 ; *SI Appendix, Table S10*). As predicted, compared to South Koreans, Germans tried to influence their partner's emotions by using more receptive listening ($\beta_{\text{country (Germany)}} = 0.19, P < 0.001$) and expressing more care ($\beta_{\text{country (Germany)}} = 0.43, P < 0.001$), and using less expressive suppression ($\beta_{\text{country (Germany)}} = -0.73, P < 0.001$), and less rumination ($\beta_{\text{country (Germany)}} = -0.28, P < 0.001$; see Fig. 2B; full models and models for remaining strategies reported in *SI Appendix, Table S11*).

Motivation to Decrease Others' Unpleasant Emotions and Using Related Strategies Are Linked to Closer Relationships in Germany than in Korea. In Study 3, we tested the associations between motivation and strategy use in interpersonal emotion regulation and relationship quality. To test our hypotheses, we predicted relationship quality from an interaction between country (Germany vs. South Korea), emotion regulation motivation, and regulation target (partner vs. self). We found cultural differences in the association between the motivation to decrease unpleasant emotions and relationship quality when relationship quality was measured using the Inclusion of Other in the Self scale (50), but not when using a subjective relationship closeness item (51) or a subjective relationship quality item (52; full models and analyses for the other indices are reported in *SI Appendix, Tables S12 and S13*).

The motivation to decrease partners' (vs. one's own) unpleasant emotions was differentially associated with relationship closeness in Germany and Korea ($\beta_{\text{interaction}} = -0.33, P < 0.001$). As predicted, people who were more motivated to decrease their partners' unpleasant emotions felt closer to them in Germany ($\beta_{\text{motivation}} = 0.25, P < 0.001$), but not in Korea ($\beta_{\text{motivation}} = -0.02, P = 0.675$; Fig. 3A). This was not the case for the motivation to decrease one's own unpleasant emotions. Although unexpected, we also found that the more motivated Koreans were to decrease their own unpleasant emotions, the closer they felt to their partner ($\beta_{\text{motivation}} = 0.24, P < 0.001$), but this was not true in Germany ($\beta_{\text{motivation}} = -0.06, P = 0.204$). We also found cultural differences in associations between the motivation to increase unpleasant emotions in one's partner and oneself and relationship closeness ($\beta_{\text{interaction}} = -0.13, P = 0.012$). The more motivated Koreans were to increase their partners' and their own unpleasant emotions, the closer they felt to their partner ($\beta_{\text{motivation}} = 0.12, P < 0.001$). This association was not found among Germans ($\beta_{\text{motivation}} = -0.04, P = 0.100$).

To test our hypotheses regarding strategy use in Study 3, we predicted closeness from an interaction between country and each interpersonal strategy, controlling for the overall level of strategies used to regulate others' emotions. We focused on strategies that were significantly linked to the motivation to decrease partners' unpleasant emotions. As predicted, expressing care was more positively linked to closeness in Germany than in Korea ($\beta_{\text{interaction}} = 0.40, P < 0.001$, Germany: $\beta_{\text{care}} = 0.05, P = 0.360$, Korea: $\beta_{\text{care}} = 0.03, P = 0.647$). However, the opposite pattern was found with listening ($\beta_{\text{interaction}} = 0.36, P < 0.001$, Germany: $\beta_{\text{listening}} = -0.04, P = 0.511$, Korea: $\beta_{\text{listening}} = 0.05, P = 0.487$). Also, expressive suppression and rumination were more negatively linked to closeness in Germany than in Korea (Rumination: $\beta_{\text{interaction}} = 0.17, P = 0.010$, Germany: $\beta_{\text{rumination}} = -0.11, P = 0.021$, Korea: $\beta_{\text{rumination}} = 0.08, P = 0.128$; Suppression: $\beta_{\text{interaction}} = 0.23, P = 0.012$, Germany: $\beta_{\text{suppression}} = -0.05, P = 0.242$, Korea: $\beta_{\text{suppression}} = 0.07, P = 0.240$; Fig. 3B). Although culture significantly moderated links between closeness and using expressive suppression and care, the simple effects, reflecting links between closeness and using these strategies within each country, were not.

Motivation and Strategies Used to Influence Others' Emotions Are Associated with Person-Level Individualist-Collectivist Values. In Study 3, we tested whether motivation to decrease partners' unpleasant emotions and the strategies used to do so were associated with participants' endorsement of individualist-collectivist values. To test our hypotheses, we predicted emotion regulation motivation and strategies from independence and monumentalism, two person-level indices of individualism. Germans were higher than Koreans in independence ($\beta_{\text{country (Germany)}} = 0.90, P < 0.001$) and in monumentalism ($\beta_{\text{country (Germany)}} = 0.44, P < 0.001$).

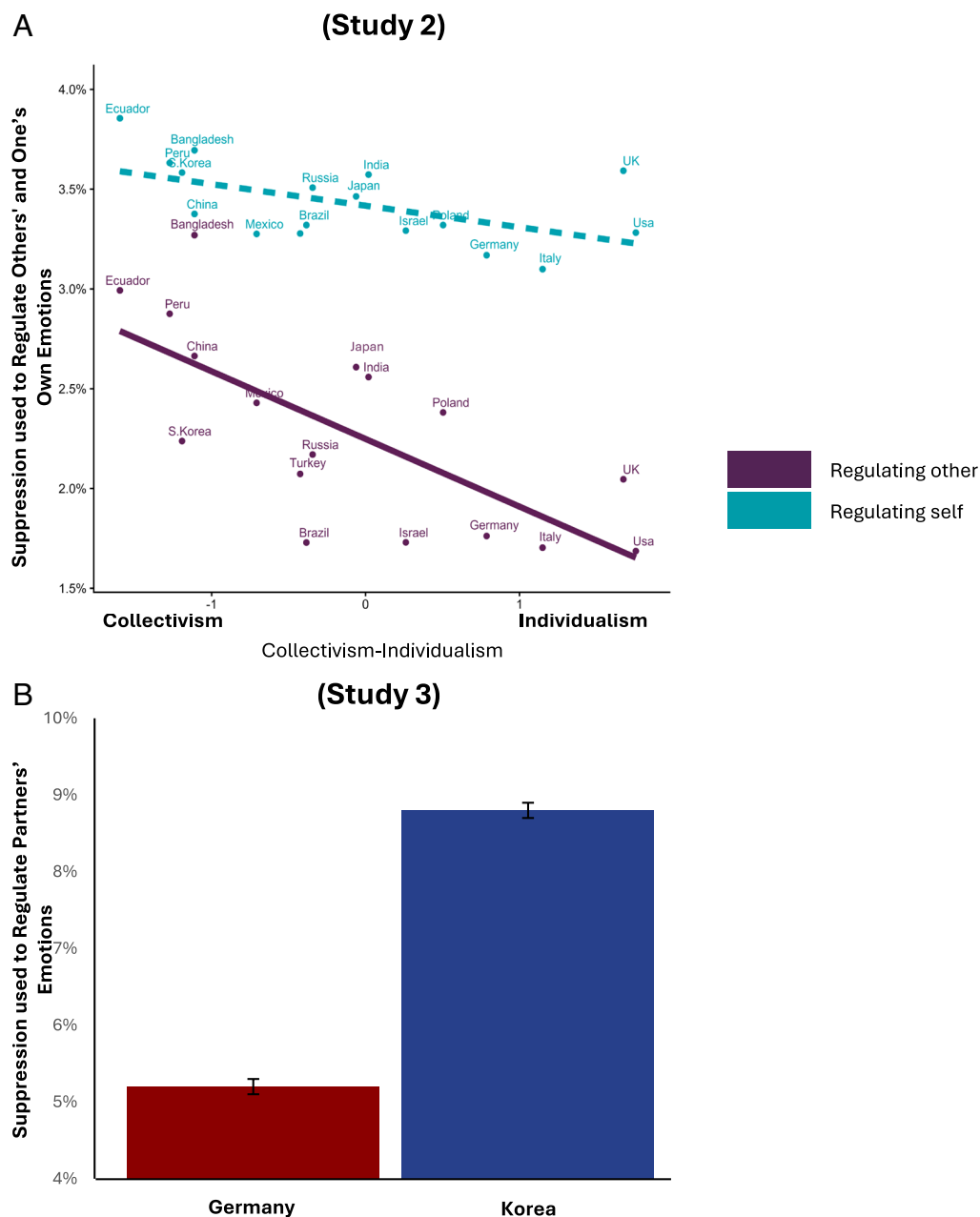


Fig. 2. The use of interpersonal expressive suppression as a function of individualism–collectivism (Studies 2–3). *A* (Study 1). *B* (Study 2). Note. In *A*, we predicted expressive suppression used to influence others' and one's own emotions from an interaction between country-level individualism and regulation target (others vs. self), controlling for the overall level of strategies used in multilevel models. We found that individualism was more negatively linked to suppression used to influence others' emotions than one's own emotions. Individualism–collectivism is z-scored around the mean of all countries. To account for the overall level of strategies participants used, we present the percentage of expressive suppression used out of the overall level of strategies one used. Percentages were calculated by dividing one's use of expressive suppression from the sum of overall strategies they used. In Study 2, individualism–collectivism is z-scored around the mean of all countries. Lines reflect estimated slopes for individualism and suppression used to influence others' and one's own emotions. In *B*, we predicted daily suppression used to influence others' emotions from country (Germany vs. Korea), controlling for the overall level of strategies one used in a multilevel model. We found that Koreans used more expressive suppression than Germans. We present the percentage of expressive suppression used out of the overall level of strategies one used. Percentages were calculated by dividing one's use of expressive suppression in each day from the sum of overall strategies they used in each day. Bars reflect mean expressive suppression percentages in Germany and Korea. Error bars reflect SE.

As expected, people who endorsed either more independent or more monumental values were more motivated to decrease their partners' unpleasant emotions and used some related strategies to influence their partners' emotions (Table 1). The motivation to decrease one's partner's unpleasant emotions was positively linked to monumentalism (vs. flexibility), but not independence (vs. interdependence). Motivation to increase one's partner's unpleasant emotions was negatively linked to independence (vs. interdependence), but not monumentalism (vs. flexibility). Both subscales were positively linked to expressing care and negatively

linked to expressive suppression, but unrelated to rumination and receptive listening.

Discussion

In three cross-cultural studies, we demonstrated that how motivated people are to make others (but not themselves) feel better or worse varies across cultures. People in more individualist (vs. collectivist) cultures were more motivated to decrease others' unpleasant emotions and less motivated to increase such emotions, but did not differ in

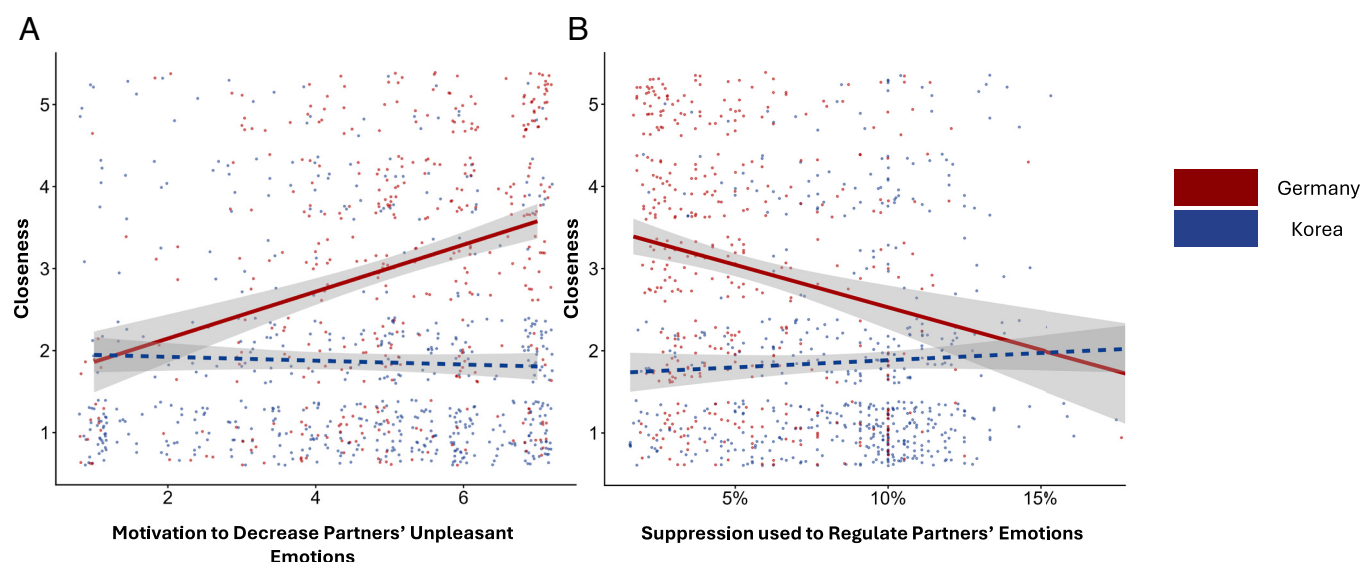


Fig. 3. Motivation to make partners feel better and expressive suppression used to regulate partners' emotions and relationship closeness in Germany vs. Korea (Study 3) (A and B). Note. Closeness was assessed using the Inclusion of Other in the Self scale. In A, we predicted daily closeness from an interaction between motivation to decrease partner's and one's own unpleasant emotions, country (Germany vs. Korea), and regulation target (partner vs. self) in a multilevel model. We found that the more motivated Germans were to decrease their partners' unpleasant emotions, the closer they felt to them, but this was not the case in Korea. Lines reflect estimated slopes for the motivation to decrease partners' unpleasant emotions and closeness in Germany and Korea. SE are presented. In B, we predicted daily closeness from an interaction between expressive suppression used to influence partner's emotions and country (Germany vs. Korea), controlling for the overall level of strategies they used in a multilevel model. We found that in Germany, expressive suppression was negatively linked to closeness, but this was not the case in Korea. To account for the overall level of strategies participants used, we present the percentage of expressive suppression used out of the overall level of strategies one used. Percentages were calculated by dividing one's use of expressive suppression in each day from the sum of overall strategies they used that day. Lines reflect estimated slopes for expressive suppression used to regulate one's partner and closeness in Germany and Korea. SE are presented.

their motivation to influence their own unpleasant emotions. When influencing others' emotions, people in more individualist cultures were more likely to use strategies that were positively linked to the motivation to decrease others' unpleasant emotions (e.g., expressing care, listening) and less likely to use strategies that were negatively linked to such motivation (i.e., rumination, expressive suppression). These differences were greater when using these strategies to influence others' emotions than one's own. We also found some evidence suggesting that people who were more motivated to decrease their partners' unpleasant emotions and used related strategies to do so in daily life had closer relationships with their partner in a more individualist culture (i.e., Germany), but not in a more collectivist culture (i.e., South Korea). Thus, we replicated our key findings in both multicountry surveys and when examining interpersonal emotion regulation as it occurred in daily life. Our findings were not accounted

for by some other potential cultural variables (e.g., relational mobility). Furthermore, we observed similar patterns when examining individualism–collectivism at the country-level and when assessing individualist–collectivist values at the person-level. Given that country-level differences are not always reflected at the individual-level (49, 53), such findings further strengthen the validity of our results.

Making Others Feel Better Is Not Equally Important across Cultures. Experiencing unpleasant emotions may be painful across cultures (14), but the perceived instrumental value of such experiences may depend on how they relate to cultural values and beliefs (11, 27). In cultures higher in individualism, feelings are considered instrumental if they reflect individual goal attainment (11, 54). Feeling unpleasant reflects failure in personal goal attainment, and therefore, is considered culturally

Table 1. Person-level individualist–collectivist values and motivation and strategies used to regulate others' emotions (Study 3)

Predicted variable	Predicting variables							
	Independence		Overall strategy use		Monumentalism		Overall strategy use	
	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE	β	SE
Motivation to decrease others' unpleasant emotions	−0.06	0.05			0.12*	0.05		
Motivation to increase others' unpleasant emotions	−0.19***	0.04			−0.03	0.05		
Listening	0.03	0.03	0.80***	0.02	0.00	0.02	0.80***	0.02
Care	0.09**	0.03	0.77***	0.03	0.07*	0.03	0.75***	0.02
Rumination	0.03	0.03	0.80***	0.02	0.03	0.03	0.64***	0.03
Suppression	−0.16***	0.04	0.52***	0.03	−0.09*	0.04	0.54***	0.03

Motivation to decrease and increase others' unpleasant emotions were predicted from independence and monumentality (in separate models). Strategies used to influence others' emotions were predicted from independence and overall strategy use, and monumentality and overall strategy use (in separate models). All variables were z-scored around the mean of the sample. Listening refers to receptive listening, suppression refers to expressive suppression. Note: *** $P < 0.001$ ** $P < 0.01$ * $P < 0.05$.

undesirable (22). In cultures higher in collectivism, feelings are considered instrumental if they facilitate social harmony or embeddedness. Feeling unpleasant is painful, but it might be considered culturally desirable, if it facilitates self-improvement, brings people together or makes life more meaningful (24, 26, 55). Thus, feeling unpleasant may be considered more instrumental in cultures higher in collectivism.

Our findings could suggest that people want others to experience emotions that are valued in their culture. In more individualist countries, people try to make others feel better. This motivation is relatively weaker in more collectivist countries, where supporting others might imply encouraging a more balanced emotional life (18, 27). Members of more collectivist cultures were less motivated to decrease others' unpleasant emotions and more motivated to increase these emotions. We did not directly examine the mechanism underlying our cultural effects, but raised the possibility that such differences relate to the perceived instrumental benefits of unpleasant emotions in different cultures.

Although further research is needed to directly test this possibility, the limited research that exists on interpersonal emotion regulation across cultures is consistent with this interpretation. For example, Chinese were more likely than Americans to make their partner feel worse, and this cultural difference was mediated by the belief that unpleasant emotions can be useful (45). Similarly, Chinese were more likely than Australians to ruminate with another person on a problem in order to solve it (25). Furthermore, compared to Chinese, European Americans felt closer to their partner when their partner made them feel better (45). These results are consistent with the notion that people in more collectivist cultures may be less motivated to decrease others' unpleasant emotions, because feeling unpleasant is considered more instrumental in these cultures.

Our research extends existing research in several ways. First, we moved beyond comparisons of Western to East Asian cultural contexts, showing that the motivation to decrease others' unpleasant emotions varies as a function of individualism–collectivism, more broadly. In Studies 1 and 2, we sampled a wide variety of collectivist countries, most of which were not East Asian, and found that members of more individualist (vs. collectivist) cultures were more motivated to decrease others' unpleasant emotions and used more strategies related to such motivation. We propose this is because in more collectivist cultures, unpleasant emotions are more instrumentally valuable. This is true for East Asian cultures, where unpleasant emotions are considered important for social harmony or self-improvement (24, 25). However, this is also true for other collectivist cultures, such as Slavic cultures, where unpleasant emotions are considered important for living meaningful and full lives (26, 55). In Slavic cultures, these beliefs are transmitted through cultural products (56), and wanting to feel unpleasant emotions is associated with better mental health (56). Ours is one of the few studies to demonstrate that how people want to influence the emotions of others varies as a function of individualism–collectivism.

Second, we showed that both motivations and strategies used to influence others' emotions are differentially linked to one index of interpersonal closeness across cultures. These findings suggest not only that how people want to influence others' emotions and what they do to influence others' emotions differ across cultures, but that the social implications of such motivations and behaviors may also differ across cultures. Third, we found a similar pattern of differences as a function of cultural values at both the country-level and at the person-level, strengthening our claim that effects are explained by individualist–collectivist values. Finally,

we compared motivation and strategies in regulating others' emotions to the regulation of one's own emotions, showing that cross-cultural differences are greater for regulating emotions in others than in oneself.

Cross-Cultural Differences Are Greater in Influencing Others' Emotions than One's Own Emotions. People in more individualist cultures were more motivated to decrease and less motivated to increase unpleasant emotions in others, but no such differences were found in the motivation to influence one's own unpleasant emotions. Furthermore, individualism–collectivism (but not some other cultural dimensions) was more strongly linked to the use of interpersonal than intrapersonal emotion regulation strategies. These findings show that cultural differences in how people influence emotions are greater when it comes to influencing emotions of others than one's own.

Even though feeling better is considered more instrumental in more individualist cultures (e.g., ref. 24), we did not find cultural differences in the motivation to make oneself feel better. This does not mean, however, that such cultural differences do not exist. Differences in the motivation to decrease one's own unpleasant emotions have been found when comparing European Americans to people in some East Asian cultures (22, 27, 57). However, these differences do not necessarily extend to individualist vs. collectivist cultures, more broadly (58). If people assign more weight to instrumental reasons when influencing others' (vs. their own) emotions, cultural differences may be larger in attempts to influence others' emotions (vs. one's own). Thus, detecting differences in the motivation to influence one's own unpleasant emotions may require larger samples. Moreover, these effects may be evident in specific countries where the instrumental value of unpleasant emotions is relatively larger.

More generally, our findings are consistent with, but do not prove, the idea that people can underestimate the impact of pain and pleasure when understanding or influencing others (59). For example, one might be willing to allow another person to experience unpleasant emotions to help them meet instrumental goals (e.g., work harder to achieve their goals; 24). In contrast, when dealing with their own emotions, people may be less willing to feel pain to meet cultural expectations. In more individualist cultures, where unpleasant emotions are both unpleasant and culturally harmful—regulating self and other are likely to be similar. However, in collectivist cultures, where unpleasant emotions are unpleasant but potentially more culturally instrumental—regulating self and others might differ, as people may weigh hedonic considerations more heavily when regulating their own emotions, and instrumental considerations more heavily when regulating the emotions of others. These ideas, however, are yet to be directly tested.

There may be other explanations why cultural differences were greater in influencing others' emotions than one's own. For example, people have better access to their own actual feelings, and so may be influenced more by their actual feelings when regulating themselves, and by culturally desired feelings when regulating others. This may be because when people think about others, they have vaguer concepts of what they should feel and so they rely more on what is considered acceptable or socially desirable in their culture. People might also process questions differently when reporting on themselves and on others. It is also the case that cultural differences are greater in how people ideally want to feel than in how they actually feel (60, 61), and this may yield greater cultural differences in regulating others' emotions than one's own. This latter possibility is consistent with our key proposed explanation, given that how people ideally want to feel depends, in part, on the instrumental value of that feeling in one's culture (60–62).

Another potential explanation is that people in cultures higher in individualism may be more motivated to influence others and less likely to adjust to them (63). Thus, people in more individualist cultures might be more motivated to decrease others' unpleasant emotions, but not necessarily their own. This explanation, however, is less consistent with our findings in Study 3, where people in an individualist (vs. collectivist) culture were *less* motivated to influence others, when this involved increasing others' unpleasant emotions.

Cultural Differences in Strategies Used to Influence the Emotions of Others. Our investigation showed cultural differences in the use of strategies to regulate others' emotions. Strategies that were positively linked to the motivation to decrease others' unpleasant emotions (e.g., expressing care) were used more in individualist than collectivist cultures. Strategies that were negatively linked to the motivation to decrease others' unpleasant emotions (e.g., expressive suppression) were used more in collectivist (vs. individualist) cultures.

Prior work has found some cultural differences in strategies used to regulate one's own emotions. For example, people in more individualist cultures use less expressive suppression (64). Our results show that cultural differences in this domain are even greater when regulating others' emotions. Our research also targeted a broader range of strategies than previously examined, paving way to future work on this topic.

Cultural Differences in Relational Implications of Influencing Others' Emotions. What people want others to feel and how they influence others' emotions may not carry the same implications across cultures. In Study 3, we found that in an individualist culture, the motivation to decrease others' unpleasant emotions was linked to one index of relationship closeness, but this was not the case in a collectivist culture. Furthermore, using a strategy that was positively related to the motivation to decrease others' unpleasant emotions (i.e., care) was more positively linked to the same index of relationship closeness in an individualist culture than in a collectivist culture. Conversely using strategies that were negatively related to such motivation (i.e., rumination and expressive suppression) was more negatively linked to that index of relationship closeness in an individualist culture than in a collectivist culture.

Our findings suggest that maintaining close relationships may involve different motivations and strategies of interpersonal emotion regulation in different cultures. Trying to make another person feel better and expressing care may not necessarily reflect closer relationships, and trying to make another person feel worse, suppressing their emotions and encouraging them to ruminate may not necessarily reflect less close relationships in different cultures. Our findings suggest that people in collectivist and individualist cultures may try to help others in different ways.

Limitations and Future Directions

Our studies suffer from several limitations. First, our studies targeted convenience or university samples. Future studies could replicate our findings using more representative samples and more countries. Second, we focused on the regulation of unpleasant emotions, and mostly measured strategies used to decrease unpleasant emotions. Future research could extend our findings by also targeting the motivation to influence pleasant emotions, assessing strategies that can be used to increase or decrease unpleasant or pleasant emotions, examining discrete emotions, and testing

how these are linked to influencing unpleasant emotions. Third, our studies focused on the dimension of individualism–collectivism, and our effects were not accounted for by some other cultural dimensions (e.g., relational mobility). However, future studies should test additional cultural dimensions, examine possible differences between specific countries and compare cultural models of emotions. Fourth, our studies relied on self-report, used correlational data, and assessed relationship quality as one social outcome. Future studies could assess motivation using other types of measures, and use behavioral and experimental designs to test how motivation and strategies in interpersonal emotion regulation influence relationship quality in different cultures. Fifth, although we demonstrated that cultures differ in the motivation and strategies used to decrease others' (but not one's own) unpleasant emotions, what underlies such differences remains speculative and should be tested in future studies. Such studies could assess why people want to influence others' emotions, how desirable unpleasant emotions are, how socially beneficial regulating unpleasant emotions is, and the perceived hedonic and instrumental value of unpleasant emotions.

Our investigation assesses motivation and strategies used to decrease others' and one's own unpleasant emotions in diverse cultures, using large survey data and records of emotion regulation in daily life. Our results suggest that wanting and trying to make others feel less (or more) unpleasant emotions is not equally desirable or potentially beneficial across cultures.

Materials and Methods

Transparency and Openness. The code and materials are publicly available (https://osf.io/3u298/overview?view_only=7242defa6edb43da8287ce78f-f9d630b) (65). All studies were part of larger projects (for other measures collected, see *SI Appendix*). Study 1 was not preregistered. The methods for Study 2 were preregistered (<https://aspredicted.org/9mjd-9wtr.pdfv>, <https://aspredicted.org/pwp6-2ff5.pdf>), but the hypotheses were not. In Study 3, we preregistered methods, hypotheses pertaining to country differences in strategies, motivation, and social outcomes of motivation (<https://aspredicted.org/is8pk8.pdf>, <https://aspredicted.org/rh4yu4.pdf>). We report how we determined sample sizes, data exclusions, and measures in each study. All participants were informed of the study procedure, compensations, risks, and benefits and provided informed consent before participating (see *SI Appendix* for full consent form). Studies were approved by local ethics committees in Friedrich Schiller University Jena, Keimyung University, Kyoto University, University of Ghana, International University of Business Agriculture and Technology in Dhaka, Russian Academy of Sciences, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Hacettepe University, National Medical College in Birgunj, Zhejiang Normal University, Coventry University, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University, Fayetteville State University, Virginia Commonwealth University, and Georgetown University.

Cross-Cultural Practices. All participants were native-born, native language speakers, and local residents, who completed the study in their native language or language of instruction. We created versions of study materials in different languages, by having independent bilinguals conduct iterations of translation and back-translation (66). When relevant, we established partial metric invariance of all our key measures, justifying comparisons between motivation or strategies used for others vs. the self across cultures. Reliability indices, means, and SD of measures, by country, as well as tests of measurement equivalence are reported in *SI Appendix*. All analyses plans are provided in detail in *SI Appendix*.

Study 1. Participants were recruited from the general population ($N = 3,154$; 66% female; $M_{\text{age}} = 30.77$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 11.72$; See *SI Appendix* for sample characteristics per country) in 13 countries (United States, United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, Poland, Russia, Türkiye, Israel, India, China, Japan, South Korea, Brazil). We

recruited participants by advertising in university mailing lists, social media (e.g., Facebook), private networks (e.g., WhatsApp groups), and online recruitment platforms (e.g., Prolific). To ensure samples were equivalent across countries, we sampled participants aged 18 to 30 in all countries. Additional 93 participants were excluded (57 for careless responding, 29 were not native-born, 6 were not native speakers, and one was underage). We targeted 200 participants per country, following recommendations for at least 100 participants per group for multi-level structural equation modeling (67), doubling that amount to increase power.

The study was completed online. To assess the motivation to decrease others' and one's own unpleasant emotions, participants indicated how much (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *a lot*) they wanted to decrease other people's unpleasant emotions during the past week, how committed they were to doing so, and how much effort they invested in doing so (68). The same items were rated separately with respect to decreasing one's own unpleasant emotions. We used Hofstede's (69) individualism index to determine country-level individualism-collectivism.[†]

Study 2. Study 2 included university students ($N = 3,503$, 59.1% female, $M_{age} = 23.06$, $SD_{age} = 5.08$; See *SI Appendix* for sample characteristics by country) from 17 countries (adding Bangladesh, Mexico, Peru, and Ecuador to the 13 countries in Study 1). We recruited participants by advertising in university mailing lists and communities, social media (e.g., Facebook), private networks (e.g., WhatsApp groups), and online recruitment platforms (e.g., Prolific). Additional 597 participants were excluded (450 failed attention checks, 56 were not native-born, 79 were underage, 11 completed the survey in less than 300 s, and one was not a native speaker). We preregistered a target sample of 200 participants per country.

Materials were similar to those used in Study 1. Participants also rated the extent to which, in the past week, they used various strategies to decrease unpleasant emotions in others, and how much they used these strategies to decrease unpleasant emotions in themselves. Strategies included distraction, rumination, situation selection, cognitive reappraisal, expressive suppression, emotional support, and acceptance, with four items per strategy (70). We also computed overall strategy use by summing across strategies.

Study 3. We recruited participants in romantic relationships in Germany ($N = 102$; 57.8% female, $M_{age} = 23.9$, $SD_{age} = 2.7$; $M_{relationship\ length} = 3.1$ y, 39% living with partner) and South Korea ($N = 141$, 61.9% female, $M_{age} = 24.0$, $SD_{age} = 2.7$, $M_{relationship\ length} = 2.2$ y, 8% living with partner). Participants were recruited by advertising using social media, WhatsApp groups, flyers, survey companies (e.g., Prolific) and student recruitment systems (e.g., SONA). To ensure samples were equivalent across countries, we sampled participants aged 18 to 30 in both countries, with up to 60% of female participants. All participants who met inclusion criteria were included in the sample, even if they did not complete all assessments ($M_{valid\ assessments} = 4.1$, $SD_{valid\ assessment} = 2.3$). Number of assessments did not differ between countries ($t = 0.41$, $P = 0.681$). Three additional participants were excluded, because they were not native-born or local residents. We preregistered a sample of 100 participants per country, to detect a significant within (self vs. other) and between (Germany vs. Korea) interaction in a repeated-measures ANOVA (power = 80%, $f = 0.10$, $\alpha = 0.05$), affording sufficient power for a multilevel version of this analysis.

Participants answered questions online about their experiences in the past day, every evening for five consecutive days. To assess participants' motivation to regulate their partner's and their own emotions, participants completed

two items per target per regulation direction ("To what extent did you want to decrease/increase your/your partner's unpleasant emotions?" and "How important was it for you to decrease/increase your/your partner's unpleasant emotions?"; 1 = *not at all*; 7 = *very much*). Participants also rated how much they tried to decrease their partners' unpleasant emotions in the past day, using 10 strategies (1 = *I did not do this at all*; 5 = *I did this a lot*), with one item per strategy (e.g., "I told them I cared about them, so they would feel better"; adapted from ref. 35). Strategies included rumination, expressive suppression, distraction, cognitive reappraisal, humor, touch, expressing care, situation selection, receptive listening, and acceptance. To assess relationship quality, we tested how close participants felt to their partners that day, using the Inclusion of Other in the Self scale (IOS; 50). As two additional indices, participants rated subjective feelings of closeness to their partner (e.g., "How close did you feel to your partner today?"; 51) and their daily relationship satisfaction (e.g., "Overall, how satisfied were you with your relationship today?"; 52). IOS was weakly or not related to the other two measures, which were strongly correlated to one another (*SI Appendix*). Ratings were on a scale of 1 = *not at all* to 7 = *very much*. In the first daily survey, participants rated their agreement (1 = *completely disagree*; 7 = *completely agree*) with items capturing individualist-collectivist values (71), including six items measuring independence-interdependence and six items measuring monumentalism-flexibility. As initial reliabilities of these subscales were low, we followed recommended procedures (72), removing two items from the independence subscale and one item from the monumentalism subscale to increase reliability. We checked all measures for response biases, correcting such biases when detected, justifying comparing them across cultures.

Data, Materials, and Software Availability. Anonymized measures, code, and participant responses in Studies 1-3 data have been deposited in OSF (https://osf.io/3u298/overview?view_only=7242defa6edb43da8287ce78ff9d630b) (65).

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