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Why Do We Engage in Everyday Interpersonal Emotion Regulation?

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Interpersonal emotion regulation occurs when people influence others' emotions (extrinsic regulation) or turn to others to influence their own emotions (intrinsic regulation). Research on interpersonal regulation has tended to focus on *how* people regulate emotions, with little interrogation of *why* people do it, despite the importance of motives in driving emotion regulation goals and strategy selection. To fill this gap, we conducted a systematic exploration of interpersonal emotion regulation motives, employing a participant-driven approach to document the breadth of motives that people hold across different social contexts. Study 1a (N = 100) provided an initial qualitative examination of motives for both intrinsic and extrinsic interpersonal emotion regulation. Study 1b (N = 399) quantitatively catalogued these motives in recalled social interactions. Study 2 (N = 200), a daily diary study, used the motive taxonomy generated in Studies 1a and 1b to understand why people regulated their own and others' emotions in everyday social interactions over the course of 14 days. Together, our findings reveal the diversity of intrinsic and extrinsic interpersonal emotion regulation motives and open avenues to further explore motives both as a precursor to and an outcome of regulatory processes in daily life.

Keywords: interpersonal emotion regulation, emotion regulation, motive, daily diary

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Why do you turn to your friends when the going gets tough? Or console them when they are down? Why does a loving parent scold their child? Or guilt-trip them into doing the dishes? Understanding people's motivations for engaging in interpersonal emotion regulation is more than an intellectual curiosity; it holds the key to unlocking insights about the means through which people influence their own and others' emotions in social contexts. Indeed, motives—the higher order desired outcomes of regulation—are the overarching factor guiding regulatory processes, including the specific goal people have for regulation and the strategies they use to achieve that goal (Tamir et al., 2020; Tamir & Millgram, 2017). Knowing what motives people have when they regulate interpersonally is therefore the first step to understanding subsequent regulation behaviors. Nevertheless, the literature currently lacks a comprehensive catalogue of the different motivations that give rise to interpersonal emotion regulation.

In the current research, we aimed to identify common motives that people report for engaging in *intrinsic* interpersonal emotion regulation (i.e., regulating one's own emotions through social contact) and *extrinsic* interpersonal emotion regulation (i.e., regulating others' emotions; Zaki & Williams, 2013). We conducted two preliminary studies using open-ended responses to generate a catalogue of motives (Study 1a), which were refined in another sample (Study 1b). Finally, in Study 2, we used daily diary methodology to explore how often these motives occurred in everyday social interactions and which motives tended to occur together. These studies strive to map the as-yet uncharted space of interpersonal emotion regulation motives, providing a new way of conceptualizing the nature and success of regulation, and laying the foundation to investigate motive both as a precursor to and an outcome of regulatory processes.

Motivated (Interpersonal) Emotion Regulation

The fields of self-regulation and goal pursuit have long recognized the importance of studying motives in understanding

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downstream regulatory goals and behaviors. Research in self-regulation is guided first and foremost by *why* people do something, before investigating *how* they do it (Gollwitzer & Moskowitz, 1996). This is because how people do things (i.e., regulatory action) is driven by what they want (i.e., concrete goal), which is ultimately in service of why they want it (i.e., abstract motive; Carver & Scheier, 2000).

The motivated approach to emotion regulation posits that, because emotion regulation is a form of self-regulation, emotion regulation processes are also hierarchically nested, with motive at the top of the hierarchy (Tamir et al., 2020; Tamir & Millgram, 2017). Accordingly, emotional experiences can be shaped by: (a) people's higher order motive or *why* they engage in emotion regulation, which in turn influences (b) their emotion regulation goal or *what* they want to feel through emotion regulation, which is related to (c) the emotion regulation strategy they use to meet that goal or *how* they engage in emotion regulation. Therefore, changes in emotional experiences may not necessarily be the ultimate desired outcome when people engage in emotion regulation (e.g., Rimé et al., 2020). Rather, we can also conceptualize the effectiveness of regulation as the degree to which the motive of regulation is satisfied. This centrality of motives in emotion regulation calls for a better understanding of what these motives are, so as to better study whether and how they are met.

Existing Taxonomies of Emotion Regulation Motives

Intrapersonal Emotion Regulation

Most existing work on emotion regulation motives has come from the more established literature on *intrapersonal* emotion regulation. Traditionally, and perhaps intuitively, research was guided by the assumption that motives were *prohedonic* by default. That is, people always want to feel good and avoid feeling bad (e.g., Thayer, 2000; Westen, 1994). However, more recent research shows people can also regulate emotions because they see emotions as beneficial for goal pursuit, such as to promote collaboration (Van Kleef et al., 2004), manage impressions (Gulliford et al., 2019), or foster intimacy (Sels et al., 2021).

Tamir (2016) was among the first to taxonomize intrapersonal emotion regulation motives in a theoretical framework, guided by the broad classes of desired outcomes that emotion regulation can help people achieve. In this framework, there are two categories of motives: *hedonic* and *instrumental*. Hedonic motives involve regulating emotions for their inherent feeling of pleasure (prohedonic) or displeasure (contrahedonic). In contrast, instrumental motives involve emotion regulation as means to an end, such as to accomplish some tasks (performance), to shape relationships (social), to attain information (epistemic), or to promote meaning and a sense of self (eudaimonic). Empirical evidence lends support to this theoretical framework, although epistemic and eudaimonic motives appeared to be quite rare (Kalokerinos et al., 2017; Weidman & Kross, 2021).

While foundational in taxonomizing intrapersonal emotion regulation motives, this framework cannot be assumed to map directly onto interpersonal emotion regulation motives. First, although both intrapersonal emotion regulation and intrinsic interpersonal emotion regulation involve regulating one's own emotions, intrinsic interpersonal emotion regulation involves the intent to regulate one's own emotions *through social means* (Zaki & Williams, 2013). Such a distinction introduces interpersonal processes into regulation, which can alter how people regulate (Koole et al., 2006). Second, this taxonomy does not cover extrinsic interpersonal emotion regulation nor is it intended to. Extrinsic regulation targets the emotions of others and is conceptually distinct from intrapersonal emotion regulation (Nozaki & Mikolajczak, 2020). As such, to understand interpersonal emotion regulation motives requires a framework developed specifically for this purpose.

Interpersonal Emotion Regulation

There have been two endeavors to taxonomize interpersonal emotion regulation motives. In turn, we discuss their unique merits and where they can be built upon to provide more holistic insights into why people engage in interpersonal emotion regulation. First, Springstein et al. (2023) pioneered efforts to adapt elements of Tamir's (2016) motive taxonomy to the interpersonal space, by examining daily instances in which people regulated others' emotions. Because of the interpersonal nature of regulation, this work further delineated social motives into four subcategories: impression management, relationship maintenance, relationship distancing, and emotional similarity. The authors found the relationship maintenance motive was most strongly endorsed in daily interactions. These findings support the need for a motive taxonomy specific to interpersonal emotion regulation. Nevertheless, this work only focuses on extrinsic regulation, with intrinsic regulation remaining uncharted territory.

Another theoretical framework to taxonomize interpersonal motives was proposed by Niven (2016), with a specific focus on extrinsic regulation in organizational contexts. Drawing on self-determination theory, this framework proposed that the three needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence can combine in various ways to form different motives. For example, someone with high autonomy, relatedness, and competence needs might regulate others' emotions with a motive to coach and promote others' performance in the workplace. While useful in providing the first effort to catalogue why people regulate others' emotions at work, this taxonomy is not ideal to study interpersonal emotion regulation motives more broadly for a few reasons. First, its specific focus on extrinsic regulation in organizational contexts means that not only is intrinsic regulation not covered, but generalizability across contexts is also limited. As such, this taxonomy potentially precludes motives that may only occur in nonworkplace settings, such as intimate and familial relationships. Second, because this taxonomy was developed with a theory-driven approach, it has not been empirically examined in everyday social interaction contexts.

Furthermore, neither of these works investigate instances where people engage in *affect-worsening* interpersonal emotion regulation, either intrinsically or extrinsically. Affect-worsening regulation refers to the deliberate worsening of one's own or others' emotions (Niven et al., 2011). It concerns the desired directional change in emotion (Tamir, 2021) and is in itself agnostic to any specific motive (i.e., desired end goal). Indeed, although theory posit affect-worsening regulation can serve a contrahedonic motive (i.e., the inherent phenomenology of negative emotions; Tamir, 2016), empirical evidence from experimental studies suggests affect-worsening regulation can also have both self-serving (Netzer et al., 2015) and altruistic motives (López-Pérez et al., 2017; Niven et al., 2019).

Although everyday affect-worsening interpersonal emotion regulation is rare (Tran et al., 2023), it is a conceptually distinct construct that thus far has received comparatively little research attention (Gross, 2014). This scarcity may be in part due to the assumption that emotion regulation is always engaged with the goal of feeling better (Westen, 1994). However, the lack of research on affect-worsening regulation is detrimental to our understanding of everyday regulation motives. Given that differences in strategies existing between upregulating positive emotions and downregulating negative emotions to feel better (see Livingstone & Srivastava, 2012; Parkinson & Totterdell, 1999, for a comparison), one would expect differences in motives to exist between wanting oneself/others to feel better and worse.

Taken together, the scope of extant works on interpersonal motives means that we do not have a comprehensive understanding of why people engage in intrinsic and extrinsic affect-improving and affect-worsening regulation across different daily contexts. Filling this gap would help researchers refine theoretical models of interpersonal emotion regulation and provide practical insights into how different motives can influence regulation outcomes (Niven et al., 2019).

An Integrated Approach to Interpersonal Emotion Regulation Motives in Everyday Life

Existing taxonomies have been foundational in the study of motives in their specific domain of inquiry. However, by omitting the exploration of intrinsic interpersonal emotion regulation and more diverse daily social contexts, they offer an incomplete picture of the breadth of interpersonal emotion regulation motives. A bottom-up or participant-driven approach would provide additional insights to complement existing top-down or theory-driven taxonomies. In adopting both top-down and bottom-up approaches, we aim to build a taxonomy that reflects everyday motives for both intrinsic and extrinsic interpersonal emotion regulation that complement existing theoretical insights.

A bottom-up approach, termed the "common sense" approach by Heider (1958), investigates psychological phenomena from participants' perspective. While this approach has been embraced in domains such as close relationships (Fletcher & Thomas, 1996), groups (Lickel et al., 2001), emotion beliefs (Ong et al., 2015), and emotion regulation strategies (Livingstone & Srivastava, 2012), it has not been applied to study motives.

Heider (1958) argued that insights from participants play a crucial role in advancing theoretical knowledge for two reasons. First, participants can help researchers identify where theoretical frameworks do and do not map well onto what they encounter in daily life. Indeed, other motives may exist outside of those that extant theoretical frameworks have proposed (Springstein et al., 2023). As such, to scope the space of motives more fully, participants' insights provide a useful starting point, as they complement theoretical frameworks to fill in a more complete picture of the motive landscape. Second, since people's beliefs shape how they think, feel, and behave (see Zedelius et al., 2017, for a review), exploring what people think is motivating them to regulate may provide important insights into downstream regulatory processes. This benefit is particularly important for our line of research, given that motive is the higher order precursor of regulatory goals and strategies (Tamir et al., 2020).

The Present Research

Given the need to gain a rounded understanding of interpersonal emotion regulation motives that is rooted in participants' everyday experiences as well as theory, we conducted a series of studies that integrate bottom-up and top-down elements. Studies 1a and 1b aimed to establish a taxonomy of motives that people report holding through cross-sectional self-reports. Study 2 used daily diary methodology to explore the frequency and co-occurrence of motives in different social interactions across 2 weeks.

Through these methods, the aim of this article is not to develop and validate a scale to measure regulation motives. Rather, we aim to create a comprehensive empirical documentation of motives for both intrinsic and extrinsic interpersonal emotion regulation, including what these motives are, how often they occur, and which motives tend to occur together. Scoping the "lay of the land" in this way will (a) provide a means for researchers to study this important but underexplored concept; (b) generate insight into the reasons why people engage in interpersonal emotion regulation; and (c) open a new avenue of research that seeks to map motives onto the goals, strategies, and outcomes of interpersonal emotion regulation.

Study 1a: Motive Generation

Study 1a aimed to generate a corpus of possible reasons why people may regulate their own and others' emotions. To do this, we used cross-sectional self-report to directly ask participants about their reasons to regulate emotions in their most recent intrinsic and extrinsic interpersonal emotion regulation episodes. Interpersonal emotion regulation is characterized by its deliberate and conscious nature (Niven, 2017; Zaki & Williams, 2013), and while motives can be implicit or explicit (McClelland et al., 1989), explicit motives are more likely to predict conscious behavior and can be more easily captured using self-report than implicit motives (Perugini et al., 2010; Schultheiss & Köllner, 2021).

To elicit as many responses as possible, we delineated interpersonal emotion regulation along two dimensions: type (intrinsic vs. extrinsic; Zaki & Williams, 2013) and direction (affect improving vs. affect worsening; Niven et al., 2011). Structuring how we elicited responses from participants along these two dimensions enables us to capture motives that may be potentially unique to affect-improving regulation and, separately, affect-worsening regulation.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Study 1a received ethics approval from the University of Melbourne's Human Research Ethics Committee (ID: 21850). We followed Fusch and Ness's (2015) guideline for qualitative sample size sufficiency, which posits that response saturation is the point during data collection at which the ability to obtain new information has been attained. As a start, we recruited 100 participants based on available funding. Inspection of data revealed that responses were saturated, which meant further data collection would not be likely to obtain new information.

The final sample comprised 100 participants (M_{age} = 28.97, SD_{age} = 7.62; 54% women; 66% White) recruited through https://www.Prolific.co and reimbursed £1.25 to complete a 10-min survey. Participants were of various nationalities, with the majority

evenly split between British and South African, each comprising 20%. A more detailed breakdown of demographic information can be found in Supplemental Material A.

The study had a mixed design, with type of regulation manipulated between subjects and direction of regulation manipulated within subjects. Participants were randomly assigned between subjects to answer questions in one of two conditions: intrinsic interpersonal emotion regulation ($n = 48$) or extrinsic interpersonal emotion regulation ($n = 52$). Within each condition, participants answered questions about both affect-improving and affect-worsening regulation instances. The study codebook is available at https://osf.io/95z8w/.

Measures

Interpersonal Emotion Regulation Instructional Prompt. We asked participants to reflect on a recent social interaction where they turned to others to influence their own emotions (intrinsic) or where they influenced others' emotions (extrinsic). For intrinsic regulation, participants were prompted to recall a recent interaction in which they turned to others to feel better (affect improving) or worse (affect worsening). For extrinsic regulation, participants were prompted to recall a recent interaction in which they made another person feel better or worse. Instructional prompts were adapted from Niven et al. (2011).

Interpersonal Emotion Regulation Context. After reflecting on each interaction, participants indicated their relationship with their interaction partner and described the situation they were in and the emotion they wanted to feel (intrinsic) or wanted others to feel (extrinsic).

Interpersonal Emotion Regulation Motives. After reporting on the emotion they wanted to feel (intrinsic) or wanted others to feel (extrinsic), participants completed the open-ended prompt, "I wanted to feel this way because …" (intrinsic) or "I wanted them to feel this way because …" (extrinsic). In addition to these specific instances, participants were also asked to list all the reasons why they generally improved and worsened their own or others' emotion.

Data Analytic Strategy

The analysis plan was preregistered at https://aspredicted.org/F6K_24C, and de-identified data are available at https://osf.io/95z8w/.

Response Cleaning. Data were organized into four quadrants: (1) intrinsic affect-improving regulation, (2) intrinsic affect-worsening regulation, (3) extrinsic affect-improving regulation, and (4) extrinsic affect-worsening regulation. We eliminated any unclear and nonsensical responses, keeping only responses that indicated a clear reason to engage in interpersonal emotion regulation. As a result, 10 responses (21%) were eliminated from the intrinsic affect-worsening quadrant and two responses (4%) from extrinsic affect-worsening. Responses containing more than one motive were split into separate motives.

Response Coding. For each quadrant, one rater content-coded responses, by grouping highly similar narratives based on how their patterns of meanings could be combined into a single overarching motive that reflected a broader theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This list of motives acted as a coding scheme for two other raters to code a random subset of 10 responses per quadrant. Raters showed strong agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977), with Fleiss' κ coefficients ranging from .70 to .85.

Results

Most social interactions occurred between friends (29%), romantic partners (27%), family members (21%), and colleagues/classmates (11%). Frequencies of each motive are displayed in Table 1. Participants provided 106 descriptions for intrinsic affect-improving regulation, grouped into eight overarching motives. Participants recalled fewer instances of intrinsic affect-worsening regulation, coming up with 67 descriptions, grouped into nine unique motives. Extrinsic affect-improving regulation yielded 123 descriptions, grouped into 10 unique motives. Last, participants generated 109 descriptions for extrinsic affect-worsening regulation, grouped into 11 unique motives.

Overall, purely prohedonic motives accounted for roughly one third of all motives in both affect-improving quadrants, but purely *contrahedonic* motives were not present in either of the affect-worsening quadrants. This finding suggested that participants may have engaged in affect-worsening regulation with instrumental motives in mind. Intrinsically, when participants had a goal to feel worse, they most commonly did so to *punish themselves* for a wrongdoing, to *express* how upset they were, or to achieve a *goal*. Extrinsically, participants desired to make others feel worse most often to *punish* or to seek *revenge*, to personally achieve a goal, or to give others a *reality check* and *help others* in the long run.

Study 1b: Motive Refinement

Study 1a offered an exploratory look into the breadth of motives that participants nominated for regulating their own and others' emotions. Study 1b aimed to map these motives in a larger sample and to refine the list of motives for a more streamlined taxonomy.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Study 1b received ethics approval from the University of Melbourne's Human Research Ethics Committee (ID: 21850). Due to the descriptive and exploratory nature of the study, in lieu of a formal power analysis, the sample size was determined by our available funding. The final sample consisted of 399[1] U.K.-demographically representative participants (M_{age} = 44.38, SD_{age} = 15.56; 50% women; 77% White) from https://www.Prolific.co. More detailed demographic information is in Supplemental Material A. Participants were reimbursed £1.88 to complete a 15-min within-person cross-sectional survey about the most recent instances where they engaged in each of the following: (a) intrinsic affect-improving regulation, (b) intrinsic affect-worsening regulation, (c) extrinsic affect-improving regulation, and (d) extrinsic affect-worsening regulation (see detailed list of measures at https://osf.io/95z8w/).

Measures

Interpersonal Emotion Regulation Instructional Prompts and Contextual Questions. Instructional prompts, questions on

[1] Two participants were excluded prior to analysis for the following reasons: one provided nonsensical open-ended responses, and one experienced technical issues.

Table 1

Content Analysis of Interpersonal Emotion Regulation Motives in Study 1a

Direction	Intrinsic motive	Illustrative quote	Frequency	%	Extrinsic motive	Illustrative quote	Frequency	%
Affect-improving	To feel better	"I don't like being anxious"	31	29.2	To help them feel better	"I want them to feel good"	40	32.5
	To seek validation/comfort/ reassurance	"I needed to seek comfort during a hard time"	21	19.8	To feel helpful or good about myself	"It's a good feeling to make someone feel better"	19	15.4
	To seek clarity/perspective/ advice	"Help me see the reality from a different point of view"	20	18.9	Because I like them or care about them	"I care about them"	18	14.6
	To build/maintain relationships	"A shared connection with people around me"	11	10.4	To relieve my own discomfort	"Their bad mood is affecting me"	13	10.6
	To get something done/ achieve a goal	"Help me get myself ready for the exam"	10	9.4	To help them see things in a different light	"To realize that the breakup was not their fault"	12	9.8
	To vent	"To release the feeling"	7	6.6	To get them to do something	"To increase their productivity"	7	5.7
	To seek distraction	"Take my mind off things"	3	2.8	To build/maintain relationships	'To earn trust"	6	4.9
	Because I can't do it on my own	"I need help with a problem I can't solve alone"	3	2.8	Because I feel for them	"I know what being overwhelmed with stress is like"	4	3.3
					To defuse a negative situation	"They're angry and I'm afraid they will hurt me"	3	2.4
					Because I felt obligated	"It's my job to help people"	1	0.8
Affect-worsening	To punish myself for something I did	"I was wrong and I needed someone to scold me"	16	23.9	To seek revenge for something they did to me	"A taste of their own medicine is okay"	29	26.6
	To express discontent	"I needed to let out my frustration"	16	23.9	To punish them for something they did to others	"They were rude for making another person uncomfortable"	25	22.9
	To get a reality checked	"I needed a reality check"	10	14.9	To give them a reality check	"I want to make sure they understand the drawbacks"	10	9.2
	To solve a problem/achieve a goal	"I wanted to feel pressured to finish the assignment"	9	13.4	To achieve a goal	"For them to allow me to do my work"	9	8.3
	To validate my negative mood	"To empower my negative emotions"	5	7.5	To help them in the long run	"To prevent them from feeling even worse later on"	7	6.4
	To seek attention	"I don't feel heard"	5	7.5	Because I am in a bad mood	"I am already in a bad mood"	6	5.5
	To validate my negative self-concept	"Depression and other mental health issues"	3	4.5	To boost my ego	"To perhaps feel better about myself"	6	5.5
	To empathize/commiserate with another person	"I just wanted to share their feeling of annoyance"	2	3.0	Because I dislike them	"I don't like them"	5	4.6
	To assert power	"Power move"	1	1.5	To get them to own up to their mistake/behavior	"I wanted them to recognise their mistake"	5	4.6
					To get them to see my perspective	"I wanted them to understand why they acted wrong in my perspective"	4	3.7
					Because I am jealous of them	"They were better than me at something I really enjoy"	3	2.8

relationship with the interaction partner, situational context, and emotion goals were the same as in Study 1a.

Interpersonal Emotion Regulation Motives. After reporting on the emotion they wanted to feel (intrinsic) or wanted others to feel (extrinsic), participants were asked, "Why did you turn to another person to help you feel this way?" (intrinsic) or "Why did you want this person to feel this way?" (extrinsic), choosing from a randomized checklist of response options (see Table 2). Participants could also indicate if they had another motive not listed and provide an open-ended response describing what it was or if they had no motive.

Ease of Recall. Following the questions on motive for each of the four instances of interpersonal emotion regulation (intrinsic affect improving, intrinsic affect worsening, extrinsic affect improving, and extrinsic affect worsening), participants reported how easy it was to recall an interaction in which that instance of regulation occurred from 1 = *extremely easy* to 5 = *extremely difficult*. They could also select option 6 = *I could not recall an instance that fits this description*.

Data Analytic Strategy

De-identified data are available at https://osf.io/95z8w/. We preregistered our planned descriptive statistics at https://aspredicted.org/F6K_24C. Data were first organized into four quadrants: (1) intrinsic affect improving, (2) intrinsic affect worsening, (3) extrinsic affect improving, and (4) extrinsic affect worsening. For each quadrant, we first excluded responses from participants who were unable to recall any instances of engaging in that particular type of regulation.[2] A post hoc addition of this step was done to ensure that responses reflected a real and salient instance of regulation.

We recoded open-ended responses where participants indicated they had another reason not listed to determine their fit with existing categories. One rater reviewed all responses and checked the allocation of a subset of responses with the second and third raters. There was no disagreement between raters. Overall, there were nine (2%) "other" responses for intrinsic affect improving, six of which were recategorized into existing categories, and 20 (6%) for intrinsic affect worsening, 13 of which were recategorized. There were 11 (3%) "other" responses for extrinsic affect-improving, seven of which were recategorized, and 22 (7%) for extrinsic affect-worsening, 15 of which were recategorized. The remaining "other" responses were kept in their original form.

Results

Motive Frequency

Overall, most social interactions occurred between friends (40%), family members (22%), romantic partners (17%), and colleagues/classmates (11%). Regarding ease of recall, participants had the hardest time recalling instances of intrinsic affect-worsening regulation (M = 3.92, SD = 1.64), followed by extrinsic affect-worsening regulation (M = 3.49, SD = 1.72), intrinsic affect-improving regulation (M = 2.17, SD = 1.29), and extrinsic affect-improving regulation (M = 1.76, SD = 1.07).

Frequencies with which each response option was observed are displayed in Table 2. The taxonomy appeared to capture a broad range of responses from a demographically representative sample, with responses that did not fit into any category accounting for only 1%–2% of instances. Furthermore, only 0%–2% participants across the categories indicated that they had no reason to regulate, suggesting that the vast majority engaged in motivated interpersonal emotion regulation.

Motive Refinement

Because the purpose of this study was to streamline the taxonomy, we (a) eliminated or reworded items participants nominated that did not clearly fit the definition of motive as an abstract desired outcome that can be attained through emotion regulation (Tamir, 2016) and (b) examined co-occurrences of motives and combined motives that were conceptually similar *and* significantly correlated. This process simplified the list of motives while still retaining the higher order meaning of the items. To do this, we first calculated Spearman's ρ nonparametric correlations using the package psych (Revelle, 2022) in R (Version 4.1.0). Each motive pair within each of the four quadrants was correlated on their presence versus absence (coded as 1 vs. 0), with the coefficient (ranging from −1 to 1) representing the extent to which they were selected together in participants' responses. Correlation matrices are in Supplemental Material B. Tables 3 and 4 summarize our decisions for intrinsic and extrinsic regulation motives, respectively. The refinement process resulted in six motives for intrinsic affect-improving regulation, seven motives for intrinsic affect-worsening regulation, six motives for extrinsic affect-improving regulation, and six motives for extrinsic affect-worsening regulation. We next turned to Study 2 to document the frequency of these motives in everyday life.

Study 2: Motives in Everyday Life

Studies 1a and 1b documented a broad range of motives that participants reported for regulating their own and others' emotions. Study 2 aimed to explore the frequency and co-occurrence of these motives in everyday social interactions using daily diary method. This technique, wherein participants complete an end-of-day report about experiences they had during the day, is suitable for studying interpersonal emotion regulation for several reasons. First, because daily diary captures "life as it is lived" (Bolger et al., 2003), it allows us to investigate personally meaningful and consequential emotional experiences that are important for regulation processes (Kuppens et al., 2022). Second, since the responses reflect experiences that occur on the same day, they are likely more recent and salient compared to experiences recalled during retrospective cross-sectional surveys. This method is thus well-poised to explore transient phenomena like emotional experiences that are prone to recall biases (Wilhelm & Grossman, 2010), thereby allowing us to get a more accurate estimate of frequencies with which motives occur. Daily diaries therefore offer an ecologically valid and holistic window into the motives of interpersonal emotion regulation across different daily contexts.

[2] This process excluded 7 (1%) responses from intrinsic affect-improving regulation, 77 (19%) from intrinsic affect-worsening regulation, 5 (1%) from extrinsic affect-improving regulation, and 66 (16%) from extrinsic affect-worsening regulation.

Table 2
Motive Frequency in Study 1b

Direction	Intrinsic motive	Frequency	%	Extrinsic motive	Frequency	%
Affect-improving	I wanted to seek validation, comfort, or reassurance.	230	22.0	I wanted to make them feel better.	313	19.5
	I wanted to feel better.	198	18.9	I like them or care about them.	291	18.1
	I wanted to vent or get something off my chest.	183	17.5	I understood their feelings or what they were going through.	229	14.3
	I wanted to seek advice, clarity, or another perspective.	180	17.2	I wanted to offer advice, clarity, or another perspective.	217	13.5
	I wanted to distract myself.	103	9.9	I felt sorry for them.	132	8.2
	I was unable to resolve things on my own.	62	5.9	I wanted to maintain or build a good relationship.	117	7.3
	I wanted to maintain or build a good relationship.	47	4.5	I wanted to defuse a negative situation.	92	5.7
	I wanted to achieve a goal or get something done.	36	3.4	I wanted to get them to achieve a goal or do something.	69	4.3
	I had another reason.	3	0.3	I felt like I had to.	64	4.0
	I did not have a reason.	3	0.3	I wanted to feel helpful or good about myself.	48	3.0
				I wanted to relieve my own discomfort.	30	1.9
				I had another reason.	4	0.2
				I did not have a reason.	0	0.0
Affect-worsening	I wanted to express how upset I was about something.	171	24.7	I wanted to give them a reality check or to manage their expectations.	183	20.6
	I wanted them to give me a reality check or manage my expectations.	110	15.9	I wanted them to understand my feelings or what I was going through.	148	16.6
	I wanted them to validate my mood.	106	15.3	I wanted to get them to apologize.	124	13.9
	I wanted them to validate how I saw myself.	70	10.1	I was in a bad mood.	81	9.1
	I wanted to understand their feelings or what they were going through.	60	8.7	I wanted to punish them for something they had done to others.	76	8.5
	I wanted their attention.	51	7.4	I wanted to seek revenge for something they had done to me.	61	6.9
	I wanted to punish myself for something I did.	49	7.1	I wanted to achieve a goal or get something done.	60	6.7
	I wanted to achieve a goal or get something done.	45	6.5	I wanted to help them.	52	5.8
	I wanted to feel powerful.	16	2.3	I dislike them.	53	6.0
	I had another reason.	7	1.0	I wanted to feel better about myself.	30	3.4
	I did not have a reason.	7	1.0	I was jealous of them.	10	1.1
				I had another reason.	7	0.8
				I did not have a reason.	4	0.4

Table 3

Intrinsic Regulation Motive Refinement Decisions in Study 1b

Regulation type	Motive 1	Motive 2	*r*	Decision	New motive	Justification	Illustrative quotes
Intrinsic affect-improving	I was unable to resolve things on my own.			Reword		Did not fit the definition of motive (i.e., a desired outcome); reworded to "I wanted their help to resolve something."	
	I wanted to vent/get something off my chest.			Cut		Did not fit the definition of motive	
	I wanted to distract myself.			Cut		Did not fit the definition of motive	
Intrinsic affect-worsening	I wanted to express how upset I was about something.	I wanted them to validate my mood.	$r = .22$ $p < .001$	Merge	I wanted them to validate how I felt.	People often engage in social sharing of negative emotions in order to elicit emotional support and validation (Pauw et al., 2018).	"When I was annoyed at the way I had been treated at work I went to someone I knew would agree with me." "I was feeling down and wanted someone else to commiserate in my misery."
	I wanted them to validate how I saw myself.	I wanted to punish myself for something I did.	$r = .22$ $p < .001$	Merge	I wanted to punish myself for something I did.	Negative emotions can be a means for negative self-verification (Millgram et al., 2015) and punishment (Rosenthal et al., 2006), particularly among clinical populations.	"I had said some horrible things to my elderly mum out of anger, and I went to my daughter to say what I had said, hoping she would make me feel even guiltier." "I had treated someone badly and wanted them to tell me how they felt knowing I would feel worse after hearing from them."

Note. Illustrative quotes are from participants who indicated having both motives.

Table 4

Extrinsic Regulation Motive Refinement Decisions in Study 1b

Regulation type	Motive 1	Motive 2	*r*	Decision	New motive	Justification	Illustrative quotes
Extrinsic affect-improving	I like them or care about them.	I wanted to maintain/ build a good relationship.	$r = .26$ $p < .001$	Merge	I wanted to maintain/ build a good relationship.	Eighty-nine percent of interaction partners in extrinsic affect-improving regulation were in close relationships (i.e., family, partner, friends). Two major components of close relationships are feelings of liking and the desire to commit to relationship building and maintenance (Finkel et al., 2017).	"I wanted my wife to feel better about her health and fitness" "Mediating between my two warring daughters during one of their fights."
	I wanted to defuse a negative situation.	I wanted to relieve my own discomfort.	$r = .20$ $p < .001$	Merge	I wanted to avoid uncomfortable feelings or situations.	Situation modification is a common and effective emotion regulation strategy with a focus on alleviating discomfort associated with negative emotions (Gross, 2014; Van Bockstaele et al., 2020).	"[…] one of my teammates were feeling very down, dealing with depression. I tried to make him feel better as the team dynamic was suffering […]" "On the phone to a friend, I tried to calm her down over a perceived betrayal, perpetrated by a third party I am only acquainted with myself."
	I understood their feelings or what they were going through.			Cut		Did not fit the definition of motive (i.e., a desired outcome)	
	I felt sorry for them.			Cut		Did not fit the definition of motive	
	I felt like I had to.			Cut		Did not fit the definition of motive	
Extrinsic affect-worsening	I wanted to get them to apologize.	I wanted them to understand my feelings or what I was going through.	$r = .27$ $p < .001$	Merge	I wanted them to understand my feelings or what I was going through.	Seeking an apology reflects a desire for the transgressor to acknowledge their wrongdoing, which requires an understanding of the harm they have caused (Schumann, 2014).	"When my housemate was really mean to me and I wanted them to know how they made me feel." "I wanted my boyfriend to realise he had upset me by not helping around the house."
	I was jealous of them.	I wanted to feel better about myself.	$r = .25$ $p < .001$	Merge	I wanted to feel better about myself.	Both reflected malicious envy (Lange et al., 2018).	"I was making my colleague feel guilty for winning a laptop." "A friend bragging about success in gambling."
	I wanted to punish them for something they had done to others.	I wanted to seek revenge for something they had done to me.	$r = .37$ $p < .001$	Merge	I wanted to punish them.	Both reflected a desire for retribution for a wrongdoing.	"Guy was being inappropriate towards a friend of mine, I tried to make him feel self-conscious about himself" "This person was trying to get me fired for no reason which I had to get revenge."
	I dislike them			Cut		Did not fit the definition of motive	

Note. Illustrative quotes are from participants who indicated having both motives.

Method

Participants

Study 2 received ethics approval from the University of Melbourne's Human Research Ethics Committee (ID: 24101). We conducted an a priori power analysis using the *t*-method for multilevel models (Murayama et al., 2022), with estimates from a daily diary data set ($N = 171$) which included similar interpersonal emotion regulation measures. To ensure sufficient power to detect small Level 1 effects, we chose the minimum effect of a significant Level 1 predictor where $t = 2.90$ ($d = 0.22$). These parameters indicated a sample size of $N = 162$ would be required to achieve 80% power with $\alpha = .05$.

The final sample comprised 200[3] participants, aged 20–77 ($M = 41.73$, $SD = 13.94$; 53% women). Most of the sample were British (89%) and White (90%). Over 70% of participants were married or in a relationship; 80% lived with another person(s) in their household. More detailed demographic information can be found in Supplemental Material A. Participants were recruited through https://www.Prolific.co and reimbursed based on compliance to daily diary protocol (see the data collection procedure preregistration accessible at https://osf.io/6jp82 for the full reimbursement schedule).

Design and Procedure

The study consisted of a baseline survey on Day 1, followed by 14 consecutive days of daily diaries. All variables of interest were in the daily diaries.

Baseline Survey. Participants completed trait measures at baseline, before receiving more detailed information about the daily diary portion. Participants were informed that these diaries centered around their daily social interactions, defined as: "an in-person exchange, or a digital/virtual exchange with another person or a group that lasted more than 2 min. A digital/virtual exchange can be a phone call, video call, social media messages, or text messages." A comprehension check was included to ensure participants understood what constituted a social interaction.

Daily Diaries. The daily diary portion began the day after participants completed the baseline survey. For 14 consecutive days, participants received a Qualtrics link to the day's diary between 6 p.m. and 7 p.m., which they had until 11:59 p.m. the same evening to complete. Each survey contained questions on participants' most significant social interaction of the day. If they did not have an interaction that day, they instead answered questions about a recent significant interaction, which were included for even branching. On average, participants completed 10 surveys each ($SD = 3.50$), with a compliance rate of 71.68% ($SD = 25.02$), yielding a total of 2,007 diaries.

Measures

Interpersonal Emotion Regulation Context. After being asked to reflect on the most significant social interaction of the day, participants indicated whether the interaction was one-on-one or between more than one person and their relationship with their interaction partner(s).

Interpersonal Emotion Regulation Intention. We asked participants: "How did you turn to the other person(s) to change your emotions during this interaction?" (intrinsic regulation), and "How did you try to change the emotions of the other person(s) during this interaction?" (extrinsic regulation). Participants could select one or more options indicating they (a) did not try to change their own/others' emotions, (b) tried to increase or maintain their own/others' positive emotion, (c) tried to increase or maintain their own/others' negative emotion, (d) tried to decrease their own/others' positive emotion, or (e) tried to decrease their own/others' negative emotion. Selecting only (a) indicated no intention to regulate, and any of (b) to (e) indicated an intention to regulate.

Interpersonal Emotion Regulation Motive. If participants indicated no intention to regulate, they answered filler questions included for even branching. If participants reported an intention to regulate their own emotions through others, they were then asked: "Why did you turn to the other person(s) to change your emotions during this interaction?" Participants could select one or more response options outlined in Table 3. Similarly, participants who indicated an intention to regulate someone else's emotions were asked, "Why did you try to change their emotions?" with response options outlined in Table 3. These response options were generated in Study 1a and refined in Study 1b. Their display was randomized for every survey. For both intrinsic and extrinsic regulation, participants could also indicate if they had another motive not listed and provide open-ended responses or if they had no motive.

Notably, in the present study, we presented affect-improving and affect-worsening motives together in one block for both intrinsic and extrinsic regulation. We kept affect improving and affect worsening separate in the initial preliminary studies to ensure a full mapping of the motive space, given the rarity of affect-worsening attempts (Niven et al., 2009). However, we combined these motives in Study 2, not only to minimize response fatigue in daily surveys, but also to avoid presupposing the directionality of regulation based on the motive. First, some motives could conceivably be achieved by either improving or worsening emotions (e.g., to get their partner to do chores, a person can either put their partner in a good mood or induce guilt). Second, combining affect-improving and affect-worsening motives ensured that we did not constrain the higher order motives that participants could select based on their lower order goal (i.e., asking participants whether they wanted to improve or worsen emotions *then* showing them only motives presumably for that type of regulation).

Data Analytic Strategy

The analysis plan preregistration, data, and code for the present study can be found at https://osf.io/95z8w/. Before conducting quantitative analyses, we independently recoded open-ended responses from observations where participants indicated that they had another motive not listed (3%–4% before recoding) to determine whether they fit in with any of the existing motives. One rater reviewed open-ended responses and checked the allocation of a subset of responses with the second and third coders. Minor disagreement between raters was resolved through discussion.

[3] Twenty-one participants were excluded prior to analysis based on the following preregistered criteria: one participant failed the comprehension check, 11 participants only partially completed the baseline survey, and 9 participants did not complete any daily diaries. In addition, two participants completed the baseline survey more than once, so we kept only the most complete entry.

Quantitative analyses were conducted in R (Version 4.2.1) on 1,830 diaries (92% of diaries) in which participants reported having an interaction that day.[4] We calculated the frequency of motive items based on the number of observations in which they occurred and the number of participants who reported them at least once during the 14-day period.

To examine co-occurrence of motives at the person level, we first computed the person mean usage of each motive across the study for each participant. Because the resulting means were not normally distributed, we calculated nonparametric correlations between all intrinsic motive items and all extrinsic motive items using Spearman's ρ.

To examine co-occurrence of motives at the occasion level, we calculated the ϕ coefficient for each motive pair using the R package psych (Revelle, 2022), as motive items were dichotomous variables. We could not compute within-person correlations, since many participants had zero variance across some variables. Within-person correlation calculation would thus result in a large amount of missing data. While this approach did not account for the nested structure of the data, thereby overestimating the power of the effects, it was nevertheless necessary to examine associations between dichotomous variables at the occasion level. To the best of our knowledge, no alternative method exists to achieve this purpose. For similar procedures to examine co-occurrence at both the person and occasion levels, see Kalokerinos et al. (2017).

Results

Motive Frequency

Roughly 90% of interactions described by participants were largely neutral or positive in nature and occurred mostly in person as opposed to digitally (74% vs. 25%) and mostly one-on-one as opposed to between many people (70% vs. 30%). The interaction partners were 27% family members, 16% friends, 16% colleagues or classmates, 15% romantic partners, 9% with multiple relationships with participants, 6% strangers, and 11% other relationships.

Table 5 presents the frequency of different motives at the person and occasion levels on 368 occasions (20% of reported interactions), where participants engaged in intrinsic regulation, and on 633 occasions (35% of reported interactions), where participants engaged in extrinsic regulation.

Overall, participants engaged in interpersonal emotion regulation with a higher order motive in mind over 97% of the time. For intrinsic regulation, the three most common motives were to build or maintain good relationships (46% of intrinsic attempts), to seek comfort or reassurance (39%), and to feel better (38%). For extrinsic, the three most common motives were to make others feel better (55% of extrinsic attempts), to build or maintain good relationships (47%), and to help others (47%). Figure 1 shows the frequency of all motives at the occasion level, organized by prevalence. Roughly the same pattern of distribution was observed in the percentage of participants who reported a particular motive at least once during the study.

In addition to the preregistered descriptive statistics, we also explored the sources of variability in motives with intraclass correlation coefficient, following the method to calculate intraclass correlation coefficient for dichotomous variables by Raykov and Marcoulides (2015). Intraclass correlation coefficients ranged from .12 to .35, indicating that only 12%–35% of the variability in motive selection occurred between persons.

Motive Co-Occurrence

Tables 6 and 7 present the occasion-level (ϕ coefficient) and person-level (Spearman's ρ) relationships for intrinsic and extrinsic regulation motives, respectively.

Occasion-Level Intrinsic Motive Co-Occurrence. On roughly 67% of occasions when people turned to others for emotion regulation, they reported having more than one motive, indicating that motives tended to occur together. Occasion-level correlations suggested that, in moments when people reported a motive of wanting to feel better, they also often reported a motive of seeking comfort and reassurance. When people reported a motive of achieving a goal or task, they also often reported a motive of seeking advice and instrumental help. Seeking advice was not only correlated with desiring a reality check and instrumental help but also with seeking comfort and reassurance. Meanwhile, when people wanted to build relationships, they also often reported motives of wanting to understand their interaction partner's feelings and to seek attention from their interaction partner.

Occasion-Level Extrinsic Motive Co-Occurrence. Participants reported multiple motives about 74% of the times they tried to influence others' emotions. A motive of wanting an interaction partner to feel better was most highly correlated with a motive of wanting to help that person. When participants reported a motive of wanting to help their interaction partner, they also often reported wanting their interaction partner to achieve some goal and to offer advice, clarity, or perspective. Wanting the interaction partner to achieve a goal was highly correlated with wanting to achieve a personal goal, indicating perhaps some overlap in goals between people in the interaction.

Interestingly, while the intrinsic motive of *seeking advice* was correlated with wanting a reality check and help from others and comfort and reassurance, the extrinsic motive of *offering advice* was only correlated with offering a reality check and help. In other words, when participants wanted others to regulate their own emotions, they also often had motives of seeking both cognitive and emotional support, but when they regulated others' emotions, they often had a motive of offering cognitive support only. In addition, when participants reported a social motive of building relationships, they also often reported wanting to feel good about themselves.

Motive Structure Exploratory Analysis

Following helpful comments in review, we conducted additional, un-pre-registered post hoc analyses to assess higher order clusters among the motives. Because some motives tended to co-occur more than others and appeared more conceptually similar, we were interested in exploring the structure of motives. To determine if the motives were distinct or if some motives could be combined to further streamline the taxonomy, we employed several methods. First, we used the Spearman–Brown prediction formula to estimate the internal consistency of each motive pair. This formula estimates

[4] Due to an oversight, we did not explicitly state this detail in the preregistration.

Table 5

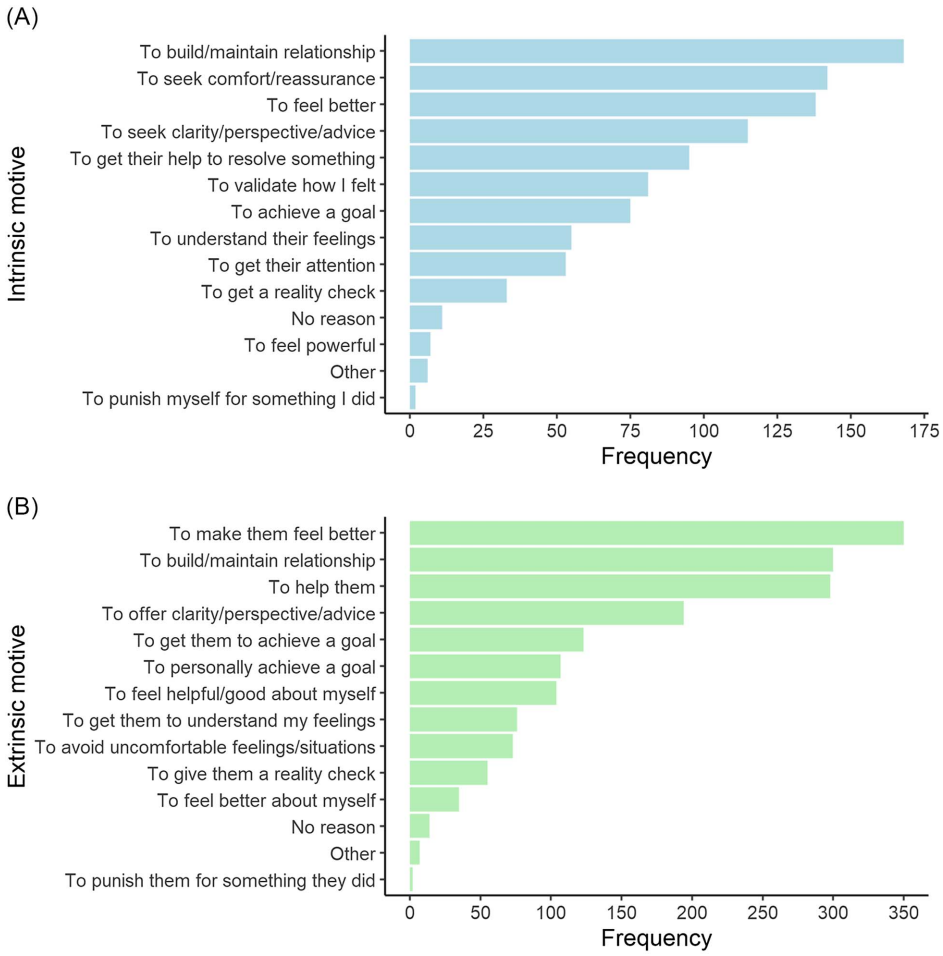
Interpersonal Emotion Regulation Motive Items and Their Frequency in Study 2

	Occasion level		Person level				Occasion level		Person level		
Intrinsic motive	*N* intrinsic regulation instances with this motive	% intrinsic regulation instances with this motive	*N* participants who had this motive at least once	% participants who had this motive at least once	ICC	Extrinsic motive	*N* extrinsic regulation instances with this motive	% extrinsic regulation instances with this motive	*N* participants who had this motive at least once	% participants who had this motive at least once	ICC
I wanted to feel better.	138	37.50	75	37.5	.30	I wanted to make them feel better	350	55.29	133	66.5	.12
I wanted to achieve a goal or get something done.	75	20.38	50	25	.19	I wanted to get them to achieve a goal or get something done	123	19.43	76	38	.18
I wanted to maintain or build a good relationship.	168	45.65	86	42.5	.20	I wanted to maintain or build a good relationship	300	47.39	114	57	.23
I wanted to seek clarity, perspective, or advice.	115	31.25	66	33	.13	I wanted to offer clarity, perspective, or advice	194	30.65	102	51	.17
I wanted to seek comfort or reassurance.	142	38.59	77	38.5	.16	I wanted to avoid uncomfortable feelings or situations	73	11.53	49	24.5	.15
I wanted their help to resolve something.	95	25.82	61	30.5	.12	I wanted to feel helpful or good about myself	104	16.43	63	31.5	.26
I wanted to understand their feelings or what they were going through.	55	14.95	35	17.5	.27	I wanted them to understand my feelings, or what I was going through	76	12.01	53	26.5	.14
I wanted them to give me a reality check or manage my expectations.	33	8.69	27	13.5	.23	I personally wanted to achieve a goal or get something done	107	16.90	62	31	.28
I wanted to punish myself for something I did.	2	0.54	2	1		I wanted to give them a reality check or manage their expectations	55	8.69	41	20.5	.26
I wanted them to validate how I felt.	81	22.01	50	25	.22	I wanted to punish them for something they did	2	0.32	1	0.5	
I wanted their attention.	53	14.40	36	18%	.20	I wanted to feel better about myself	35	5.53	25	12.5	.35
I wanted to feel powerful.	7	1.90	6	3		I wanted to help them	298	47.08	120	60	.16
I had another reason.	6	1.63	5	2.5		I had another reason	7	1.11	6	3	
I did not have a reason.	11	2.99	10	5		I did not have a reason	14	2.21	14	7	

Note. ICCs could not be calculated for four intrinsic motives and three extrinsic motives due to low item endorsement, resulting in some variance components equaling 0. ICC = intraclass correlation.

Figure 1

Frequency Distribution of Intrinsic (Panel A) and Extrinsic (Panel B) Motives at the Occasion Level in Study 2



Note. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

the reliability of a two-item scale and provide further information about whether any two motives appear to share the same latent construct (Eisinga et al., 2013). Second, we conducted nonmetric multidimensional scaling to two-dimensionally visualize patterns of dissimilarity between motives based on their presence or absence across regulation occasions (d'Angella & Hennig, 2022). Third, we conducted hierarchical clustering to explore any potential clusters of motives that may emerge from the data. Full data analytic strategy and results for these analyses are in Supplemental Material C.

Nonmetric multidimensional scaling and hierarchical clustering revealed that, across methodologies, no robust cluster solutions emerged from the data for either intrinsic or extrinsic regulation motives. Similarly, the Spearman–Brown coefficients indicated that no two motives reliably shared the same underlying construct. These analyses suggested that the motives were distinct enough that motives could not easily be combined to make a conceptually coherent cluster. Accordingly, our participant-generated list appears to capture relatively independent and unique motives that people have when engaging in interpersonal emotion regulation.

General Discussion

In three studies exploring both intrinsic and extrinsic interpersonal emotion regulation in affect-improving and affect-worsening directions, we found people almost always had a motive in mind when they regulated in social interactions. The ground these motives cover includes not just changing emotions to feel worse or better (contra/hedonic motives) but also as a means to an end (instrumental motives). Specifically, when people regulated their emotions through others (i.e., intrinsically), the three most common motives, in order, were to build or maintain good relationships, to seek comfort or reassurance, and to feel better. When people regulated others' emotions (i.e., extrinsically), the three most common motives, in order, were to make others feel better, to build or maintain good relationships, and to help others. Motives to punish oneself or others were the least common for both intrinsic and extrinsic regulation, respectively. Nevertheless, these punishment motives offer a unique glimpse into why people may engage in affect-worsening interpersonal emotion regulation, which occurs very rarely in everyday life (Tran et al., 2023).

Table 6
Intrinsic Motive Co-Occurrence in Study 2

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. I wanted to feel better.	—	.20*	.26**	.35***	.55***	.33***	−.04	.25**	.20*	.28**	.20*	.19*	−.10	−.04
2. I wanted to achieve a goal or get something done.	−.04	—	.33***	.39***	.15	.38***	.14	.26**	.14	.15	.38***	.14	.03	−.04
3. I wanted to maintain or build a good relationship.	−.01	.04	—	.36***	.32***	.37***	.29**	.15	.16	.22*	.48***	.24**	.02	−.1
4. I wanted to seek clarity, perspective, or advice.	.10	.20***	−.03	—	.46***	.60***	.27**	.37***	.16	.34	.28**	.03	.03	.04
5. I wanted to seek comfort or reassurance.	.30***	.03	−.09	.27***	—	.31***	.11	.30***	.19*	.46***	.30***	.24**	−.03	−.16
6. I wanted their help to resolve something.	.11*	.30***	−.03	.37***	.18***	—	.12	.39***	.13	.31***	.29**	.00	−.01	−.12
7. I wanted to understand their feelings or what they were going through.	−.07	−.02	.21***	.01	−.02	−.04	—	.15	.05	.22*	.21*	−.06	−.02	.03
8. I wanted them to give me a reality check or manage my expectations.	.07	.10	−.10	.26***	.16**	.21***	−.02	—	.12	.30***	.20*	.09	.00	−.08
9. I wanted to punish myself for something I did.	.02	−.04	−.07	.03	.02	.04	−.03	.11*	—	.20*	.04	.26**	−.02	−.03
10. I wanted them to validate how I felt.	.10*	−.07	−.03	.14**	.14**	.06	.05	.13*	.14**	—	.20*	.18*	−.06	−.01
11. I wanted their attention.	.08	.10	.18***	.07	.09	.08	.05	.06	−.03	.02	—	.19*	.05	.08
12. I wanted to feel powerful.	.06	.03	−.01	−.05	.05	−.04	−.06	.10	.26***	.12*	.11*	—	−.04	−.06
13. I had another reason.	−.01	−.01	−.03	−.09	−.10	−.08	−.05	−.04	−.01	−.07	.01	−.02	—	−.06
14. I did not have a reason.	−.14**	−.09	−.13*	−.08	−.14**	−.10*	−.07	−.06	−.01	−.09	−.03	−.02	−.02	—

Note. Correlations below the diagonal are at the occasion level. Correlations above the diagonal are at the person level.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 7
Extrinsic Motive Co-Occurrence in Study 2

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. I wanted to make them feel better.	—	.24**	.40***	.31***	.24**	.42***	.15	.18*	.26**	.00	.35***	.63***	.06	−.05
2. I wanted to get them to achieve a goal or get something done.	.01	—	.23**	.29***	.13	.17*	.04	.50***	.32***	−.07	.12	.40***	.12	.07
3. I wanted to maintain or build a good relationship.	.01	.01	—	.24**	.23**	.51***	.30***	.25**	.20*	.06	.33***	.28***	.1	−.01
4. I wanted to offer clarity, perspective, or advice.	.02	.13**	−.02	—	.20*	.13	.27**	.28***	.41***	.07	.07	.45***	.14	.15
5. I wanted to avoid uncomfortable feelings or situations.	−.07	−.05	−.01	.04	—	.12	.24**	.26**	.23**	.07	.21**	.16*	.01	−.03
6. I wanted to feel helpful or good about myself.	.11**	.12**	.19***	.01	.01	—	.12	.22**	.10	−.06	.31***	.31***	.11	.02
7. I wanted them to understand my feelings, or what I was going through.	−.13**	−.01	.04	.16***	.16***	.02	—	.13	.22**	−.06	.08	.06	.06	−.03
8. I personally wanted to achieve a goal or get something done.	−.13**	.34***	−.01	.13**	.07	.12**	.12**	—	.35***	.04	.16*	.29***	.06	−.06
9. I wanted to give them a reality check or manage their expectations.	−.06	.10**	−.01	.25***	.13**	−.02	.13**	.25***	—	−.05	.10	.29***	.04	.06
10. I wanted to punish them for something they did.	−.06	−.03	−.05	−.04	−.02	−.02	−.02	−.03	−.02	—	.15	.10	−.02	−.02
11. I wanted to feel better about myself.	.06	.02	.10*	−.07	.02	.19***	−.00	.09*	−.03	.11**	—	.31***	.19*	−.01
12. I wanted to help them.	.35***	.18***	.04	.26***	−.05	.09*	−.14***	.03	.05	−.05	−.01	—	.09	.03
13. I had another reason.	−.06	−.05	−.07	−.04	−.04	−.01	−.04	−.01	−.03	−.01	.04	−.01	—	.06
14. I did not have a reason.	−.17***	−.07	−.14***	−.10*	−.05	−.07	−.06	−.04	−.05	−.01	−.04	−.14***	−.02	—

Note. Correlations below the diagonal are at the occasion level. Correlations above the diagonal are at the person level.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Toward an Integrated Understanding of Interpersonal Emotion Regulation Motives

In examining instances of everyday interpersonal emotion regulation, we distilled 12 motives for why people regulated their own emotions through others and 12 motives for why they regulated others' emotions. Table 8 outlines what these motives are and how they align with the predominant taxonomies in the intrapersonal emotion regulation (Tamir, 2016) and extrinsic regulation (Niven, 2016) literatures. These alignments can be broadly construed as conceptual (rather than latent) constructs and the motives documented in the current research as specific manifestations of these constructs in daily life. Nevertheless, the motives we identified appear to be relatively distinct, and our analyses suggest that they do not form clearly defined clusters (Supplemental Material C).

The breadth of motives uncovered through participants' insights reveals both overlaps and disconnects with existing theoretical frameworks. As such, our work uses bottom-up insights on which to build in useful gradation to interpersonal emotion regulation.

Our daily diary study revealed that people engaged in everyday interpersonal emotion regulation with a higher order motive in mind over 97% of the time. This finding lends support to the theoretical conceptualization of emotion regulation as a motivated process, not only on an intrapersonal level (Tamir et al., 2020), but also on the interpersonal level. As such, research on interpersonal emotion regulation should consider its motivated nature. The present study provides a helpful starting point to understand people's motives to regulate when studying interpersonal regulatory behaviors.

Motive Frequency

Intrinsic Interpersonal Emotion Regulation. We build upon theoretical mapping of intrapersonal emotion regulation motives (Tamir, 2016) to expand understanding of intrinsic interpersonal emotion regulation. Existing literature has underscored the importance of instrumental motives (i.e., social, performance, epistemic, and eudaimonic), alongside hedonic motives, in driving intrapersonal emotion regulation (Kalokerinos et al., 2017; Tamir, 2016). A broad interpretation of our framework suggests intrinsic interpersonal and intrapersonal emotion regulation can serve similar motives. Daily diary data suggest that people most commonly regulated their emotions through others to build or maintain good relationships (46% of intrinsic regulation instances). This motive—along with the motive to understand the interaction partner's feelings—serves social ends. The epistemic motive to seek clarity, perspective, and advice was also

Table 8
Summary of Interpersonal Emotion Regulation Motives

Regulation type	Motive	Alignment with Tamir (2016)	Alignment with Niven (2016)
Intrinsic	1. I wanted to feel better.	Prohedonic	Hedonism
	2. I wanted to achieve a goal or get something done.	Performance	Instrumentality
	3. I wanted to maintain or build a good relationship.	Social	
	4. I wanted to seek clarity, perspective, or advice.	Epistemic	
	5. I wanted to seek comfort or reassurance.	Prohedonic	Hedonism
	6. I wanted their help to resolve something.	Performance	Instrumentality
	7. I wanted to understand their feelings or what they were going through.	Social	
	8. I wanted them to give me a reality check or manage my expectations.	Performance	
	9. I wanted to punish myself for something I did.		
	10. I wanted them to validate how I felt.		
	11. I wanted their attention.		
	12. I wanted to feel powerful.		Identity construction
Extrinsic	1. I wanted to make them feel better.	Prohedonic (other-focused)	Compassion
	2. I wanted to get them to achieve a goal or get something done.	Performance (other-focused)	Coaching
	3. I wanted to maintain or build a good relationship.	Social	
	4. I wanted to offer clarity, perspective, or advice.	Epistemic (other-focused)	Coaching
	5. I wanted to avoid uncomfortable feelings or situations.		Conformity
	6. I wanted to feel helpful or good about myself.	Prohedonic (self-focused)	Identity construction
	7. I wanted them to understand my feelings, or what I was going through.	Social	
	8. I personally wanted to achieve a goal or get something done.	Performance (self-focused)	Instrumentality
	9. I wanted to give them a reality check or manage their expectations.	Performance (other-focused)	Coaching
	10. I wanted to punish them for something they did.		
	11. I wanted to feel better about myself.	Prohedonic (self-focused)	Identity construction
	12. I wanted to help them.	Prohedonic (other-focused) Performance (other-focused)	Compassion

Note. The motives in Tamir's (2016) taxonomies are: *prohedonic* (to feel pleasure), *contrahedonic* (to feel displeasure), *performance* (to achieve something), *social* (to build relationships), *epistemic* (to learn something), and *eudemonic* (to find meaning and growth). The motives in Niven's (2016) taxonomies are: *identity construction* (to promote sense of self), *impression management* (to promote career/reputation), *conformity* (to promote the smooth running of social situations), *emotional labor* (to promote organizational performance), *hedonism* (to promote personal well-being), *compassion* (to promote others' well-being), *instrumentality* (to promote personal performance), and *coaching* (to promote others' performance).

common (31%), as was the performance motive to achieve a goal or get something done (20%). However, in social contexts, socially oriented motives (e.g., building relationships or seeking comfort and reassurance) may be at the forefront when people engaged in regulation.

Furthermore, the rarity of eudaimonic and contrahedonic motives in intrapersonal emotion regulation (Kalokerinos et al., 2017; Weidman & Kross, 2021) also extends to the interpersonal space. First, participants did not report any motives that fit the eudaimonic definition (i.e., to grow as a person) across our studies. This may be a motive that emerges only in specific situations or over a longer timescale than the discrete social interactions we assessed in this research. Second, participants did not regulate their own emotions through others purely contrahedonically (i.e., to feel displeasure). Instead, feeling worse may be a means to an end, such as to punish oneself (1%). These findings suggest that, while some motives are theoretically important for *intra*personal emotion regulation, they may not necessarily reflect everyday *inter*personal emotion regulation experiences. Taken together, our work on intrinsic motives draws on existing theoretical works to bridge the gap between intrapersonal and interpersonal emotion regulation literature. Furthermore, it brings nuance to theory by revealing which motives are common, which are rare, and which are present in theory but not in daily life and vice versa.

Extrinsic Interpersonal Emotion Regulation. In line with extant works on extrinsic regulation motives (Niven, 2016; Springstein et al., 2023), we found that although extrinsic regulation was most commonly engaged to make others feel better (55% of extrinsic regulation instances), people oftentimes had self-focused motives as well. These included wanting to feel helpful or good about oneself (16%) and to avoid feeling uncomfortable (12%). Furthermore, people regulated others' emotions not only to help others achieve a goal (19%) but also to achieve their own goal (17%). People also regulated others' emotions to serve social ends. Supporting work by Springstein et al. (2022), we found that a relationship building/maintenance motive was among the most common (47%), followed by a motive to get others to understand one's feelings (i.e., emotional similarity; 12%). Together, these findings highlight the importance of studying extrinsic regulation, not just from the perspective of the regulation targets, but also from the regulator's perspective, as extrinsic regulation is not always only about the target's emotions.

Additionally, we found, in the rare instances where people engaged in affect-worsening extrinsic regulation, that their motive was instrumentally directed, such as to punish their interaction partner (1% of extrinsic regulation instances). Punishment as a motive also does not appear to map well onto existing taxonomies and indeed is quite distinct from other motives (see Figure S1 in Supplemental Material C)—perhaps because it more explicitly ties to affect-worsening regulation, which is itself rare (Tran et al., 2023). Our findings therefore shed light on the motives for these highly context-specific and rare instances of regulation (Niven et al., 2009).

Motive Co-Occurrence

Further mapping the interpersonal emotion regulation space, we found motives often do not occur in isolation. Indeed, people reported having multiple motives 67% of the time for intrinsic regulation and 74% of the time for extrinsic regulation. Prior works on intrapersonal emotion regulation have shown that it is common for people to have multiple motives when regulating their own emotions (English et al., 2017; Kalokerinos et al., 2017). Our work suggests motive co-occurrence is also common in interpersonal emotion regulation. Critically, our exploratory analysis of motive structure indicated that this co-occurrence did not appear to follow predictable lines. That is, although people often reported holding multiple motives, it was not the case that motives reliably clustered together such that certain motives mostly occurred together. Thus, our list appears to do a good job of mapping the range of distinct motives that people hold when engaging in interpersonal emotion regulation.

Examining co-occurring motives may shed light on some potential discrepancies between what people want to receive versus provide in interpersonal emotion regulation. For instance, when people turned to others for regulation, wanting to *seek* advice (cognitive support) usually co-occurred with wanting comfort and reassurance (emotional support). However, when people regulated others' emotions, wanting to *offer* advice did not usually co-occur with a motive of providing emotional support. There is evidence that the targets of regulation prefer to receive emotional support (Pauw et al., 2018), yet regulators tend to provide problem-oriented support instead (Liu et al., 2021). Our research suggests that this mismatch may occur as early as the motivation level, with differing motives for seeking versus providing interpersonal emotion regulation. This finding further highlights the importance of studying the motives that people want to achieve through regulation. Motives are thus a useful way to define the effectiveness of regulation (i.e., whether the motive is successfully achieved), not only from the perspective of the target, but also from that of the regulator.

Limitations and Future Directions

Although foundational in providing a holistic documentation of motives informed by everyday experiences, our research is not without flaws. First, while we strived to recruit representative samples in terms of age and gender, participants were still mostly White, which limits the generalizability of our findings across cultural contexts. Indeed, there is evidence to suggest people from Eastern and Western backgrounds may regulate their own and others' emotions differently (Liddell & Williams, 2019). Therefore, the motives that people have, and how often they occur, may differ in a more culturally diverse sample.

Another limitation concerns the use of self-reported daily diaries. First, we could only capture *intentional* regulation attempts and *explicit* motives that participants were aware of having and were willing to report. Although interpersonal emotion regulation is often conceptualized as intentional and explicit (Niven, 2017; Zaki & Williams, 2013), regulation can also happen automatically, with implicit motives outside of conscious awareness (Brunstein, 2008; vanDellen et al., 2012). Exploring implicit motives is a worthy future endeavor to further map the motive space. Second, the use of self-reported end-of-day diaries in Study 2 may still be subject to recall bias, especially if the reported regulation attempt occurred early in the day. Approaches like experience sampling methodology, with multiple surveys throughout the day, may be used to capture regulation motives with more temporal granularity.

Generating a motive taxonomy using day-to-day experiences may have also resulted in the underrepresentation of some theoretically

important motives, either because they were harder to recall, or because they are rare in everyday life. Indeed, participants found it more difficult to reflect on instances of affect-worsening regulation in Studies 1a and 1b. In Study 2, wherein participants nominated the most significant social interaction of the day, they reported roughly 90% positive or neutral interactions, resulting in very few instances of affect-worsening regulation and motives of that nature. Investigating affect-worsening regulation is challenging, potentially because people are unwilling to report such instances out of evaluative concerns (Niven et al., 2011), and may require a more targeted approach than the present research. For example, studying couples' conflict interactions (e.g., Berlamont et al., 2023; Sasaki & Overall, 2023), where negative emotions are relatively more salient, may offer further insight into this type of regulation than everyday interactions more broadly.

Last, it is important to reiterate that the aim of this article was not to develop and validate a scale to measure interpersonal emotion regulation motives. Rather, it provided a documentation of motives based on empirical evidence from participants' everyday experiences. Although we strived to ensure the uniqueness of motives through Spearman–Brown prediction formula, clustering, and dimension reduction techniques, there were still limitations to our approach. First, these techniques were applied post hoc in Study 2, after the decisions to refine the list of motives had been made in Study 1b. Although we retrospectively explored the motive structure in Study 1b (see Supplemental Material D), these analyses ideally would have been conducted prior to the refinement process so all information could be considered. Second, because we did not take a formal scale development approach with factor analysis, we may not have fully captured latent constructs underlying some motives. As such, there may be room to further streamline the list of motives (e.g., the extrinsic regulation motive of wanting to help others co-occurred with other motives 96% of the time in Study 2, suggesting it may be a broad all-encompassing motive). Nevertheless, our motive list provides a foundation for the creation and validation of a future measure that can be assessed through reports from the source and target of interpersonal emotion regulation. Such measures could be used in everyday life studies, as well as in experimental paradigms, to study motives as both a precursor to and an outcome of interpersonal emotion regulation.

Conclusion

The present research explored people's motives to engage in interpersonal emotion regulation, including what these motives are, how often people hold them in social interactions, and which motives tend to occur together. We found that everyday interpersonal emotion regulation was almost always motivated—not only to simply feel better, but also to achieve certain instrumental goals. The diversity of motives that participants reported goes beyond what has been proposed in extant theory and research and presents a new method through which researchers can explore motives for interpersonal emotion regulation. Our findings of why people regulate provide a new way of conceptualizing the nature and success of regulation and open avenues to investigate motive as both the engine driving downstream regulatory processes and a means to evaluate the effectiveness of regulation in achieving its overarching goal.

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