

Emotional Regulation and Cross-cultural views on Pleasure

Research Questions

1. Are there cultural differences in how individuals choose to regulate their emotions?
2. How might cultural differences in beliefs about pleasure or happiness relate to these group differences in their decisions to regulate emotions?

Purpose

The global issue of mental health has been highlighted in recent years as seen through mental health awareness month, representation in popular songs, and other prominent representations in society (World Health Organization [WHO], 2022). As issues such as depression and anxiety gain more attention as a crippling pandemic, the need for clinicians and researchers to address this issue is rising. Ailments such as depression are treated with a variety of methods based on the patient's needs. Each individual may have a specific treatment plan. One important aspect of many evidence-based clinical interventions such as Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy is supporting individuals in the management and regulation of emotion. If a patient can learn to effectively manage their feelings, they may be able to better address their struggles.

Emotion regulation is the behavior one exhibits when faced with negative situations of varying intensity. A study conducted by Sheppes tested between two methods of regulation: reappraisal and distraction. They found that subjects' choices reflected healthy adaptations in emotional regulation (Sheppes et al., 2011).

Recent literature and empirical studies have begun to consider in what context may individuals choose different regulation strategies in response to their emotions. For example, individuals may be more likely to use certain strategies depending on the intensity of the emotional stimuli (Sheppes et al., 2014). Furthermore, studies have also found other factors relating to regulation choice, such as age (Sheppes et al., 2015). However, there is not extensive research that has examined the role of culture on regulation choice. Although the basic structure of emotions may be the same across cultures, their intensities and the way they are expressed differ (Russell 1991). To my knowledge, only one study has been conducted comparing different cultures and their emotional regulation choice (Mehta et al., 2017). Their findings suggest that Indian populations were significantly more likely to use cognitive reappraisal compared to U.S. populations. They concluded that culture does have a noticeable effect on which methods people choose during emotional regulation. Given prior work examining cultural differences in emotion regulation comparing Asian Americans and European Americans (Mauss et al., 2010), we might anticipate that East Asians may also choose to regulate differently than their European American counterparts. Therefore, as part of this proposal, I aim to comparatively study East Asians and White individuals to understand their preferences in emotional regulation choice.

The differences in emotional regulation choice can be attributed to differing societal values between individualistic and collectivistic cultures. A recent film, *Crazy Rich Asians*, follows the story of a couple who faces opposition from the groom's family towards their marriage. As the bride does not come from a background of wealth and power, the groom initially does not receive his mother's blessing. In the film, we see a conflict in values between individualistic and collectivistic cultures. Specifically, Asian cultures tend to be collectivist, putting greater value in working towards the betterment of the community (Yuki, 2003). As such, they may prioritize pursuing personal pleasure or desire less. Comparatively, western cultures tend to view the world in an individualistic view, prioritizing individual happiness and success. Indeed, work by Papadopoulos and colleagues (2012) has found cultural differences in mental illness stigmas, where individuals from individualistic cultures were more likely to report a more positive attitude towards mental illness than individuals from a collectivistic culture. These contrasting cultural values may lead to a different perspective on emotions as a whole. Individualistic cultures are more open with their emotions, allowing themselves to feel a wider spectrum of thoughts and feelings. In contrast, collectivistic cultures tend to suppress their individual emotions, as their primary goal is to work towards the betterment of the community. If their society is benefiting from their work, they choose to ignore their personal strife as it is for the greater good.

Although some research has touched on this idea, my study aims to focus on these differences and see if there is an observable difference in emotional regulation based on these conflicting perspectives (Butler et al., 2007). I am looking to know how these choices may tie into their cultural perspectives on pleasure, whether that leans towards individualism or collectivism. These findings will address whether or not collectivist or individualistic cultures may suppress emotions as a whole. Does working towards a common societal goal lead to individual suppression of emotion? On the contrary, does achieving personal pleasure lead to more expressive feelings?

Objective & Approach

I will be assisting with a study in order to acquire the data needed to address my research questions. Data collection is currently ongoing. Undergraduate students at the University of Irvine will be recruited to participate in this study through the Social Sciences Human Subjects Research Pool. Students are eligible if they are over 18 years old, identify as Caucasian, East Asian, or Southeast Asian, who can speak, read, and understand English were eligible to participate in the study.

The study involves two phases. Participants will first complete a self-reported psychological assessment and then an in-lab session involving behavioral tasks. For the online survey, students will answer questions regarding their demographic background, I will be looking at three specific sections within the first questionnaire portion: Valuing happiness scale (Mauss et al., 2011),

Prioritizing positivity scale (Catalino et al., 2014), Beliefs About Pleasure Scale (Yang et al., 2018). These three measures assess an individual's general beliefs about and values towards pleasure and happiness. To assess emotion regulation tendencies, I will also use data collected from the second portion of the study. Participants will be asked to choose from three different strategies to respond to a series of emotional stimuli. Differences in people's decisions on how to regulate will be examined in relation to cultural differences in self-reported pleasure and happiness.

Responsibility

In the study, I am responsible for running the lab sessions. For the lab sessions, I first introduce the participant to the lab and study, go over the consent form, and proceed to have them complete the lab tasks on the computer. Midway through the task, I undergo a training session with them, explaining the three instructions and strategies to respond and regulate their emotions (i.e., watch, rethink, distract). Participants will complete a series of practice trials, ensuring that the participant fully understands what each strategy entails in order to procure the most accurate results possible. Following the conclusion of the study, I debrief the subject and ensure confidentiality of the study.

In addition to running the experiment, I also am responsible for data collection and analysis. Since the study is conducted both in the lab and through an online platform, any notes during the lab session about the participant's behaviors are documented on a systemized spreadsheet. For the proposal, I will clean and process the self-report measures of interest and then clean the behavioral data to then use for analyses.

Throughout the entire study, I will be in frequent communication with my faculty mentor and the overseeing graduate student of the study. They will oversee my performance both inside and outside the lab setting, supervising my work on the UROP project. Through bi-weekly meetings, my status will be checked as well as the current state of my research at the time. Although I will be working independently on the data collection and analysis, they will help in any places where I may need assistance.

Timeline

Spring 2022

- Turn in proposal into UROP for review and approval
- Data Collection
- Literature review

Summer 2022

- Data collection
- Literature review

- Method / Data analytic plan

Fall 2022

- Data collection
- Data processing / cleaning
- Running analyses
- Drafting Thesis

Winter 2023

- Finalizing analyses
- Writing-up results and poster for presentation

Spring 2023

- Finish data analysis and finalize thesis
- Writing-up results and poster for presentation
- Prepare to present findings at research symposium
- Submit research findings into the UCI Undergraduate Research Journal for possible publishing

References

Butler, E. A., Lee, T. L., & Gross, J. J. (2007). Emotion regulation and culture: Are the social consequences of emotion suppression culture-specific? *Emotion*, 7(1), 30-48.

doi:10.1037/1528-3542.7.1.30

Catalino, L. I., Algoe, S. B., & Fredrickson, B. L. (2014). Prioritizing Positivity Measure.

PsycTESTS Dataset. doi:10.1037/t36687-000

Mauss, I. B., Butler, E. A., Roberts, N. A., & Chu, A. (2010). Emotion control values and responding to an anger provocation in Asian-American and European-American individuals. *Cognition & Emotion*, 24(6), 1026-1043.

doi:10.1080/02699930903122273

Mauss, I. B., Tamir, M., Anderson, C. L., & Savino, N. S. (2014). Valuing Happiness Scale.

PsycTESTS Dataset. doi:10.1037/t36630-000

Mehta, A., Young, G., Wicker, A., Barber, S., & Suri, G. (2017). Emotion Regulation Choice:

- Differences in U.S. and Indian Populations. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 4(2). doi:10.25215/0402.160
- Mental health. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.who.int/health-topics/mental-health#tab=tab_1
- Papadopoulos, C., Foster, J., & Caldwell, K. (2012). 'Individualism-Collectivism' as an Explanatory Device for Mental Illness Stigma. *Community Mental Health Journal*, 49(3), 270-280. doi:10.1007/s10597-012-9534-x
- Russell, J. A. (1991). Culture and the categorization of emotions. *Psychological Bulletin*, 110(3), 426-450. doi:10.1037/0033-2909.110.3.426
- Scheibe, S., Sheppes, G., & Staudinger, U. M. (2015). Distract or reappraise? Age-related differences in emotion-regulation choice. *Emotion*, 15(6), 677-681. doi:10.1037/a0039246
- Sheppes, G., Scheibe, S., Suri, G., Radu, P., Blechert, J., & Gross, J. J. (2014). Emotion regulation choice: A conceptual framework and supporting evidence. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 143(1), 163-181. doi:10.1037/a0030831
- Yang, Y., Yang, Z., Zou, Y., Shi, H., Wang, Y., Xie, D., . . . Chan, R. C. (2018). Beliefs About Pleasure Scale. *PsycTESTS Dataset*. doi:10.1037/t74744-000
- Yuki, M. (2003). Intergroup Comparison versus Intragroup Relationships: A Cross-Cultural Examination of Social Identity Theory in North American and East Asian Cultural Contexts. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 66(2), 166. doi:10.2307/1519846