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# Suppress for success? Exploring the contexts in which expressing positive emotion can have social costs

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**ABSTRACT**

Researchers and lay people alike have tended to focus on social benefits of expressing positive emotion and, as a result, tend to overlook potential social costs. In this paper, we consider limits to the idea that expressing positive emotion is universally beneficial and review literature demonstrating that, in some contexts, expressing positive emotion can have social costs. Building on our own and others' work in this space, we outline three sociocontextual factors that influence the social success of positive emotion expression: To avoid potential costs, we suggest that positive emotion should generally be expressed in the right situation, by (and to) the right person, and in the right way. Where positive emotion expression may incur social costs, we propose people can effectively down-regulate positive emotion through use of expressive suppression, and review literature demonstrating that there can be social benefits to down-regulating positive emotion. This review advances theorising on the importance of considering context when seeking to understand socially successful emotion expression and regulation.

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A tennis champion celebrates conspicuously after winning against a weaker competitor. A funeral attendee laughs out loud during a solemn ceremony. A murder suspect smiles while giving testimony. These expressions of positive emotion are all intuitively recognised as inappropriate, but the contexts in which it might be socially problematic to express positive emotion remain unarticulated in the broader literature. In this paper, we provide a theoretical rubric for understanding which contextual factors are likely to influence whether positive emotion expressions are considered

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socially problematic or beneficial. Because expressing positive emotion is generally considered to be a socially affiliative signal, in this paper, we focus on exploring the ways in which these expressions may sometimes unexpectedly undermine social closeness and cooperation.

Increasingly, research is demonstrating that positive emotions have wide-ranging consequences (e.g., Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005), but both the broader psychological literature and the emotion literature more specifically have historically focused on negative emotions (Fredrickson, 2001; Sheldon & King, 2001). Although the positive psychology movement has made important inroads in investigating positive emotion, a large body of existing emotion research focuses on the antecedents and consequences of negative emotion, meaning that, as a whole, negative emotion is better understood than its positive counterpart (Fredrickson, 1998, 2001). Consequently, there is a *positive–negative asymmetry* in emotion research; as with many domains in life, it appears that bad is stronger than good (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001). The relative de-emphasis on positive emotion in the literature means that scientific understanding has lagged behind understanding of negative emotions. Where research does consider positive emotion, it is typically with a view to uncovering the benefits of experiencing and expressing positive emotion (cf. Gruber, Mauss, & Tamir, 2011; Johnson, 2005; Mauss, Tamir, Anderson, & Savino, 2011).

In this article, we address the positive–negative asymmetry in research on emotion expression. In Part 1, we begin by taking a new perspective on positive emotion expression, reviewing an emerging body of literature that suggests expressing positive emotion can have negative social consequences. In Part 2, we introduce a theoretical rubric for understanding why expressing positive sometimes has social costs when expressed in certain situations, by (and to) certain *people*, and in certain *ways*. In Part 3, we discuss how positive emotion can be successfully regulated to avoid social costs in these contexts. In doing so, we highlight our recent work suggesting that expressive suppression, traditionally viewed as a maladaptive emotion regulation strategy, could be useful in these situations.

## Part 1: the costs (and benefits) of expressing positive emotion

In general, research suggests that there are personal and social benefits to *experiencing* positive emotion (Aknin, Dunn, & Norton, 2012; Berry & Willingham, 1997; Fredrickson, 1998, 2009; Pressman & Cohen, 2005; Shiota, Keltner, & John, 2006). Lay intuition holds that the benefits of experiencing positive emotion also hold for expressed positive emotion. A wealth of popular self-help books promotes the benefits of indiscriminate positive emotion expression, starting with Dale Carnegie's (1936) bestseller

*How to Win Friends and Influence People*. Of a range of emotions (e.g., surprise, anger, disgust), people reliably rate *happiness* as the emotion that should be expressed most and suppressed least across a wide range of social situations (Matsumoto, Yoo, Hirayama, & Petrova, 2005).

### Benefits of expressing positive emotion

In line with this lay intuition, there is a large body of research suggesting that positive emotion expression can have both personal and social benefits. For example, on the personal level, individuals who spontaneously smile while viewing a sad film show quicker recovery from the detrimental cardiovascular effects of experiencing sadness (Fredrickson & Levenson, 1998). Indeed, it is generally personally costly *not* to express positive emotions when they are felt: Correlational work has found that individuals with a greater positive emotion experience–behaviour dissociation show higher levels of depressive symptoms and lower levels of well-being (Mauss, Shallcross et al., 2011).

Positive emotion expression also has social benefits. Early in life, positive emotion expression facilitates bonding and eventually love between infants and caregivers (Shiota, Campos, Keltner, & Hertenstien, 2004). Later in life, the expression of positive emotion is associated with the development and maintenance of romantic relationships (Shiota et al., 2004). For example, discussing positive events with others (a regulation strategy termed "capitalisation") is associated with greater relationship well-being (Gable, Reis, Impett, & Asher, 2004). Positive emotion expression is also important when making initial judgments of other people: Harker and Keltner (2001) found that women who expressed more positive emotion in their college yearbook pictures experienced better outcomes in life, including improved well-being, but were also rated as more affiliative (e.g., generous, considerate, pleasant, affectionate) and lower on negative emotionality (e.g., fearful, irritable, hostile). These positive judgements were made by raters who had never met the targets *and* by raters who had the opportunity to interact with the targets. The raters who never met the targets believed that they would find future interactions with the targets more rewarding, indicating the powerful role positive emotion may play in initial relationship formation.

More generally, those who express positive emotions tend to have smoother social interactions. For example, research has found that majority group members who express happiness in cooperative (vs. competitive) contexts tend to put dissenting group members at ease and reduce pressure to conform (Heerdink, van Kleef, Homan, & Fischer, 2013). In the relationship domain, expressing gratitude to a partner is associated with positive outcomes, including increased perceptions of closeness, comfort, and relationship strength and quality (Algoe, Fredrickson, & Gable, 2013; Lambert,

Clark, Durtschi, Fincham, & Graham, 2010; Lambert & Fincham, 2011). When asking for assistance, expressing positive emotion elicits greater support than expressing anger if the assistance is justified (although the opposite pattern emerges when it is not justified; Hareli et al., 2009). The social benefits of positive emotion also extend to the workplace: In a longitudinal study by Staw, Sutton, and Pelled (1994), participants who initially expressed more positive emotion received more favourable supervisor evaluations, and more supervisor and co-worker social support 18 months later.

Given the large body of research demonstrating that there are both personal and social benefits to expressing positive emotions, it is tempting to conclude that expressing positive emotion is universally beneficial. However, emerging research suggests that this is not always the case. In this review, we synthesise this emerging research to provide a comprehensive investigation of the contexts in which people can incur social costs for expressing positive emotion. Below, we review a range of literature revealing social costs to expressing the positive emotions of happiness, pride, amusement, and gratitude, as well as briefly touching on some other positive emotions.

## Costs of expressing happiness

Expressing happiness, often through smiling, is a classic affiliative signal (Fridlund, 1991), and as such is generally thought to elicit positive social evaluations (Ekman & Friesen, 1975; Harker & Keltner, 2001; Matsumoto et al., 2005). However, an emerging body of research shows this strategy can have unintended negative consequences when applied indiscriminately (see Clark & Monin, 2014 for a review of the "dark side" of expressing happiness). For example, in a correlational study, Bonanno and colleagues (2007) found that victims of sexual abuse who smiled non-genuinely while recounting abuse in a recorded interview also reported worse social outcomes in the form of feeling unpopular and having few friends.

Several different lines of experimental research demonstrate the causal effect of positive emotion expressions on social outcomes. For example, Szczurek and colleagues (2012) had participants view a series of targets who smiled or showed negative affect while supposedly viewing positive or negative images (i.e., in a fully crossed design). Targets who smiled at negative images received worse social evaluations than targets who expressed negative affect at viewing positive images (or targets who expressed an emotion that was congruent with the images they saw). Similarly, Ansfield (2007) demonstrated that individuals tend to smile while viewing disgusting stimuli, a behaviour that was personally beneficial – helping to up-regulate the experience of positive emotion – but that was perceived as socially inappropriate and unlikable by observers. Experimental work also

demonstrates that there may also be costs to positive emotion expression in romantic settings: Tracy and Beall (2011) showed that happiness was one of the least attractive emotional expressions in ratings of men's dating profiles – sometimes being rated as even more unattractive than expressing shame or no emotion. The authors speculated that happiness expressions convey low dominance, and are therefore at odds with a female evolutionary drive to attract mates with high status and access to resources.

The negative consequences of expressing happiness can also extend to the academic domain. For example, in two experiments, Van Doorn and colleagues (2014) found that students exhibited poorer learning when instructors expressed happiness compared with when they expressed anger. The authors argued that happiness expressions conveyed the impression that current performance was satisfactory and thus required no further improvement. Together, these findings suggest that the affiliative message often conveyed by happiness expressions is not appropriate in every situation. This research provides evidence that happiness expressions can occasion negative social responses in situations in which they may be considered incongruous, inappropriate, or unexpected.

### *Costs of expressing pride*

In addition to happiness, research demonstrates that expressing certain types of pride can attract negative social outcomes. Tracy and Robins (2004, 2007a, 2007b) distinguish between two facets of pride: hubristic and authentic. Authentic pride stems from feelings of genuine self-worth, accomplishment, and self-esteem. In contrast, hubristic pride stems from feelings of arrogance, conceit, and narcissistic self-aggrandisement. Of the two facets of pride, hubristic pride appears to be particularly socially problematic, most likely because it signals overt self-interest and disregard for the feelings of others. Correlational work has demonstrated that people who are prone to experience and express hubristic pride tend to have worse interpersonal relationships, demonstrate maladaptive attachment styles, and receive less social support (Tracy, Cheng, Robins, & Trzesniewski, 2009).

Both correlational and experimental research demonstrates that expressions of pride can incur social costs. For example, using a correlational design, Horberg and colleagues (2013) had participants rate perceived pride and joy expressed by a target in a mock job interview. They found that targets who were perceived as expressing pride were rated as more selfish, a trait associated with low trustworthiness and warmth. In other studies using experimental designs, Horberg and colleagues found that a target who expressed pride through posing in a static image was rated as more self-interested and meritocratic than when they expressed joy or a neutral expression. Other experimental research has shown downsides to

expressing pride: Feinberg and colleagues (2012) found that a confederate who expressed pride elicited less cooperation in a trust game than a confederate who expressed embarrassment. Also in this vein, Scopelliti and colleagues (2015) found that people who were assigned to self-promote, which included expressing positive emotion about their achievements, were evaluated as less likeable than people who were not assigned to self-promote.

We investigated the social costs of pride expression experimentally in our own work. To do this, we showed participants videos of winners who expressed or did not express positive emotion in the presence of a loser (Kalokerinos, Greenaway, Pedder, & Margetts, 2014). We sourced existing videos of people who experienced victory in three domains: the Academy Awards, Tennis Grand Slam matches, and high-profile game shows. In each domain, we sourced videos of highly expressive winners who showed a great deal of positive emotion immediately after their win, and non-expressive winners who appeared to suppress their emotions following victory. Participants then rated the winners on perceived hubristic pride, how much they appeared to be protecting the feelings of any losers who were present, as well as likeability and friendship potential. Expressive winners were rated as more hubristically prideful, inconsiderate of losers' feelings, less likeable, and less attractive as potential friends than inexpressive winners (see Figure 1). This shows that certain types of pride can attract negative social outcomes, potentially because pride expressions signal that individuals are focused exclusively on the self at the expense of social concerns.

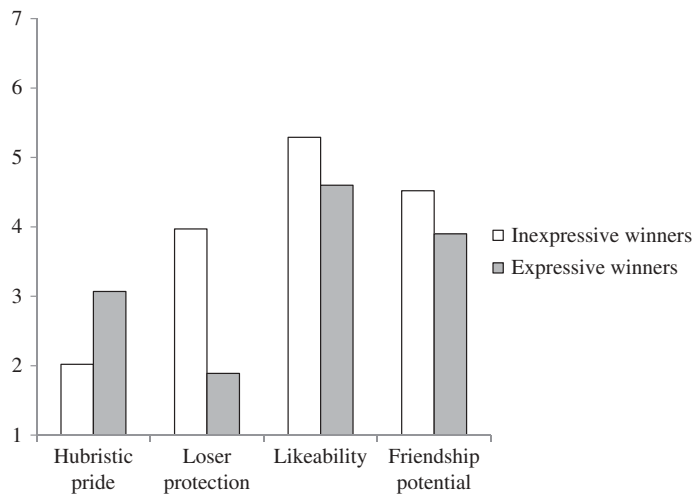


**Figure 1.** Effects of winner expressivity on ratings of winner hubristic pride, protection of the loser's feelings, likeability, and friendship potential in Kalokerinos et al. (2014, Experiment 3). Images reproduced with permission.

### Costs of expressing amusement

Comparatively less research has catalogued negative social outcomes to expressing positive emotions other than pride and happiness, but there are some examples that hint at situations in which the expression of amusement might be socially costly. Anecdotally, people report suppressing amusement in situations in which it would be inappropriate to smile or laugh, for example, at a funeral. Indeed, when we have asked participants to specify a situation in which positive emotion expression could have negative effects, we find that "laughing at a funeral" is the situation that comes to mind most frequently: In a pilot study, approximately a third of participants (134 of 400 participants, or 33.5%) spontaneously mentioned this specific situation. There are also examples of social penalties for such behaviour in day-to-day life. For example, President Clinton found to his detriment that funerals are not the right situation to express positive emotion when he was caught on camera smiling at Ron Brown's memorial service (Glaser & Salovey, 1998). Former Danish Prime Minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt also faced pubic outcry over a cheerful "selfie" taken with then US President Barack Obama and British Prime Minister David Cameron at Nelson Mandela's memorial service (Anthony, 2013). Yet, despite the fact that these misplaced amusement expressions constitute a rather obvious faux pas to lay people, research has remained relatively quiet on this issue.

Some research supports this lay intuition that expressions of amusement can have negative social effects in certain contexts. Early work by Labott, Martin, Eason, and Berkey (1991) showed that participants who watched a sad film alongside a crying, laughing, or neutral male confederate liked the laughing confederates less than crying confederates. Moreover, participants were less likely to engage in conversation with confederates who had laughed during the film than with confederates who were expressively neutral. The behaviour of laughing in negative situations may seem intuitively strange or unusual, but is not unheard of – an extreme example occurred in Milgram's (1963) obedience studies, in which some participants were so stressed by the procedure of administering escalating electric shocks that they began laughing hysterically.

In other research, observers have been shown to socially penalise individuals who express (and attempt to elicit) laughter by telling offensive jokes (e.g., Johnson, 1990; Suls & Miller, 1976). In addition, amusement expressed at the expense of other people – a form of schadenfreude – has been shown to have negative consequences for social relations (e.g., Cikara, Bruneau, Van Bavel, & Saxe, 2014; Spears & Leach, 2004). For example, correlational research has found that school students who laugh at others' misfortunes are more likely to be perceived as bullies (Boulton, 1997). Although little research has systematically addressed when and why it is

inappropriate to laugh, the early evidence suggests that expressions of amusement can be evaluated negatively in some situations.

### *Costs of expressing gratitude and love*

Researchers are beginning to theorise about situations in which gratitude expressions might have negative social effects. Research suggests that unwarranted expressions of gratitude – for example, in the case of thanking a person for performing a service for someone else – can be viewed as inappropriate, particularly when expressed by people with low status (Wazlawek, in press). In the case of close relationships, Clark argued in a conference presentation that relationship partners may sometimes misconstrue expressions of gratitude (Clark & Von Culin, 2014). She argued that expressions of gratitude may be appropriate in early stages of a relationship when one desires to promote closeness. However, in later stages, expressing gratitude may convey surprise that a partner "came through" – the need to express gratitude for a routine action expected of a relationship partner may suggest a tacit assumption that one's partner would not (or regularly does not) perform such actions. In empirical work, Clark and colleagues (2017) found that partner expressions of gratitude (even if infrequent) increased projection of one's own feelings of gratitude onto the partner (i.e., a reduction in accurate perception of the partner's emotion). The authors concluded that "knowing for sure that one's partner has expressed [gratitude] at some time effectively 'opens the door' for perceiver projection that goes beyond what accurate perception of that emotion justifies" (p.204). Although in its infancy, this work provides early indications that gratitude may not always be appropriate or beneficial for interpersonal relations.

Expressing other types of positive emotions in the context of close relationships may also come with social costs. For example, there are situations in which the expression of love and affection may be socially inappropriate or have negative social effects. Research shows that interracial and homosexual couples are less likely to engage in public displays of affection due to fear of social stigma (e.g., Newman & Nelson, 1996; Vaquera & Kao, 2005). Public displays of affection between heterosexual couples can also be seen as inappropriate when they are particularly intense, excessive, or culturally insensitive (Voo, 2007). And of course, showing love or affection may not end well for either party if expressed to a person who does not share one's ardour.

## Part 2: the importance of context

Our review of literature demonstrating social costs to expressing positive emotion already makes clear that there are moderating factors shaping the

social outcomes of positive emotion expression. The question of whether it is socially beneficial to express a particular positive emotion in a given situation is likely to be met with the answer "it depends". In particular, we suggest that it depends on three key contextual factors that we explore in this section, including in *what* situation the emotion is expressed, *who* the emotion is expressed by (and to), and *how* the emotion is expressed. This perspective is part of a broader movement in the field of positive psychology recognising that positive emotions and positive psychological states can be either harmful or beneficial depending on the context in which they are studied (McNulty & Fincham, 2012).

Recent theorising emphasises that there is no one "good" or "bad" type of emotion, just as there is no one "right" or "wrong" way to regulate that emotion (e.g., Aldao, 2013; Bonanno & Burton, 2013). Rather, individuals must respond flexibly to changing situational demands to express contextually appropriate emotions in appropriate ways. The ability to flexibly respond to emotional demands is a key indicator of psychological health (Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010). Indeed, Aldao (2013) suggests that it is emotional *rigidity* and inability to shift one's emotional mindset that characterises many psychological disorders. Bonanno and Burton (2013) introduced the concept of regulatory flexibility, a composite skill comprising access to a wide range of regulation strategies, sensitivity to the appropriate context in which to apply those strategies, and responsiveness to feedback.

With this flexibility in mind, Bonanno and colleagues (2004) explicitly demonstrated the well-being benefits associated with being able to effectively express or suppress one's emotions at will. In this study, participants viewed positive and negative images. On some trials, participants were asked to express the emotion they experienced, and on other trials, participants were asked to suppress the emotion they experienced so that a (bogus) person in another room would, or would not, be able to tell what emotion was being experienced. Coders blind to condition rated emotional expression and suppression, and participants who were able to accurately express when instructed and suppress when instructed showed better well-being after a natural stress induction in the form of the 9/11 bombings over 1 year later. This research suggests that people who are able to accurately express *and* suppress their emotions in situations that call for this behaviour tend to be better adjusted than those who are less expressively flexible.

Researchers have known that context matters in the evaluation of emotion expression since early work on display rules, which are ingrained standards that govern the appropriate expression of emotion in social situations. Display rules exist to teach individuals to express the right emotion in the right situation and to the right person – rules that they learn from an early age (Ekman & Friesen, 1969). In this way, work on display rules was a forerunner to modern conceptualisations of emotion

regulation and management. Ekman and Friesen (1975) outlined six strategies for managing the expression of emotion, two of which explicitly recommended *qualifying* or *masking* one's expression with a smile. Yet, as the research on happiness expressions reviewed earlier shows, smiles can indeed be inappropriate in some situations (e.g., Ansfield, 2007; Szczurek et al., 2012).

Although it is easy to recognise the importance of context in guiding the effects of emotion expression, the precise aspects of context that matter are not entirely clear in the broader psychological literature. It is our intent in this paper to outline a concrete framework for understanding which contextual factors are likely to influence the social perception of positive emotion expression that researchers may use as a guide to manipulate context in future empirical work. We offer three contextual factors informed by our review of the literature (including work by Fischer & Manstead, 2008; Hess & Fischer, 2013; Parkinson, 2005; van Kleef, 2009; van Kleef, Van Doorn, Heerdink, & Koning, 2011; among others), and based on an instrumental approach to emotion regulation, which argues that people often attempt to regulate their emotions in order to bring emotional experience in line with important goals or outcomes (Tamir, 2009, 2016). The instrumental approach posits that people may regulate emotions not just for reasons of hedonic pleasure (e.g., up-regulating positive emotions to feel better) but also for utility purposes – because certain emotions will help them in achieving a particular outcome. This perspective explains why people might engage in contra-hedonic emotion regulation, that is, up-regulating negative emotions and – relevant to our review – down-regulating positive emotions.

An instrumental approach puts context at the core of emotion processes. In this framework, people must match their emotional experience (e.g., anger, happiness) with the contextual goal (e.g., competition, cooperation). We argue that the same principle applies to successful emotion *expression* – people must match their emotion expression to the context in order to ensure smooth social interactions. When people express an emotion that is incongruous with the context it is likely to appear inappropriate, unwarranted, and inconsiderate – evaluations that typically damage social relations. We therefore introduce the *emotion mismatch principle* as a guiding framework for understanding when and why the expression of positive emotions may have negative social consequences.[1]

The emotion mismatch principle states that positive emotion expressions will be socially costly when there is an inconsistency between the expressed

[1]We note that the emotion mismatch principle is not necessarily unique to positive emotion and could be employed to understand negative emotion, although that is not our current theoretical focus. We return to this issue later in the manuscript.

positive emotion and the context. We construe context as a combination of factors that may include the particular situation (a "what" factor), the people involved (a "who" factor), and the mode of delivery (a "how" factor). For example, positive emotion expressions may have negative social outcomes when expressed in a situation that does not appear likely to evoke positive emotional experience (e.g., in response to negative stimuli). Similarly, positive emotions may sometimes be considered inappropriate when expressed to a person who does not share one's positive emotional experience. Finally, positive emotion expressions may not be well received if they are expressed with the wrong degree of intensity. We therefore present a theoretical framework outlining how these factors impact whether positive emotion has social costs or social benefits. This framework is presented in Table 1.

We are not the first to identify these three specific contextual factors as being relevant to the evaluation of emotion expression: The framework we propose is partly inspired by the burgeoning build-up of relevant research. As van Kleef and colleagues (2011) noted, moderating factors of this sort may include "the appropriateness of the emotion given the topic of communication, the way the emotion is expressed, relative status, and dispositional preferences for social harmony" (p. 124). Relatedly, Fischer and Manstead (2016) observed, "social functions of emotions are at least partly related to the perceived appropriateness of the emotion expression in the situation … and whether the expresser is regarded as sincere and as willing and able to change his or her behaviour". (p. 428). Here, our goal is to synthesise these previously recognised factors into a rubric that researchers

**Table 1.** The emotion mismatch principle: contextual factors influencing the social outcomes of expressing positive emotion.

| | Contextual element | Example of operationalisations | Example of mismatch |
|---|---|---|---|
| 'What' factor | Situation | Situational orientation (competitive vs. cooperative) | Expressing positive emotion while competing with another person (Kalokerinos et al., 2014) |
| | | Situational valence (positive vs. negative) | Expressing positive emotion while viewing negative pictures (Szczurek et al., 2012) |
| "Who" factor | Person | Partner emotion (positive vs. negative) | Expressing positive emotion to a partner who feels negative (Schall et al., 2016) |
| | | Personal characteristics (culture, gender, etc.) | Expressing positive emotion in certain collectivist cultures (Matsumoto, Yoo, Fontaine, et al., 2008) |
| "How" factor | Delivery | Intensity of expression (strong vs. weak) | Expressing extreme positive emotion in a mildly positive situation (Warner & Shields, 2009) |
| | | Authenticity of expression (authentic vs. inauthentic) | Expressing positive emotion when one does not feel positive (Keltner & Bonanno, 1997) |

can apply to identify and summarise contextual influences on perceptions of emotion expression. This rubric centres on contextual questions of "what", "who", and "how".

### The "what" factor: positive emotion expressed in the right situation

The expression of emotion serves a social purpose – signalling an individual's intentions, goals, and desires (Fridlund, 1991; Frijda & Mesquita, 1994; Keltner, Ekman, Gonzaga, & Beer, 2003; Keltner & Haidt, 1999; Shiota et al., 2004). People therefore expect there to be a match between one's emotional expression (e.g., pride) and the situation in which they express that emotion (e.g., winning). In line with the emotion mismatch principle, when there is a mismatch between one's emotional expression (e.g., pride) and the situation (e.g., losing), it is likely to arouse negative feelings and evaluations in observers, because that information is no longer diagnostic of a person's intentions or goals in that situation. It is therefore important that people match their positive emotion displays to appropriate social situations in order to ensure smooth social interactions.

One situational factor that moderates the social outcomes of expressing a particular emotion is whether the goal of an interaction is competitive or cooperative (Fischer & Manstead, 2008; Tamir, Ford, & Gilliam, 2013; van Kleef, De Dreu, & Manstead, 2010). Research suggests that positive emotion expressions can be socially benign or beneficial in contexts of cooperation. This is because positive emotions typically signal a desire to affiliate and cooperate (Fridlund, 1991; Hess & Fischer, 2013; Shiota et al., 2004); hence, there is a match between the implied goal of positive emotion expressions and the cooperative context (van Kleef, De Dreu, & Manstead, 2004a, 2004b). Van Kleef and colleagues (2010) further propose that because cooperative settings are defined by shared goals and interdependence, expressions of happiness by a target imply that a perceiver also has a reason to be happy, which should promote greater cooperation and trust.

In contrast, positive emotion expressions are likely to undermine social relations in contexts of competition, which are characterised by self-interest and antagonism. Here, the implied affiliative goal of positive emotion expression is mismatched with the presumed focus on personal gain inherent in competitive contexts. Positive emotion expressions in competitive situations may be interpreted as a sign of weakness (Kraus & Chen, 2013). Alternatively they may signal that a target is gaining at the expense of a competitor (van Kleef et al., 2010), or is taking pleasure in the competitor's misfortune (i.e., expressing schadenfreude; Cikara et al., 2014). Demonstrating this point, de Melo and colleagues (2014) had participants play a prisoner's dilemma game in which a virtual partner expressed joy following a cooperative round (reflecting an emotion-context match) or

expressed joy following a round in which they defected, betraying the participant (reflecting an emotion-context mismatch). Participants were more likely to cooperate with a partner who expressed joy in the appropriate context, that is, following cooperation. They were significantly less likely to cooperate with a partner who expressed joy in a competitive defection context. Likewise, Lanzetta and Englis (1989) found that participants showed increased physiological arousal in response to partners who expressed pleasure in a competitive context, but physiological relaxation in response to partners who expressed pleasure in a cooperative context.

In our recent work, we found direct evidence for the idea of an emotion-situation mismatch (Kalokerinos, Greenaway, & Casey, 2017). To test this idea, we created two sets of video stimuli in which targets expressed or suppressed positive emotion. One stimulus set featured undergraduate students who had been instructed to express or suppress experienced positive emotion while describing an amusing film clip (or in a control condition given no instructions on how to regulate their emotions). The other stimulus set featured trained actors who were instructed to express or suppress positive emotion while performing a script. We showed these videos in a series of experiments, telling participants that the targets were in a negative situation (e.g., having an argument, watching a sad film) or a positive situation (e.g., having a friendly conversation, watching a funny film). When the situation was positive, targets who expressed positive emotion were perceived as behaving more appropriately and as more likeable than targets who suppressed positive emotion (or control targets). However, when the situation was negative, targets who expressed positive emotion were perceived as behaving *less* appropriately and as less likeable than targets who suppressed their emotions (see Figure 2). This work shows that expressing positive emotion in negatively valenced situations can worsen social evaluations.

### *The "who" factor: positive emotion expressed by (and to) the right person*

Emotion expressions are often made with other people in mind. Indeed, the instrumental approach to emotion regulation (Tamir, 2009) suggests that individuals align their emotional state with their current goals, and proposes social goals as one category of emotion regulation goals (Tamir, 2016). Given that people regulate their emotions for social ends, whether or not a particular emotion will be socially beneficial if expressed depends in part on their interaction partner. Indeed, research shows that people are vastly more likely to share their emotional state with socially close, compared to distant, others (for a review, see Rimé, 2009), and it is likely that the interpretation of that emotion by others will similarly depend on the nature of the interpersonal relationship.

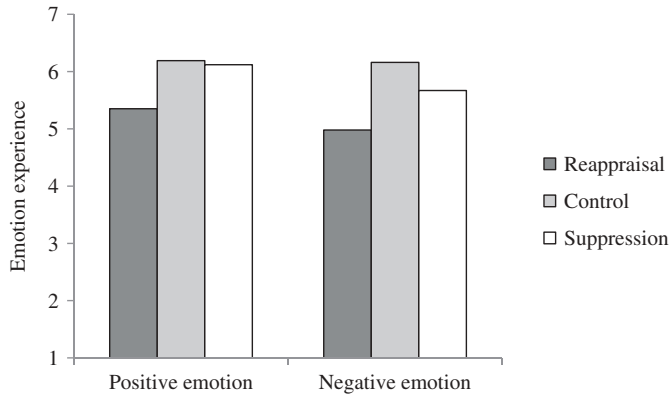


**Figure 2.** Perceived appropriateness of expressing, suppressing, or receiving no instructions to regulate positive emotion as a function of context (from Kalokerinos et al., 2017, Experiment 2). Images reproduced with permission.

Although emotion regulation research generally focuses on hedonic strategies of up-regulating positive emotion and down-regulating negative emotion, work by Tamir and colleagues (2013) suggests that it may be beneficial to up-regulate negative emotion and down-regulate positive emotion with certain interaction partners. In this experiment, participants were told they would engage in a negotiation task with a partner who was likely to be confrontational or cooperative, and were offered a monetary reward if they performed well in the negotiation. Participants preferred to engage in anger-inducing activities prior to the negotiation in the confrontation condition compared with the cooperation condition. The pattern was reversed for preferences to engage in happiness-inducing activities. That is, participants preferred to up-regulate their negative emotion and down-regulate their positive emotion when dealing with a partner who was likely to be combative instead of cooperative.

Expressing emotions that match those of an interaction partner is important in relationship formation and maintenance: The degree to which people's emotions converge and become similar is positively related to the cohesion and longevity of social bonds (Anderson, Keltner, & John, 2003). Unfortunately, our positive emotional experiences do not always align with those of other people. For example, in cases of social comparison, people often experience an emotional mismatch with their comparison partner. In the case of downward comparisons, an individual may feel positive while their partner feels negative, whereas for upward comparisons, an individual may feel negative while their partner feels positive (Tesser, 1988). Those on the receiving end of a downward social comparison tend to find these situations particularly unpleasant (Tesser & Collins, 1988), and

may try to improve their self-evaluation by reducing closeness to the out-performing friend (Tesser & Campbell, 1982). In such circumstances, the better-performing partner generally tries to protect the feelings of the person on the receiving end of a downward comparison (Friedman & Miller-Herringer, 1991; Mendolia, Beach, & Tesser, 1996). One way to do this is to reduce expressions of positive emotion about one's own success (Friedman & Miller-Herringer, 1991). Thus, it might be socially beneficial to avoid expressing positive emotion to create the appearance of emotional alignment with one's interaction partner, and to reduce the salience of the downward comparison.

Other research suggests that one should take the culture of one's partner into consideration when deciding whether to express positive emotion. For example, research suggests that the social expression of positive emotion may be less beneficial in more collectivist East Asian cultures than in individualistic Western cultures. Asian-American participants rate the expression of emotion with casual acquaintances as less appropriate than do European Americans (Matsumoto, 1993), and Japanese participants rate happiness as less appropriate to express to out-groups than do American participants (Matsumoto, 1990). More broadly, when investigating a wide sample of cultures across the world, cultural individualism is positively correlated with higher expressivity norms, particularly for positive emotions (Matsumoto, Yoo, Fontaine, et al., 2008). Taken together, this work indicates that people from less individualistic cultures may not appreciate a high degree of positive emotion expression from a relatively unknown interaction partner. This work therefore suggests that one should take the cultural background *and* their level of acquaintance with their partner into account when determining whether to express positive emotion.

The literature reviewed so far suggests that positive emotion expressions may incur social costs when expressed *to* certain types of people (e.g., people who do not share one's positive emotional state, people from certain cultures). Considering the other side of the equation, research suggests that positive emotion expressions may incur social costs when expressed *by* certain types of people. In this respect, group membership is an important cue to the contextual appropriateness of expressing certain emotions. For example, Weisbuch and Ambady (2008) found that expressions of positive emotion by racial and sports team out-group members evoked more negative reactions than the same expressions by in-group members. Specifically, positive emotion expressed by out-group members automatically activated the opposite emotional experience in participants, that is, greater negative emotion. In a similar vein, Paulus and colleagues (2016), using a reverse correlation image classification paradigm, found that people tend to perceive out-group smiles as conveying superiority and dominance, while in-group smiles convey sociality and benevolence.

Intriguingly, even though positive emotion expressions by out-group members can evoke negative reactions, people are sometimes more likely to express positive emotions to out-group members. Mendes and Koslov (2013) found that White participants were more likely to smile and laugh when interacting with a Black partner than a White partner. The authors interpreted this behaviour as evidence of "overcorrection", whereby White participants attempted to mask implicit negative attitudes by expressing positive emotion. This expressivity had a social cost: White participants who overcorrected with positive emotion did not receive reciprocal positive emotion expressions from their Black partners. Overall, this work suggests that positive emotions are best expressed to people with whom one shares group membership (i.e., in-group members) and can have negative social consequences when expressed to out-group members.

In addition, it may be more acceptable for certain groups to express positive emotion than others. Anecdotal and empirical evidence suggest that it is more socially acceptable for women to express positive emotion than men (e.g., Shields, 2005), and indeed, women expect more negative social sanctions than men when they fail to express positive emotions, particularly when those positive emotions are other-oriented (Graham, Gentry, & Green, 1981; Stoppard & Gunn Gruchy, 1993). Reciprocally, women tend to express their emotions – regardless of valence – more than men (Kring, Smith, & Neale, 1994). Men may therefore experience greater social costs to expressing positive emotions than women (e.g., Labott et al., 1991) because social convention dictates that they be more emotionally reserved.

However, some evidence suggests that the perceived appropriateness of positive emotion expressions by men and women may vary at the level of the specific positive emotion expressed. Expressing certain positive emotions associated with status, for example pride (Tracy, Shariff, Zhao, & Henrich, 2013), may be particularly beneficial for men. Men are expected to express emotions associated with dominance (Timmers, Fischer, & Manstead, 2003), and indeed, research indicates that men do express more pride than women (Brody & Hall, 1993). In contrast, expressing positive emotions associated with affiliation (e.g., happiness) may be socially costly for men. Men smile less than women, and supporting the idea that happiness expressions can be socially costly for men, this gender difference is larger when participants are aware that others could be watching them (LaFrance, Hecht, & Paluck, 2003). Demonstrating this social cost, Tracy and Beall (2011) found that men who expressed happiness in dating profiles were rated as less attractive than men who expressed pride. This pattern of results was reversed for women: Women who expressed pride in dating profiles were rated as less attractive than women who expressed happiness. In all, the literature suggests that whether a positive emotion

should be expressed or regulated depends on the person expressing the emotion, the person observing the emotion, and of course, the situational context.

### The "how" factor: positive emotion expressed in the right way

In addition to being expressed in the right situation and by and to the right person, positive emotions must also be expressed in the *right way* to avoid social costs. One clear factor here is the intensity with which the emotion is expressed. Much of the research discussed so far has treated emotion expression as a dichotomous variable: that is, the studies focus on whether positive emotion is expressed or not expressed, without examining the intensity with which the expression occurs. However, it is clear that emotion expression takes place on a continuum, with the expression of emotion varying in intensity from almost neutral (e.g., micro-expressions; Ekman & O'Sullivan, 1991) to extreme (e.g., strong expression through both verbal and non-verbal channels). It is likely that this expressive intensity has a role to play in determining whether emotion expression is socially beneficial: A person may express the right emotion for the situation (e.g., gratitude in response to a favour) but express that emotion to the wrong degree (e.g., by expressing an amount of gratitude disproportionate to the size of the favour).

By expressing the correct emotion with too much or too little intensity, a person may be expressing emotion in the *wrong way*. Empirical support for this point comes from research by Warner and Shields (2009) who found that more intense emotion (in this study, anger) was perceived as more appropriate as the situational severity increased: Extreme anger was seen as warranted in severe situations, but unwarranted when the situation was less severe. Research on positive emotion has shown that targets who express extreme happiness are rated as more naïve than targets who express moderate happiness, and thus are more likely to be exploited by others (Barasch, Levine, & Schweitzer, 2016). To be judged positively, people do not just have to match the right emotion to the right context; they also need to display the appropriate amount of emotion.

A second important factor in the way emotion is expressed is authenticity. An emerging research agenda suggests that emotions should be expressed authentically in order to have positive outcomes (English & John, 2013). In addition to well-being benefits (Kifer, Heller, Perunovic, & Galinsky, 2013), feeling and acting authentically is associated with positive social consequences, including better relationship outcomes (Le & Impett, 2013). This may be because authenticity signals trust and openness, which are important qualities for interpersonal closeness (Reis & Patrick, 1996).

This suggests that perceived inauthenticity will have negative social consequences. In line with this suggestion, research does indicate that

positive emotions that are inauthentically expressed can incur social costs. For example, Pataki and Clark (2004) found that unattractive women, compared with attractive women, tended to discount expressions of happiness by a man they expected to interact with, distrusting their motives for expressing what they perceived to be inauthentic emotion. This distrust was not entirely misplaced; men did report greater happiness about interacting with an unattractive woman when they believed she would see their ratings and more disappointment when they believed she would not. Our recent work has found evidence for the role of authenticity: In a series of unpublished experiments, we have found that perceived authenticity moderates the effects of positive emotion expression on social evaluations. We find that winners who express a positive emotion they are said to genuinely feel are seen as *more* successful and competent than winners who suppress positive emotion they are said to genuinely feel. However, we found no difference in ratings of expressing and suppression winners when positive emotion is described as non-genuine, indicating that authenticity plays a key role in the interpretation of positive emotional displays (i.e., inauthentic; Greenaway, Kalokerinos, Murphy, & McIlroy, in preparation).

Perhaps the most well-known example of this authenticity phenomenon concerns the difference between genuine and fake smiles. Genuine, or "Duchenne", smiles are characterised by contraction of the orbicularis oculi muscle (producing "crows feet") and zygomaticus major (mouth) muscle, and are perceived as more natural, social, and pleasant than non-Duchenne smiles (Frank, Ekman, & Friesen, 1993). For instance, relative to genuine smiles, fake smiles induce less liking (Harker & Keltner, 2001), mimicry (Surakka & Hietanen, 1998), and enjoyment in observers (Frank et al., 1993). It should be noted that genuine (appearing) smiles can be faked and thus are not necessarily a *true* signal of authenticity (Krumhuber & Manstead, 2009; Thibault, Levesque, Gosselin, & Hess, 2012), but it still appears that people tend to perceive these smiles positively. Taking a cue from the insincere pretence of appreciation by one who has received an unappreciated gift, it is generally beneficial to express emotion in an apparently authentic and "real" way.

Other research suggests that the expression of positive emotion may sometimes make people *feel* inauthentic and so have negative social consequences (Hochschild, 1983). For example, adhering to display rules that call for the suppression of negative emotion and expression, or amplification, of positive emotion has been shown to increase feelings of inauthenticity in the workplace (Hochschild, 1983; Simpson & Stroh, 2004). Other work confirms that these inauthentic positive emotion displays can come with social costs. Keltner and Bonanno (1997) found that bereaved partners who exhibited fake smiles and laughter while discussing their deceased partners in a grief symptom interview received worse social ratings and

less comfort from observers. Thus, inflexible application of a positive emotion expression rule may ultimately backfire, leading individuals to be perceived as inauthentic and socially inappropriate. Individuals should be mindful to express positive emotion authentically if their aim is to reap social rewards. We should note that the benefits of expressing emotions authentically may be culturally bound. Peng and Nisbett (1999) suggest that East Asian cultures may place less value on an alignment between outward and inward states than Western cultures, and thus may place less of a premium on emotional authenticity.

## What causes emotion mismatch?

We have so far explored the guiding influence of context in determining when and why expressing positive emotion can have negative social effects, introducing an overarching tenet – the *emotion mismatch principle* – to describe this process. At its heart, the principle states that positive emotion expressions will be socially costly when there is an inconsistency between the emotion that people *expect* to see expressed in a given context and the emotion that is *actually* expressed in that context. In this sense, we believe that the process through which these effects ultimately operate is a general perception by observers that people's positive emotion expression is inappropriate (Ansfield, 2007; Kalokerinos et al., 2017). Because this perception relies on the social expectations and attributions made by other people about emotion expression, the emotion mismatch principle implicitly incorporates a social appraisal process (Manstead & Fischer, 2001).

### The role of appraisal processes

Thus far, we have focused on emotion "senders", cautioning that expressers must be careful to show positive emotions in the right situation, to the right person, and in the right way. Yet, the social impact of emotion expressions is in the eye of the beholder. The way an emotion "receiver" appraises an expressed emotion will influence their social reaction to it (Fischer & Manstead, 2008; Manstead & Fischer, 2001; van Kleef, 2009). From this perspective, emotion expression is a two-way street, depending both on perceivers being able to accurately identify expressed emotions and associated intentions, and targets being effective in their expression of a particular emotion and intention (Biesanz, 2010; Hareli & Hess, 2010; Hess, Kafetsios, Mauersberger, Blaison, & Kessler, 2016).

Much of the literature we have reviewed in this article appears to suggest that positive emotion expressions can be socially costly when they violate social norms for the appropriate expression of emotion. For example, we expect winners to be humble in victory, friends to sympathise rather than rhapsodise when we feel sad, allies to take pleasure in our success rather

than failure, and people to show disgust rather than happiness at unpleasant sights. Violating these affective norms through expressing contextually inappropriate emotion incurs a social cost (Szczurek et al., 2012), but the reason for this social cost is that observers have *appraised* these expressions as socially inappropriate in the first place (Ansfield, 2007). This suggests that if observers were to develop a social attribution that excused anti-normative emotion expressions, such expressions would be unlikely to incur social costs. For example, laughing at a funeral may not be considered inappropriate if onlookers decide that it reflects a celebration of the life of the deceased. Similarly, an insincere pretence of gratitude for an unwanted gift is unlikely to be perceived negatively if it is not appraised as inauthentic.

However, we believe that benevolent attributions for inappropriate positive emotion expression are likely to be the exception rather than the rule. Classic research on the fundamental attribution error (Ross, 1977) indicates that people typically provide dispositional, rather than situational, explanations for the behaviour of others. Thus, if people perceive another person expressing positive emotion in an inappropriate context (e.g., Bill Clinton laughing at Ron Brown's funeral), they are unlikely to recognise the situational constraints that may have led to such expressions (e.g., responding to a fellow attendant's jovial greeting) and instead infer a dispositional explanation for the response (e.g., Clinton did not care about Brown).

However, the type of appraisals made about inappropriate positive emotion expressions may also depend on *who* the emotion expresser is (see the "who" factor, above). According to research on the ultimate attribution error (Pettigrew, 1979), the dispositional attribution advantage is only observed when people explain the negative behaviour of out-group members, while a more benevolent interpretation is provided for the negative behaviour of in-group members. That is, where out-group members may be perceived as expressing inappropriate positive emotion for callous reasons, in-group members (or close others) are likely to be given the benefit of the doubt in such situations. This is because we trust in-group members and believe they have motives to promote social harmony (Hornsey & Imani, 2004; Tanis & Postmes, 2005). This may mean that in-group members are given affordances for expressing positive emotion (e.g., trying to cheer up a sad friend rather than demonstrating callous disregard for the other person's feelings), and may even be given leeway when they fail to accurately inhibit inappropriate positive emotion expression.

This suggests the contextual factors that guide appropriate positive emotion expression that we outlined above may be further moderated by social appraisals made by observers. Of course, context influences the appraisals people make, and hence there are likely to be complicated reciprocal relationships between social context and individual appraisal

that ultimately determine the social outcomes of specific emotion expressions. It is nevertheless important to note that there are appraisal-based exceptions to the factors we outlined above. Thus far, empirical work in this area is limited, but it is clear that a nuanced understanding of not only the expresser and the context but also of the observer and their attributions, is required to fully understand the potential costs and benefits of expressing positive emotion.

### The role of social goals

It is important to note that we have focused our review on social costs in the form of closeness and cooperation – that is, affiliative social goals. We focused on this outcome specifically because positive emotion expressions, particularly happiness expressions, are generally considered to be affiliative signals designed to align oneself with others (Fridlund, 1991). Thus, we believed it would be a more conservative approach to identify ways in which expressing positive emotion undermines social closeness and liking – the outcomes such expressions are usually designed to elicit. Developing and maintaining social relationships with others is an important social goal, but it is not the only type of goal people may hold (Fischer & Manstead, 2016; Fiske, 2002). For example, people also seek to establish and maintain a social position relative to others; a status goal that may sometimes be at odds with an affiliation goal. Thus, the social success of a positive emotion expression is likely to depend on the goal that is active in a given situation. If people do not desire closeness with an interaction partner, then expressing positive emotion in a way that undermines closeness cannot be considered a social failure, and may instead be successful in serving some other goal.

We have found evidence of this notion in our own work. In early research, we found that winners who express positive emotion following victory are seen as less likeable than winners who suppress that emotion (Kalokerinos et al., 2014). However, in more recent unpublished work, we have found that the same winners who express positive emotion are seen as higher status and more formidable opponents than winners who suppress positive emotion (Greenaway et al., in preparation). Thus, relationship costs to expressing positive emotion may sometimes come with reputational benefits. This highlights the importance of considering people's social goals when determining whether positive emotion expressions are likely to be socially beneficial or costly.

### The role of negative emotion

In this review, we have focused specifically on understanding when and why the expression of positive emotion can be socially costly. In doing so, we did not consider the role of negative emotion, or the potential interactions between positive and negative emotions. Previous research has

examined the ways in which expression or disclosure of negative feelings can have social costs and, somewhat surprisingly, benefits (Kelly & McKillop, 1996; Kennedy-Moore & Watson, 2001; Sutton, 1991). This suggests that a contextual examination of the costs and benefits of expressing emotion – positive *and* negative – is a logical direction for the emotion field to pursue.

We believe the emotion mismatch principle also operates for negative emotion, and anticipates that the contextual factors we have outlined moderate the social effects of expressing negative emotion as for positive emotion. There is direct evidence of these processes operating similarly for the "right situation" factor we propose in our framework: Szczurek and colleagues (2012) found that targets who expressed negative emotion while supposedly viewing positive images were judged particularly harshly – even more so than targets who expressed positive emotion while supposedly viewing negative images. Turning to the "right person" factor, in line with positive emotion, research suggests that the identity of one's interaction partner guides display rules about expressing negative emotions such as anger or sadness (Zeman & Garber, 1996). Finally, there is also evidence for the "right way" factor: Warner and Shields (2009) found that negative emotion expressions were rated as more appropriate when expressed intensely in intense situations and as less appropriate when expressed intensely in neutral situations.

We focused specifically on positive emotion in this review to address the positive–negative asymmetry in emotion research, whereby researchers have paid comparatively more attention to the regulation of negative compared with positive emotion. We hope that in future, the literature will move to a state of greater balance in which positive and negative emotion expressions, and the contexts in which they are made, are examined simultaneously. Future research might even consider investigating the interaction of expressed positive and negative emotions (i.e., mixed emotions; Aragón, Clark, Dyer, & Bargh, 2015) to determine whether the negative social consequences of inappropriate positive emotion expression can be counteracted by simultaneous expression of negative emotion, and vice versa.

### *Interplay between contextual factors*

We have presented a framework for understanding which contextual factors matter for the evaluation of positive emotion expression, comprising a "what" factor, a "who" factor, and a "how" factor. This is intended to be a launching point for empirical research. We outline these situational, relational, and delivery factors based on a review of the literature in the hopes that researchers moving forward will manipulate and measure "what", "who", and "how" factors in their work to begin cataloguing how these factors influence social evaluations of emotion expressions, together and in isolation. Such a framework both cues researchers to factors they can

vary to begin cataloguing moderation effects, and provides a structure for the organisation of existing research. Adoption of a field-wide rubric of this sort would allow the field to begin coalescing established wisdom about the effect of contextual factors on emotion processes (Greenaway, Kalokerinos, & Williams, in preparation).

As such, the framework as it currently stands does not address the complexities that may arise from interactions between the different factors. However, the contextual focus we have taken invites theoretical speculation of this sort. Real-life contexts are rarely so obliging as to vary solely in terms of the situational goal, or the people present, or the mode of emotion delivery. On the contrary, these factors are inherently intertwined and reinforcing: *Who* is present will influence *how* emotion is expressed; *what* situational goals are active will depend on *who* is in that situation, and so on.

Hence, it is likely that there are important higher-order interactions between positive emotion expression and various aspects of the context. It may even be that the processes behind the effects of certain contextual factors depend on other contextual factors. For example, the expression of positive emotion in response to negative stimuli (a type of situational mismatch) may have negative social effects because observers assume the expresser is behaving inauthentically (a type of delivery mismatch). Moreover, certain contextual factors may moderate the effects of other factors. For example, there are social costs to expressing positive emotion in negative situations, but what if this positive emotion was expressed at a very low intensity? Perhaps this would dampen perceived mismatch and associated social condemnation. In addition, perhaps *who* is expressing the emotion would affect how situational or delivery factors operate in influencing the effects of positive emotion expressions.

Currently, such discussion is necessarily speculative. Testing these hypotheses empirically will provide insight into whether – and if so, which and for whom – particular contextual factors exert a primary influence on social evaluations of positive emotion. Here, we can only offer speculation based on our intuitive observations while manipulating some of these factors. For example, our published work shows that situation valence (positive vs. negative) reliably moderates social evaluations of targets who express positive emotion (Kalokerinos et al., 2017). In ongoing work, we are beginning to manipulate *who* targets are talking to when they express positive emotion (Greenaway, Kalokerinos, & Bingley, in preparation). Our nascent observation thus far is that the social relationships within a situation exert a less striking and consistent impact on evaluations of emotion expression than the situation itself, as indicated by smaller effect sizes as a result of manipulating "who" one is talking to compared to "what" situation they are in. We are turning our thoughts to why this may be the case, and encourage other researchers to do the same.

## Part 3: the benefits (and costs) of suppressing positive emotion

We have thus far explored the contexts in which expressing positive emotion may come with social costs. Yet, this is only part of the story – if positive emotion has social costs when expressed, then to avoid these costs, one can engage in the process of emotion down-regulation. There are a range of emotion regulation strategies that might be useful in down-regulating contextually inappropriate positive emotion, but we argue that one strategy might be particularly useful, namely *expressive suppression* (Gross & Levenson, 1993). As its name suggests, expressive suppression targets the behavioural expression of emotion: When people successfully suppress their emotions, perceivers are unable to tell by looking at the target what emotion they are experiencing (Gross & Levenson, 1993, 1997; Webb, Miles, & Sheeran, 2012).

### *Costs of suppressing positive emotion*

Just as expressing positive emotion is generally thought to be associated with positive personal and social outcomes, suppressing the expression of emotion is generally thought to be associated with negative personal outcomes, including cognitive and physiological exhaustion (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Muraven, & Tice, 1998; Gross & Levenson, 1997; Richards & Gross, 2000; Schmeichel, 2007). Beyond personal consequences, expressive suppression has been found to harm social relationships – reducing social rapport and inhibiting relationship formation and quality (Butler et al., 2003; Gross & John, 2003; Impett et al., 2012).

Little research has investigated suppression of *positive* emotion specifically. Correlational research that has considered this question suggests it comes with similar costs to negative emotion suppression. A daily diary study conducted by Nezlek and Kuppens (2008) found that expressive suppression of positive emotion was associated with lower self-esteem and poorer psychological adjustment. Relatedly, English and John (2013) found that chronic expressive suppression of positive emotion predicted worse social functioning and relationship satisfaction. Speaking against this one-dimensional view of the costs of expressive suppression, we argue that this emotion regulation strategy can have social benefits when used appropriately, namely, in contexts in which expressing positive emotion is likely to incur a social cost.

### *Benefits of suppressing positive emotion*

Although research on chronic expressive suppression of positive emotion suggests that this strategy is personally and socially maladaptive, recent experimental research demonstrates that it may sometimes have personal

and social benefits, at least in the short term. While researchers assumed for some time that suppression reduced the experience of positive emotion (although not negative emotion; Gross & Levenson, 1997), our work shows this is not always the case (Kalokerinos, Greenaway, & Denson, 2015). In two high-powered experiments with over 1,000 participants, we induced positive or negative emotion in participants using film clips. Before watching the film clips, we assigned participants to one of three conditions in which they were instructed to use expressive suppression during the clip, to use cognitive reappraisal during the clip, or not provided any instructions about regulating their emotions during the clip, before again measuring emotion experience. We found that reappraisal reduced the experience of positive and negative emotion relative to the control condition, but that suppression did not (see Figure 3). These results therefore challenged a widely held assumption in the literature that suppression reduces positive emotion. In contrast, it appears to leave this dimension of emotion untouched. Thus, while other emotion regulation strategies might also be useful, suppression seems like it would be particularly effective at offsetting the costs associated with inappropriate positive emotion expression, while maintaining the benefits of positive emotion experience.

Thus, we argue that people may fruitfully employ expressive suppression to counteract the social costs that come with contextually inappropriate positive emotion expression. This is a relatively new notion in the emotion regulation literature, which typically focuses on hedonic regulatory strategies – those that up-regulate positive emotion and down-regulate negative emotion – rather than contra-hedonic regulatory strategies – those that down-regulate positive emotion and up-regulate negative emotion. It also presents a new way of thinking about expressive suppression specifically,

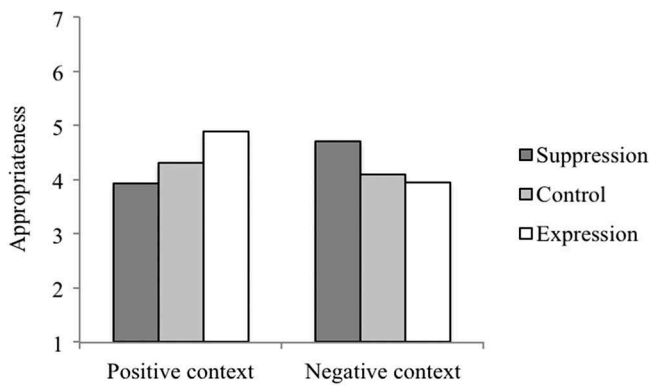


Figure 3. Self-reported emotion experience among people reappraising, suppressing, or given no instructions to regulate positive and negative emotion (from Kalokerinos et al., 2015, Experiment 2). Images reproduced with permission.

which the literature has tended to present as a maladaptive emotion regulation strategy.

We have observed the benefits of this approach in our own work, described above, in which we found expressive winners were rated more positively than inexpressive winners who were rated by independent coders as employing expressive suppression techniques to inhibit the outward expression of positive emotion (Kalokerinos et al., 2014). More recent work directly tested the role of suppression in this phenomenon. Schall and colleagues (2016) had participants watch videos of targets who expressed or suppressed positive emotion and described these as taking place in an outperformance context (in which the target received a better grade than a friend on a test) or an equal performance context (in which the target performed as well as a friend). The authors found that targets who suppressed positive emotion were liked more than targets who expressed positive emotion in an outperformance context, but that the opposite was true in the equal performance context.

We found similar evidence for this point in the research described in the "what" factor, above (Kalokerinos et al., 2017). In positive situations, we found that targets who suppressed positive emotion were perceived as behaving less appropriately and as less likeable than targets who expressed positive emotion (i.e., replicating the main takeaway message of most expressive suppression findings to date). However, in negative situations, targets who suppressed positive emotion were perceived as behaving *more* appropriately and as *more* likeable than targets who expressed positive emotion. We should note that an internal meta-analysis of the effects across six experiments showed that the socially beneficial effect of suppression in negative situations was at least half as strong ($d_{\text{appropriate}} = -0.68$; $d_{\text{likeable}} = -0.26$) as the socially beneficial effect of expression in positive situations ($d_{\text{appropriate}} = 1.02$; $d_{\text{likeable}} = 1.12$; see Figure 4). We believe this reveals the strength of the general assumption that it is better to express than suppress positive emotion, making it even more impressive that there *are* circumstances in which suppressing positive emotion appears to be the superior strategy. Overall, this research suggests that expressive suppression can be a socially beneficial strategy in situations that call for it, and identifying those situations is a fruitful direction for future research.

Some early work in this space shows that suppression can also have social benefits when employed judiciously in romantic relationships. Le and Impett (2013) found that individuals who suppressed negative emotions about relationship sacrifices enjoyed higher well-being and better relationship quality. Critically, this effect occurred only for people who construed the self in interdependent terms. For individuals low in interdependence, suppression had negative personal and relationship consequences. These

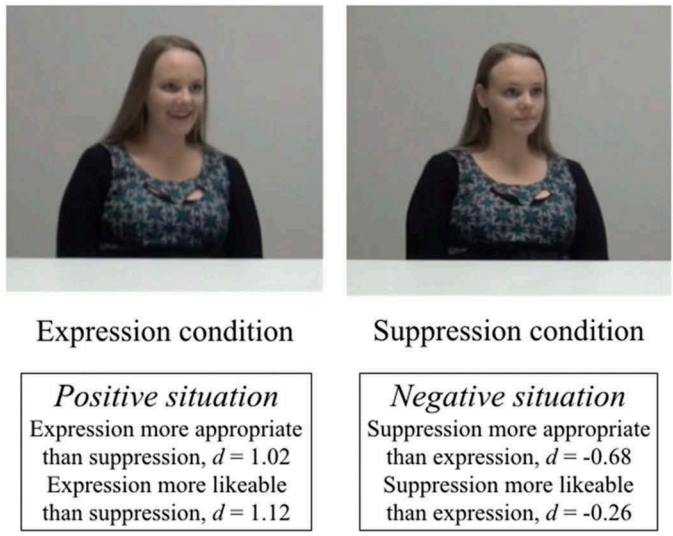


**Figure 4.** Results of meta-analysis and screenshots of videos used to manipulate positive emotion expression and suppression in Kalokerinos et al. (2017, Stimulus Set 2). Images reproduced with permission.

effects were mediated by perceived authenticity: Independently focused people felt less authentic when suppressing, which had relationship costs, while interdependently focused people felt more authentic when suppressing, which had relationship benefits. This is likely to be because interdependent people have a goal of maintaining social harmony, and hence are able to authentically suppress the expression of negative emotions with the goal of preserving relationship quality. Whether or not these benefits persist when romantic partners suppress *positive* emotion awaits future research. However, it seems likely that, echoing Le and Impett's (2013) research, suppressing positive emotions may also have positive outcomes if this serves to protect the feelings of a romantic partner.

Earlier, we noted that the phenomena we examine may be somewhat culturally bound. This is the case for expressive suppression: Research suggests that the assumption that suppression is a generally maladaptive strategy may be culturally constructed. Expressive suppression is an acceptable and even desirable emotion regulation strategy in Eastern cultures (Matsumoto, Yoo, & Nakagawa, 2008). This may be because individuals in these cultures are less motivated to engage in the hedonic emotion regulation process of up-regulating positive emotions and down-regulating negative emotions (Miyamoto & Ma, 2011; Miyamoto, Ma, & Petermann, 2014). Certainly, the findings of Le and Impett (2013) discussed above suggest that suppression may be a beneficial strategy for people high in interdependence, which is a hallmark of many Eastern cultures (Markus & Kitayama,

1991). Butler, Lee, and Gross (2007) directly assessed whether the social consequences of suppressing negative emotion extended to Asian cultures. They found that among participants who held more traditional Asian values, the detrimental social effects of suppression were reduced. This work suggests that a Western cultural aversion to suppression may have coloured research on emotion regulation, leading researchers to focus on the pitfalls of this strategy while overlooking potential benefits.

A broad characterisation of emotion expression as "good" and suppression as "bad" clearly misses the nuance in how and why people actually regulate their emotions, and the effectiveness with which they do so. The research we have reviewed demonstrates that positive emotion expression is likely to be beneficial in some contexts and costly in others. It therefore stands to reason that the effects of positive emotion suppression will be likewise dependent on context. This is the core message of the regulatory flexibility approach (e.g., Aldao, 2013; Aldao, Sheppes, & Gross, 2015; Bonanno & Burton, 2013), which argues that no one emotion regulation strategy is universally beneficial or costly, but will be differentially effective in different contexts. Researchers in this area have made targeted calls to address gaps in the literature by identifying conditions under which expressive suppression is an effective emotion regulation strategy (Bonanno & Burton, 2013), to which we add our voices.

## Combining personal and social levels of analysis

In this review, we have focused particularly on negative *social* outcomes to the expression of positive emotion in particular contexts. Yet, when taken too far, positive emotion expressions may also have negative *personal* outcomes. Indeed, inability to appropriately express positive emotion is a hallmark of many mental health disorders, and exploring how positive emotion expression goes wrong in clinical populations is another avenue through which to understand the personal consequences of inappropriate positive emotion expression. For example, exaggerated expression of positive emotion is co-morbid with maladaptive goal pursuit in individuals with a history of mania (Johnson, 2005). Even in non-clinical populations, the expression of positive emotion can have negative consequences for personal well-being. For example, Labroo and colleagues (2014) found that among people who believed that smiling causes happiness, frequent smiling reduced well-being, ironically because it lowered felt happiness. Exploring potential negative personal consequences of unregulated expression of positive emotion is therefore a fruitful avenue for future research.

However, by and large, the literature tends to reveal personal benefits to expressing positive emotion (e.g., Bonanno & Keltner, 1997; Fredrickson & Levenson, 1998; Gable et al., 2004; Harker & Keltner, 2001). The present

review suggests that, in some situations, these personal benefits may be associated with social costs, suggesting a potential trade-off between personal and social benefits. For example, research suggests that people sometimes express positive emotion to help them cope with negative experiences (Ansfield, 2007). Expressing emotions that are opposite in valence to those that are experienced may help people regulate their emotional state (Aragón et al., 2015), and thus may serve a personal emotion-regulatory function. However, these expressions typically come with a social cost, as observers tend to appraise mismatched emotional expressions as being inappropriate and morally questionable (Kalokerinos et al., 2017; Szczurek et al., 2012). It may even be the perception that individuals are putting their own needs ahead of social mores that leads to the social cost (e.g., celebrating a win in the presence of a loser; Kalokerinos et al., 2014; Schall et al., 2016).

Specific exceptions notwithstanding, personal and social benefits often go hand in hand in emotion research. That is, when positive emotion expressions *do* have positive personal effects, it is often through social processes. For example, Mauss and colleagues (2005) found that people who expressed positive emotion they felt (i.e., showing greater experience-behaviour congruence) reported greater social connectedness, and through this process experienced lower depression and higher well-being. Gable and colleagues (2004) found that discussing a positive experience with others enhanced personal well-being, especially if others responded positively. This benefit was over and above the direct impact of the actual positive experience. This mediating role of social processes supports a social–functional perspective on emotion, an approach that claims emotions serve to build and maintain social bonds with others (Frijda & Mesquita, 1994; Keltner & Haidt, 1999). Positive emotion expressions are thought to signal affiliation and cooperation, and for this reason promote social connectedness with others. Social connectedness, in turn, has important personal benefits in the form of promoting better individual health and well-being (Cohen, 2004; Cruwys, South, Greenaway, & Haslam, 2015; Greenaway, Cruwys, Haslam, & Jetten, 2016; Greenaway et al., 2015; Jetten, Haslam, & Haslam, 2012). Thus, it is partly through *social* means that positive emotions can have personal benefits.

This interpretation provides an intriguing new light in which to view the social costs of expressing positive emotion. If positive emotion expressions sometimes have personal benefits because they promote improved social outcomes, then positive emotion expressions that have *detrimental* social outcomes may also have harmful effects at the personal level through this social process. The opposite may be true for positive emotion suppression: Suppression that has social *benefits* may also have benefits at the personal level through this social process. That is, although positive emotion suppression may have a direct detrimental effect on personal outcomes, it may

sometimes compensate for these with a simultaneous beneficial effect on personal outcomes via positive social outcomes (i.e., constituting a statistical suppression effect).

Understanding the effects of positive emotion expression and down-regulation at personal and social levels of analysis, and the interactions between these levels, is an exciting new challenge for emotion research. To fully examine these two levels, research conducted on a longer timescale may be necessary: It is likely, for example, that the personal costs of suppressing positive emotion are immediate, but the personal benefits will only emerge as a result of accrued social benefits at a later time point. Such research will also be important in examining the frequency of such situations in daily life: it may be that individuals who encounter social situations in which they need to suppress more often will show long-term personal costs that are not offset by the social benefits they receive. Here, research from the emotional labour literature may be useful in identifying situations that require chronic (inauthentic) expression or suppression of emotion. Moreover, methods that allow for non-intrusive measurement of these emotion processes in daily life, such as experience sampling techniques, will be critical in testing these hypotheses.

## Conclusions

We have reviewed research highlighting surprising costs to expressing positive emotion, and outlined three contextual factors that guide the appropriate expression of positive emotion. First, we argue, positive emotions are likely to be beneficial when expressed in the *right situation* (a "what" factor), with particular attention paid to the valence and perceived competiveness of the context. Second, positive emotions are likely to be beneficial when expressed by and to the *right person* (a "who" factor). Our analysis suggests that in-group members and particular groups (e.g., women) are given more leeway in the expression of positive emotion. Third, we argue that positive emotions are likely to be beneficial when expressed in the *right way* (a "how" factor). Consideration should be given to the authenticity and intensity with which an emotion is expressed.

We hope that this perspective will help to bring balance to the emotion literature, which has not yet given a great deal of consideration to the nuanced ways in which positive emotion expressions might affect social outcomes. Life provides many examples of public figures who faced a backlash for what was perceived as an inappropriate expression of positive emotion: Amanda Knox kissing and joking with her boyfriend after her flatmate was murdered; Bill Clinton laughing at Ron Brown's funeral; James Cameron displaying unbridled glee as he wins an Oscar with the losers looking on. People intuitively recognise that these positive emotional

expressions are inappropriate and likely to be met with social disapprobation, but the scientific literature is only beginning to articulate when and why this might be the case. This paper has provided a framework that outlines when and why people may see downsides to up-regulating positive emotion and upsides to down-regulating positive emotion.

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