Article:
Niven, K. orcid.org/0000-0002-6675-5532 and López-Pérez, B. orcid.org/0000-0002-8517-2236 (2025) Interpersonal emotion regulation: reflecting on progress and charting the path forward. Emotion, 25 (2). pp. 277-286. ISSN 1528-3542

https://doi.org/10.1037/emo0001472

Interpersonal Emotion Regulation: Reflecting on Progress and Charting the Path Forward

Abstract

Interpersonal emotion regulation occurs when people try to manage their own or others' feelings or emotional expressions via social interactions. Research on this distinctive form of emotion regulation has grown exponentially over the last fifteen years. In this article, we draw from literature across different disciplines, including multiple sub-disciplines within psychology (e.g., social, clinical, developmental, organizational, sports), neuroscience, and sociology, to reflect on what is currently known about interpersonal emotion regulation. Our analysis focuses on the process through which interpersonal emotion regulation unfolds, its outcomes, and the development of abilities and difficulties in interpersonal emotion regulation through the lifespan. We also introduce this special issue, which presents a collection of seventeen papers that advance our knowledge about these aspects of interpersonal emotion regulation in multiple ways. Finally, we chart the path forward, by considering some of the most important challenges and opportunities for researchers aiming to deepen our understanding of interpersonal emotion regulation.

Keywords: interpersonal emotion regulation, extrinsic emotion regulation, intrinsic emotion regulation, other-focused emotion regulation, development.

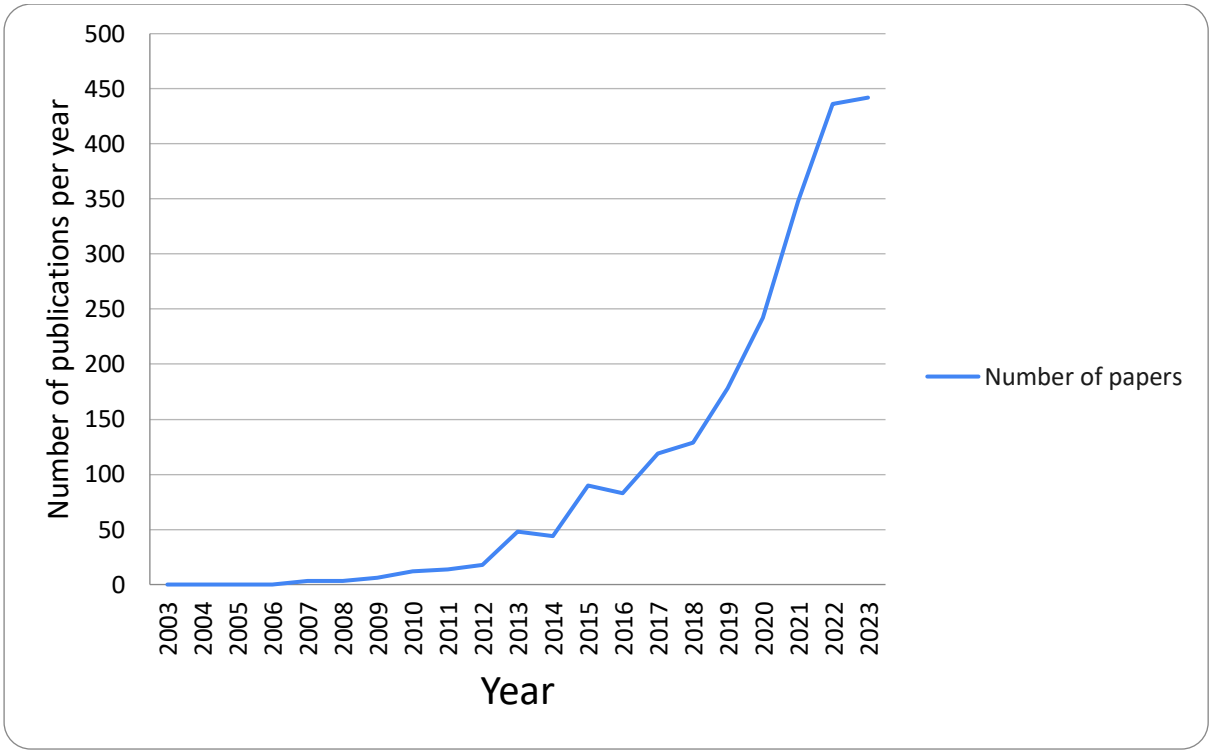
Interpersonal Emotion Regulation: Reflecting on Progress and Charting the Path Forward

Emotion regulation has traditionally been defined and studied as an intrapsychic process, wherein a person works alone to manage their own feelings. Under this perspective of emotion regulation as a private phenomenon, researchers have generated important knowledge, particularly about the intrapersonal strategies people use and which are most effective for regulating emotion. But are there times when individuals depend on *others* to support their emotions? Do empathic people express and reinforce their care for others through emotion regulation? And does emotion regulation characterize and shape relationships? Questions such as these spurred the two of us to independently begin research on the process that has since come to be known as interpersonal emotion regulation.

In our initial forays into research in this area, we drew from *ad hoc* studies across multiple disciplines, including sociology, developmental psychology, communication studies, and organizational behavior, which described highly contextualized instances of emotion regulation that were social in nature. Many years on from this early work, the seeds of curiosity those studies planted have not only germinated but have thrived, giving rise to a dynamic and flourishing field of study, as evidenced by a remarkable 780% increase in the number of publications from 2013 to the present (Figure 1). It is now rare to find a conference on emotion without at least a few symposia or talks on the topic of interpersonal emotion regulation, and most up-to-date theories of emotion regulation explicitly integrate the construct.

Figure 1.

Number of Articles Published on 'Interpersonal Emotion Regulation'



Note. Articles were identified using 'Scopus' with the term 'Interpersonal Emotion Regulation' present in the title or abstract.

We think the time is ripe for a special issue to bring together current insights and provide direction for research on this topic as it continues to develop and evolve. When we first approached Naomi (Eisenberger) as the then incoming editor of Emotion, we were thrilled by her wholehearted endorsement of our concept for a special issue. Yet even Naomi's enthusiasm, which matched our own, could not have prepared us for the overwhelming response to our call for proposals. The resulting special issue showcases a curated selection of the highest quality research in interpersonal emotion regulation, and we are very excited to share it with you.

In the remainder of our editorial, we outline what interpersonal emotion regulation is, focusing on key distinctions within the field. We then summarize current knowledge, with insights across three main domains: process, outcomes, and development. These three

domains serve as a framework to explain how the articles in this special issue advance our understanding and where we might seek to go next.

Progress in Understanding Interpersonal Emotion Regulation

Emotion regulation is the process of changing emotional experience, its expression, or both. For many years, the process was treated as intrapersonal; the private experience of managing one's own emotions. However, attempts to manage feelings typically occur in the context of relationships and interactions (Eisenberg et al., 2000) and are often motivated by social concerns (Eldesouky & English, 2019). Furthermore, people also try to regulate the feelings of others as well as their own feelings (Niven et al., 2009). Accordingly, a rich literature has developed, in which emotion regulation is characterized as an interpersonal process.

Zaki and Williams (2013) explain that emotion regulation can be considered interpersonal in instances where (i) emotion is regulated in accordance with a goal, and (ii) such regulation occurs during live social interactions, with (iii) the presence or actions of an interaction partner being integral to the regulation. These criteria distinguish interpersonal emotion regulation from cases where merely spending time with another person causes a change in someone's feelings, despite a lack of regulatory goal on the part of either interaction partner. They also distinguish interpersonal emotion regulation from instances where people try to regulate their feelings by simply thinking of others, or by using intrapsychic strategies (such as positively reframing the cause of their emotion) in social contexts wherein the presence of others is purely incidental. The goal-directed nature of interpersonal emotion regulation implies a certain degree of intentionality to the act. However, this does not mean to say that people are always consciously aware of the entire regulatory process; much of the interpersonal emotion regulation that we engage in everyday life is at least semi-habitual and therefore enacted somewhat instinctively (Niven, 2022).

A key distinction lies between interpersonal emotion regulation that is intrinsic and that which is extrinsic (Gross, 2013; Niven et al., 2011; Zaki & Williams, 2013). While intrinsic interpersonal emotion regulation refers to instances where a person seeks others to change *their own emotions* through social interaction, extrinsic interpersonal emotion regulation refers to occasions where a person aims to change *another person's emotions*. In this sense, intrinsic interpersonal emotion regulation can be described as a self-focused process and extrinsic interpersonal emotion regulation as an other-focused process (Petrova & Gross, 2023). Although researchers typically separate both phenomena to better understand each process, in actual interactions these two forms of regulation tend to co-exist. For instance, when a friend is feeling upset, they might ask to meet with us, representing an intrinsic form of interpersonal emotion regulation. However, when we observe our friend's distress, we may initiate a conversation seeking to reduce their upset, representing an extrinsic form of regulation. In this sense, intrinsic and extrinsic interpersonal emotion regulation can be two sides of the same interaction. Moreover, as Petrova and Gross (2023) discuss, people often regulate their own and others' emotions simultaneously. For example, by helping one's partner reappraise a problem to reduce their worry, one can also prevent oneself from becoming anxious.

Scholars of extrinsic interpersonal emotion regulation often use the terms 'regulator' and 'target' to denote the two parties involved in the process, wherein the regulator is the person who engages in the regulation attempt and the target is the recipient of that attempt (Niven, 2017). For intrinsic interpersonal emotion regulation, the regulator and target can be the same person, in the sense that the regulator is seeking to manage their own feelings via social interaction. However, because the initiation of regulation often leads to or even requires the active participation of the other party in the regulation, the other person involved can play a regulator role. Although most of the instances described in the literature focus on

dyadic interactions, in which regulators and targets are individuals, interpersonal emotion regulation may encompass multiple actors, with both regulators and targets potentially comprising more than one individual (López-Pérez et al., 2024). For example, a child may seek emotional support from their peer group (Kwon & López-Pérez, 2022), or a politician may try to shape the feelings of a nation (Naughton et al., 2024).

Process of Interpersonal Emotion Regulation

As a process, interpersonal emotion regulation can be meaningfully broken down into constituent stages. Applying an action control perspective (e.g., Webb et al., 2012), as seen in Gross's (2015) extended process model (see also Nozaki & Mikolajczak, 2020) and Reeck and colleagues' (2016) social regulatory cycle, allows us to elaborate these stages for both intrinsic and extrinsic interpersonal emotion regulation.

The first stage of the process entails *identification* of the need for regulation. In intrinsic regulation, it is the target who self-identifies that they need interpersonal regulation of their feelings, based on their assessment of their current feeling state against their goal for how they want to, or perceive that they ought to, feel. If a sufficient distance between the current and goal states is present, then the potential for regulation is initiated. In extrinsic regulation, the regulator (a different person) deduces the need to regulate the target's feelings. This can be based on an explicit request from the target for support in regulating their emotions, such that the target's intrinsic interpersonal emotion regulation attempt prompts extrinsic interpersonal emotion regulation on the part of the regulator. It can also be based on inference of the need, stemming from the regulator's assessment or anticipation of the target's feelings. For example, a regulator might be interacting with a friend and notice that the friend seems subdued and infer that they need cheering up. Or a regulator might anticipate their partner becoming jealous in the event of a night out and so proactively infer the need for extrinsic regulation to reassure them. In either case, the regulator must set a goal for how the

target should feel and assess the difference between that goal state and the target's current or anticipated emotion state, during this first stage of the regulation process. For both intrinsic and extrinsic processes, whether the potential for regulation translates into actual regulatory behavior in the second stage is dependent on a fundamental belief that emotion can be changed.

In the second stage, a decision must be made as to the *selection* of how to regulate. For intrinsic regulation, the decision to seek interpersonal support for regulation may be made on the basis of perceived weakness for self-regulation (i.e., low emotion regulation self-efficacy) or simply a preference for social regulation. For extrinsic regulation, the regulator must judge if the target is capable of managing their own feelings and whether an attempt on their part to regulate would be welcomed. For both intrinsic and extrinsic processes, the regulator must then consider which of several possible approaches might be most effective, based on their prior experiences of using these strategies, their knowledge of the target (in the case of intrinsic regulation, their self-knowledge), their analysis of the situation, and the availability of resources to support the use of particular strategies.

In the final stage, *implementation* of regulation occurs. For intrinsic regulation, the target reaches out to a social contact to request their support in regulation, either in a very explicit manner ("I'm feeling sad…") or a more implicit manner (e.g., seeking out company while expressing non-verbal signs of emotion). The regulation that occurs after this initial reaching out can be, as Zaki and Williams (2013) term it, 'response independent', in the sense that the mere act of spending time in the company of someone else might serve to regulate the target's feelings, e.g., by helping them to process their emotions. However, it can also be 'response dependent', in that it prompts the interaction partner to engage in extrinsic behaviors that regulate the target's feelings. Meanwhile, for extrinsic regulation, the regulator must translate the strategy or strategies they have selected into specific tactics and judge

when to implement them. In both cases, monitoring of the target's emotion state is needed to ascertain if the emotion goal has been achieved or if further regulatory effort is required.

Outcomes of Interpersonal Emotion Regulation

Interpersonal emotion regulation has a range of consequences, broadly fitting within three overarching categories: affective, social, and behavioral. As a process, emotion regulation is directed at influencing the experience or expression of emotion; thus, affective consequences are hardly surprising. Indeed, both intrinsic and extrinsic forms of interpersonal emotion regulation can shape targets' feelings in the short term (e.g., Pauw et al., 2024; Sahi et al., 2021) and, when used repeatedly, over longer periods of time. In relation to the latter, for example, there is evidence linking reliance on certain intrinsic interpersonal emotion regulation strategies to increases or decreases in symptoms of clinical disorders (Hofmann, 2014). Research on intrinsic interpersonal emotion regulation suggests that positive consequences on affect occur via mechanisms of perceived responsiveness, cognitive support, and physical presence, whereas regulation can prompt negative affective responses when targets perceive hostility (Swerdlow & Johnson, 2022). Extrinsic forms of interpersonal emotion regulation can have emotional consequences for the regulator too, with the findings showing a mixed picture. Cheering others up can improve the feelings of the regulator (Niven et al., 2012a), but it can also take an emotional toll (Martínez-Íñigo et al., 2013; Morelli et al., 2015).

Social outcomes are also to be expected, given that the process is interpersonal in nature, typically occurring in the context of established or fledgling relationships. Both intrinsic (e.g., Williams et al., 2018) and extrinsic interpersonal emotion regulation (e.g., Niven et al., 2015) have been linked to the formation and development of new high-quality relationships, while extrinsic interpersonal emotion regulation has also been linked to the development of social competence in childhood (Kwon & López-Pérez, 2022). Both

processes have also been reported to underlie the strengthening of existing relational connections (e.g., Nils & Rimé, 2012; Niven et al., 2012b). While social consequences can be conceived as downstream outcomes stemming from the more proximate effects of interpersonal emotion regulation on affect (e.g., my new roommate makes me feel happy so I want to spend more time with her), they can also occur independently (e.g., even though my new roommate's attempts to cheer me up aren't working, they make me think of her as a nice person).

In terms of behavioral outcomes, applied research in contexts like workplaces and sports teams attests to the relevance of interpersonal emotion regulation in enhancing performance (e.g., Tamminen et al., 2019; Vasquez et al., 2020). Performance consequences are evident both when receiving interpersonal emotion regulation (e.g., athletes report greater goal attainment when their teammates make efforts to improve their emotions; Tamminen et al., 2021) and when providing extrinsic regulation to others (e.g., leaders who try to improve the feelings of their team members are rated as more effective; Vasquez et al., 2021). Other desirable behavioral consequences of interpersonal emotion regulation include adherence to public health orders (Naughton et al., 2024) and engagement in helping behaviors (Little et al., 2016). Dysfunctions in interpersonal emotion regulation have also been linked to the undesirable consequences, such as disordered eating (Christensen & Haynos, 2020). Changes in both affect and relationship quality that arise from interpersonal emotion regulation appear to be responsible for behavior change, such that, for example, team members comply with the orders of a leader who engages in interpersonal emotion regulation because the leader makes them feel good and because they trust in the leader.

A key insight stemming from the literature on outcomes of interpersonal emotion regulation is that consequences are not uniform. Rather, they vary based on the strategies that are selected to regulate emotion and, at least in the case of extrinsic interpersonal emotion

regulation, the motives that underlie the regulation attempt. Strategies that focus on the underlying cause of emotion (referred to as 'antecedent-focused', Gross, 2013, or 'problem-oriented', Niven, in press), such as asking others for advice (intrinsic) or trying to help someone to see a situation from another perspective (extrinsic) appear to be particularly effective for eliciting desired outcomes, such as changes in emotion (e.g., Jurkiewicz et al., 2023; Lepore et al., 2004). However, people typically report preferring that others use strategies that demonstrate care and understanding (referred to as 'socio-affective', Pauw et al., 2018, or 'relationship-oriented', Niven, in press), such as empathic listening and validation (Liu et al., 2021; Sahi et al., 2023), with nuanced preferences depending on the emotion to be regulated. For example, listening is perceived by targets as especially efficient in regulating their sadness (López-Pérez, 2018). Thus, there is a potential disconnect between what people want when it comes to interpersonal emotion regulation and what is best for them. Research on motives further suggests that when people engage in extrinsic interpersonal emotion regulation with prosocial motives (i.e., intending to benefit the target), their actions are perceived more positively and are more likely to generate salubrious outcomes, even if in the short term they may make the target feel bad (López-Pérez et al., 2017; Niven et al., 2019a).

Development of Interpersonal Emotion Regulation

In developing the ability to experience and express emotions appropriately through emotion regulation, children rely initially on parents and caregivers (Eisenberg et al., 2000; Kopp, 1989; Thompson, 1994). The acquisition of emotion regulation within the family context emerges through three different processes: (a) modelling, (b) parenting practices, and (c) emotional climate (Morris et al., 2007). Concerning modelling, children learn how to respond to others' emotions and when to seek others' emotional support by initially observing how their parents respond in different emotional situations. Through observation,

children will model the use of specific regulation strategies. As children spend more time in other contexts outside the family (e.g., school), they begin to rely on other socialization agents (e.g., peers) for interpersonal emotion regulation (Eisenberg & Morris, 2002). Regarding parenting practices, the way parents respond to children's emotions (e.g., reinforcement, guidance, punishment) can shape the development of both intrinsic (i.e., whether children will seek others to have their emotions regulated; Morris et al., 2007) and extrinsic processes (i.e., whether they will respond in a supportive manner to others' emotions; Denham et al., 2010). Finally, the overall emotional climate within the family, including the levels of warmth, support, and conflict, also plays a crucial role. A positive, nurturing emotional climate fosters a sense of security, enabling children to develop more adaptive interpersonal emotion regulation skills (Repetti et al., 2002).

Intrinsic interpersonal emotion regulation is thought to emerge as early as six months of age (Mangelsdorf et al., 1995). Meanwhile, extrinsic interpersonal emotion regulation takes place somewhat later, as it requires children to understand how another person might be feeling and to comprehend this may be different from their own emotional experience (Dunfield, 2014). Nevertheless, research has shown that as early as 2 years of age children use a wide repertoire of strategies to make others feel better (Farver & Branstetter 1994; Persson, 2005). While younger children (3-4-year-olds) use regulation strategies that might be less cognitively sophisticated (e.g., distracting an upset peer by sharing their teddy), older children (7-8-year-olds) can use more cognitively advanced strategies (e.g., discussing a problem that upsets their friend from a more positive angle; López-Pérez et al., 2016). As children develop and grow, they get better at interpersonal emotion regulation using more adaptive strategies (López-Pérez & Pacella, 2021). However, children are also ready to worsen others' feelings, with research showing how children (9-year-olds) and adolescents (13-year-olds) are motivated to upset perpetrators of social exclusion (Gummerum & López-

Pérez, 2020). Niven (2022) argues that there is theoretical reason to believe that people continue to develop and improve their interpersonal emotion regulation abilities through their adult years and towards older age, due to gains in crystallized intelligence and shifts in motivation towards seeking emotional meaning and connections. However, empirical evidence for this conjecture is embryonic and somewhat mixed (e.g., Gurera et al., 2022).

Difficulties in interpersonal emotion regulation are strongly linked to development and the role played by family members. For example, there is evidence that children with depressed mothers tend to use more maladaptive regulation strategies (e.g., Silk et al., 2006). In the same vein, parenting practices that dismiss children's emotions and family climates that foster insecure or anxious attachment and with high levels of family conflicts have been associated with poorer socioemotional functioning in children and adolescents (Dixon-Gordon et al., 2015a; Morris et al., 2007). Maladaptive intrinsic interpersonal emotion regulation may arise from excessive reliance on others for emotional support (Dixon-Gordon et al., 2015b). For instance, adolescents who excessively sought peer reassurance experienced greater general emotion difficulties (Schwartz-Mette et al., 2021). Conversely, insufficient seeking of emotional support can also be maladaptive (Dixon-Gordon et al., 2015b). Maladaptive extrinsic interpersonal emotion regulation has been documented in fewer studies but there is evidence that adults with Asperger's syndrome engage in more maladaptive and less adaptive extrinsic strategies and that adults with borderline personality disorder tend to improve others' feelings to a lower extent (López-Pérez et al., 2017).

The development of interpersonal emotion regulation may not only be affected by people with whom we interact frequently but also by culture, which shapes how emotions are experienced and expressed (Mesquita et al., 2016). For example, cultural differences have been observed such that East Asians engage more frequently in, and benefit more from, intrinsic interpersonal emotion regulation compared to Western Europeans (Liddell &

Williams, 2018), albeit that other research shows that East Asians are actually less likely to seek support from others during times of stress (e.g., Taylor et al., 2004). Evidence for the role of culture on extrinsic interpersonal emotion regulation is also mixed, with a lack of differences between children from individualist and medium collectivistic cultures observed in some research (López-Pérez & Pacella, 2021), but a study on adults showing that high scores on collectivism predicted using more extrinsic reappraisal (Liu et al., 2023). Other broader social influences on interpersonal emotion regulation and its development may come in the form of norms and socialization around gender, race, or the intersection between these, which can shape and constrain people's opportunities and what is viewed as appropriate interpersonal behavior (Lively & Weed, 2014).

How this Special Issue Furthers Understanding of Interpersonal Emotion Regulation

In this special issue, we present 17 original empirical articles that ask new questions about the process, outcomes, and development of interpersonal emotion regulation. Below, we summarize how these articles build our knowledge across these domains, collectively enhancing our understanding of what interpersonal emotion regulation is and how it functions and evolves.

Process of Interpersonal Emotion Regulation

While conceptual work gives us a sense of how intrinsic and extrinsic interpersonal emotion regulation processes unfold individually, understanding of whether and how these processes intersect remains limited. In this special issue, Pauw and colleagues' study provides important empirical evidence on how interpersonal emotion regulation looks from both the regulator (extrinsic) and target (intrinsic) perspectives. They find that regulators typically respond accurately to the type of regulation (cognitive vs. emotional) desired by targets, and that the perceived emotional intensity of the target influences both the regulation that is desired and that which is provided. Pauw and colleagues' data provide a strong starting point

for research on the interplay between intrinsic and extrinsic regulation processes. Future studies might build on this to ask questions about how regulators and targets perceive the same regulation attempt; how regulators combine both intrinsic and extrinsic strategies within the same interaction; and the more complex, dynamic interplay between regulatory parties over time.

Another area in which we are lacking in knowledge concerns the process of affect-worsening. While it is known that people sometimes deliberately try to worsen others' feelings or even seek out others to worsen their own emotions (e.g., López-Pérez et al., 2017; 2022; Netzer et al., 2015; Niven et al., 2009; 2019b), real-world accounts of affect-worsening are relatively rare. Consequently, we know little about how the process of affect-worsening unfolds. Two articles in our special issue offer insight into this topic. In Polias et al., the authors explore the interplay between regulators' feelings of anger and their engagement in affect-worsening. The reciprocal relation they evidence suggests that anger can prompt individuals to worsen others' feelings, indicating that some instances of affect-worsening may represent a form of 'lashing out' in response to personal anger. In Tran et al., the authors provide an in-depth exploration of motives for extrinsic and intrinsic interpersonal emotion regulation. A particularly valuable aspect of their work is to catalog motives for affect-worsening. Their research suggests that reasons for seeking out affect-worsening from others (intrinsic) include self-punishment, expressing pain, or goal achievement, while reasons for making others feel worse (extrinsic) include punishing others, giving a reality check, and helping others in the long run. A next step for researchers, taking a processual view, might be to explore whether different motives or prompts for affect-worsening translate into the use of distinctive strategies or different ways of implementing interpersonal emotion regulation.

Outcomes of Interpersonal Emotion Regulation

Existing studies document a range of outcomes for interpersonal emotion regulation, but as a research area in its relative infancy, there is still much we do not know about its consequences. Two articles in this special issue advance our understanding in this regard, by comparing the effectiveness of interpersonal emotion regulation to intrapersonal emotion regulation. Sahi and colleagues provide initial evidence that reappraisal with the help of a friend is more effective – both immediately and the following day – compared to solo reappraisal. Swerdlow and Johnson's reanalysis of several secondary datasets further questions whether receiving interpersonal emotion regulation could compensate for difficulties with intrapersonal regulation. Their findings suggest that interpersonal emotion regulation is beneficial even for those who struggle with intrapersonal regulation, although these people may benefit somewhat less from interpersonal emotion regulation than those without such difficulties. Building on the insights from this work, researchers might next seek to identify why interpersonal emotion regulation is potentially more effective than solo regulation. Lemay and colleagues' article in this special issue offers a possible explanation: depending on others for intrinsic interpersonal emotion regulation enhances satisfaction with relationships because it fosters positive relational perceptions, such as seeing others as being supportive, responsive, warm, and virtuous.

Another way that the articles in our special issue further our knowledge in this domain is by extending the range of known outcomes of extrinsic processes. Much of the evidence so far has focused on outcomes for the target, and as noted earlier the small volume of research detailing outcomes for regulators has shown mixed effects, leaving our understanding incomplete. Three articles in the special issue help to push the agenda forward in relation to regulator effects. Jurkiewicz and Oveis provide evidence that improving others' feelings can enhance regulator wellbeing, while Polias and colleagues' study suggests that worsening others' feelings can increase regulator anger. Together, these studies suggest that affect-

improving and affect-worsening are likely to have divergent consequences for regulators. Future research directly capturing potential mechanisms of these outcomes would enhance our theoretical understanding of why these differing effects occur. Meanwhile, Cheshin and colleagues study regulator outcomes in the context of leadership. While existing research reports that leaders can use extrinsic interpersonal emotional regulation to generate positive outcomes for team members (e.g., Madrid et al., 2019), Cheshin and colleagues show that people can also use affect-improving extrinsic strategies to rise to leadership positions. It remains to be seen whether affect-worsening strategies confer similar benefits or whether, mirroring effects on affective outcomes, trying to make others feel worse has negative consequences for leadership emergence. Beyond regulator effects, but still extending the range of outcomes of extrinsic interpersonal emotion regulation, Rosen and colleagues' contribution to the special issue focuses on the novel relationship-level outcomes of sexual satisfaction, distress, and desire within romantic relationships. Their findings highlight some gender differences and raise a broader question about the role played by individual differences, such as gender, in shaping how people respond to others' emotion regulation.

A further extension to knowledge on outcomes provided by articles in this special issue concerns insight into which extrinsic strategies are most effective when trying to change others' feelings. In MacCann and colleagues' article, they present the development and validation of a new measurement tool that captures eight distinctive strategies for improving others' feelings. Their analysis suggests that the level of engagement of the strategy, in terms of how much attention and effortful processing of the target's emotions is required, might transcend its orientation (e.g., being problem vs. relationship focused) in shaping the consequences. They find the high engagement strategies of valuing, cognitive reframing, and receptive listening to be particularly effective for eliciting desirable target outcomes. Whether these same strategies work optimally in all contexts remains a question for future research.

Initial findings reported by Zayas and colleagues in this special issue suggest that the relational context may be a particularly salient factor in shaping the effectiveness of different strategies. They investigated whether short text messages of support could enhance wellbeing around stressful events like exams and found that while messages coming from a partner were effective, those from the research team made little difference. Future studies exploring a wider range of contextual factors, such as the immediate situation necessitating regulation as well as the broader context, would help to present a more nuanced understanding of the outcomes of interpersonal emotion regulation and how and why these might vary.

Development of Interpersonal Emotion Regulation

The development of interpersonal emotion regulation is shaped by different layers, ranging from immediate family and peers (micro level) to the wider cultural context (macro level). At the micro level, existing research has documented how we develop interpersonal emotion regulation through seeking and providing emotional support to others but we know little about which others we choose to engage with during different developmental periods. Kwon and colleagues' article in this issue shows that the peers children turn to for intrinsic interpersonal emotion regulation are not necessarily their friends and that children seek support from different peers depending on whether they are feeling sad or angry. Notably, children who are more often involved in providing extrinsic interpersonal emotion regulation are also chosen by others to receive help in managing their own emotions (intrinsic interpersonal emotion regulation). Relying on different partners for emotional support is not exclusive to children and the work by Springstein et al. in this special issue shows that older adults are less likely than their younger counterparts to share negative emotions with others and are perceived by others as less effective partners for sharing these emotions. However, older adults are preferable social partners for the specific strategy of co-reappraisal (i.e., a strategy where two or more individuals work collaboratively to reinterpret a situation to

change its emotional impact), potentially due to their life experience. Future research could build on these findings to investigate how interpersonal emotion regulation changes across developmental stages, aiming to identify the most influential factors at each stage that shape who we choose to engage with emotionally.

Also at the micro level, researchers have given focus to difficulties in interpersonal emotion regulation and their impact on mental health within the context of family relationships. Research in this special issue by Gadassi-Polack et al. and Zhao et al. sheds light on the complex dynamics of interpersonal emotion regulation within families, highlighting both its potential benefits and pitfalls. Gadassi-Polack and colleagues investigated whether the use of extrinsic interpersonal emotion regulation by parents and their adolescent children could affect depressive symptoms. They found that both parents and adolescents experienced more depressive symptoms with the use of extrinsic affect-worsening. Interestingly, while adolescents did benefit from their efforts to improve others' emotions, parental use of extrinsic affect-improvement strategies was linked to increased depressive symptoms over time in both themselves and their adolescents. This suggests a need to better understand when and why efforts to improve others' feelings can backfire, negatively impacting both the regulator and the target. Zhao and colleagues' findings provide a potential explanation here, based on how we think about happiness. They found that *aspiring* for others to be happy is a functional way of valuing happiness, enabling more effective extrinsic regulation of children's and partners' emotions. However, being *concerned about* happiness makes people less accepting of their children's and partners' distress and predicts poorer mental health outcomes for those family members. Thus, our underlying attitudes to emotions may influence how we regulate others' feelings and the consequences of our regulatory efforts. Future research could investigate further how adaptive and maladaptive interpersonal emotion regulation can contribute to clinical symptoms and mental

health conditions, and whether such regulation can be changed through intervention to benefit clinical outcomes.

At the macro level, interpersonal emotion regulation can be influenced by cultural practices, as culture can shape social norms, values, and expectations about how emotions are experienced, shared, and managed. Despite the relevance of this topic, only a handful of previous studies looked at potential cross-cultural differences in interpersonal emotion regulation with mixed results. In the special issue, two articles address this important gap. Li and colleagues report evidence across three studies that Asians engage less in hedonic extrinsic interpersonal emotion regulation (i.e., increasing positive feelings in others) and benefit less from their romantic partner's use of this process, compared with European Americans. Pruessner and Altan-Atalay investigate whether the use of intrinsic interpersonal emotion regulation strategies differs by culture, finding that participants from a more individualist culture (Germany) prefer soothing and perspective-taking more than those from a more collectivist culture (Turkey). They also report that the use of strategies for managing negative emotions is associated with better mental health outcomes for individualist but not collectivist participants. The obtained findings suggest the importance of conducting more cross-cultural studies to better understand the nuances of socioemotional interactions across different cultures. It will also be important to look at what specific cultural dimensions, norms, and values can account for cross-cultural differences in interpersonal emotion regulation rather than taking countries as proxies.

The Path Forward

In this editorial, we have highlighted how the articles in this special issue advance our understanding of the process and outcomes of interpersonal emotion regulation as well as how interpersonal emotion regulation develops through the lifespan. In doing so, we have also noted questions that we believe are particularly important for researchers to pursue to

move the field forward in the coming years. Here, we elaborate on some of the challenges that researchers might face as they seek to progress our knowledge, then consider some potential solutions.

A key challenge concerns how conscious people are of either seeking (intrinsic) or enacting (extrinsic) interpersonal emotion regulation, which can make it difficult to collect accurate self-report data on the process. There are also instances in which regulation efforts might have unintended effects—for example, when a regulator upsets a target even when trying to make them feel better—that those involved may not be consciously aware of. Compounding this problem is the fact that certain aspects of interpersonal emotion regulation, such as affect-worsening and more self-focused (egoistic) motives, may be less socially desirable to report, meaning that even when people are aware of what they are seeking or doing, they may not wish to report this truthfully. The dynamic nature of the process further means that interpersonal emotion regulation attempts are often fleeting, leading people to retrospectively misremember events or only recall the most salient or effective interactions. This can result in losing vital information, for example, about failed regulation attempts. In addition, the inherently social nature of the process involves multiple perspectives, which can be challenging to capture fully and in a timely manner.

Some of the articles in this special issue adopt methods that may be promising in addressing these issues. Ecological momentary assessments and diary methods, such as those used by Polias and colleagues, Jurkiewicz and Oveis, Tran and colleagues, and Zayas and colleagues, involve collection of (close to) real-time data and can be helpful in reducing retrospective recall biases. They can also be combined with a dyadic approach, as in Rosen and colleagues, to capture multiple perspectives on relationships as they unfold. While such data can be time-consuming and costly to collect, making use of secondary datasets that have adopted this method, as in Swerdlow and Johnson, can help to reduce costs and make the best

use of available data. Fortunately, researchers are increasingly engaging with open access and attempts to collate existing datasets, notably the EMOTE database (Kalokerinos et al., in preparation), are bringing together experience sampling data that could help researchers to answer novel questions on interpersonal emotion regulation.

The video-cued recall method used by Pauw and colleagues and Lemay and colleagues may also be particularly promising because it allows researchers to study an interaction involving interpersonal emotion regulation in a high level of depth, through directly accessing the perspectives of both parties involved immediately after the interaction. The ability to subject the data obtained using such a study design to independent coding, as in Lemay and colleagues, also means that to some extent self-report biases and issues with lack of conscious awareness can be addressed. A common framework for coding a broad range of interpersonal emotion regulation strategies would be particularly advantageous moving forward to combine with this type of method. The use of social network analysis by Kwon and colleagues can also be helpful to better understand interpersonal emotion regulation dynamics in contexts where multiple regulators and targets operate, providing access to a multitude of perspectives.

There are many further promising methods not featured in the articles in this issue that we encourage researchers to consider as they might be of help in overcoming the challenges we have identified. First, Artificial Intelligence (AI) may provide valuable tools for the analysis of data derived from interpersonal emotion regulation conversations (e.g., as gathered using video recordings). AI has started being used to study emotion recognition and understanding (Khare et al., 2023), with algorithms able to process large volumes of data and identify patterns (e.g., whether certain regulation strategies or motives have been mentioned). A particular form of AI that holds promise for studying interpersonal emotion regulation is Natural Language Processing (NLP), which has been used previously for emotion

identification both in basic and applied research (e.g., Tanana et al., 2021). This method could potentially be used to evaluate semantic and prosodic aspects of conversations that take place during interpersonal emotion regulation, overcoming concerns of social desirability, as it does not rely on participants' self-reports. Importantly, NLP can identify subtle cues and patterns of speech that individuals might not be consciously aware of, providing an opportunity to investigate instances of interpersonal emotion regulation where people might not be fully aware of engaging in the process.

Second, the use of virtual reality can be particularly helpful for simulating a range of social contexts and allowing participants to engage in lifelike, yet controlled situations. This method has been used to study human interactions (for a review see Pan & Hamilton, 2018) and it has potential for application to interpersonal emotion regulation, allowing for enhanced ecological validity relative to traditional laboratory studies by mimicking real-world interactions. Virtual reality can be particularly helpful for studying the fleeting nature of interpersonal emotion regulation by capturing the process in real time while maintain a controlled environment. Finally, it can aid in acquiring multiple perspectives by simulating various scenarios where participants can experience different viewpoints and see how they engage in both intrinsic and extrinsic interpersonal emotion regulation. In the same vein, serious games have been helpful in the assessment of interpersonal emotion regulation (López-Pérez & Pacella, 2021; Pacella & López-Pérez, 2018). This method can be a good alternative to overcome issues of social desirability but also a way to implement interventions, especially in children and adolescents.

Finally, the use of computer modeling can be of help in creating detailed simulations to aid in hypothesis testing and theory development. This method has been extensively used to simulate emotions artificially (Kowalczuk & Czubenko, 2016) and there is potential to adapt it to understand interpersonal emotion regulation. For example, researchers can run

numerous simulations with varying conditions to identify patterns and shed light on the nuanced contextual and individual factors that shape interpersonal emotion regulation and its consequences. Methods like these may help researchers not only to explore the questions posed in this editorial, but also to identify and answer new questions about interpersonal emotion regulation.

To conclude, we wish to thank all the authors who submitted their work for consideration, especially those whose work features in this special issue, the reviewers for being so generous with their time and constructive feedback, and Naomi for her support and belief in this project. We are excited to see the research that the articles here stimulate.

Karen and Belen

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