

INTERDEPENDENT SELF-CONSTRUAL, COMPETITIVE ATTITUDES, CULTURE AND EMOTIONAL REACTIONS ON SADNESS

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Two studies analyzed the relationship between interdependent self-construal, competitive attitudes, emotional expression, coping, and subjective emotional reaction on sadness. This article reports the research carried out in 29 countries. These studies replicate previous research showing that people living in collectivist and high power distance contexts report low verbal expression, and low emotional intensity. Participants sharing collectivist self-construal and competitive attitudes reported more secondary coping (that is, self-modification or suppression reactions). However, only competitive attitudes were related to low verbal emotional expression and low subjective reactions. Participants answered questions related to a typical person and for their personal experience. Results suggest that cultural feelings and display norms can explain the stoical emotional personal style, since actual self-reported and general emotional knowledge patterns were similar. However, the association between coping and subjective reactions was stronger in the personal experience condition, suggesting that internal processes depend on norms less than open verbal behavior.

Key words: emotional expression; cultural dimensions, interdependent self-construal, competitive attitudes, cross-cultural

It is currently accepted that the cultural context plays an important role in emotions. Culture could be determining both internal (e.g., appraisals of emotional intensity) and external emotional behaviors as verbal and non-verbal reactions. A well-known study shows that American participants report more verbal and non-verbal emotional reactions than Japanese participants (Matsumoto, 1989). Sometimes, differences are not only quantitative, but qualitative, or related to the cultural meaning of the emotional expression. For instance, in Chinese novels people smile to hide distress, anger, and embarrassment (Klineberg, 1954), but smile is the prototypical expression of happiness in Western cultures (Ekman, 1972). Classic research suggests that Japanese participants smile when experiencing distress in the presence of a high status person, though when they are alone they display as negative behaviors as the American participants, who always act in the same way in all contexts (Ekman, 1972; Friesen, 1972).

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Different theories coincide on the assumption that there are cultural norms concerning the appropriateness of emotional expressions (Scherer, Wallbott, & Summerfield, 1986). Display rules are related not only to facial expression, but also to the perception and expression of many parameters of emotions, including verbal and non-verbal behaviors (Matsumoto, 1989). The same event can have different meanings depending on cultural norms (Mesquita & Frijda, 1992). Markus and Kitayama (1994) point out that even the nature of emotion itself is influenced by culture: in individualistic cultures emotions mean private experiences, but in collectivist cultures emotions are defined as strategies for coordinating social relationships.

Previous studies have compared people living in different context, and have not made direct measures of beliefs and attitudes related to cultural values. In this article we shall focus on the role played by psychological constructs related to cultural dimensions.

Cultural dimensions and emotional expression

Two main cultural dimensions are Hierarchy or Power Distance and Individualism (Hofstede, 2001). Power Distance (PDI) refers to the extent to which less powerful group members accept inequalities: in high PDI cultures respect, asymmetry in roles and rewards are stressed, while in low PDI cultures egalitarian norms and interdependence are emphasized. Individualism (or high IDV) refers to the relative priority granted to the person and to voluntary relationships (e.g., friends), while Collectivism (or low IDV) refers to the relative priority given to in-group goals and to obligatory relationships (e.g., family). Individualist cultures can be horizontal or egalitarian, as in Scandinavian nations, or vertical and hierarchical, as in North America and Britain. Collectivist cultures can be egalitarian, as in Costa Rica, or vertical, as in China. As Mesquita and Leu (2007) found, compared to people living in low PDI and Individualist cultures, those living in high PDI and Collectivist cultures reported lower levels of emotions, of mental ruminations, and of expression of emotion. In high PDI and Collectivist cultures, experiencing and expressing intense negative emotions is indeed not socially desirable. Among members of this last-named type of culture, focusing on one's internal states is not valued, so that people's attention is less self-centered than in is the case of other cultures. Levels of emotional intensity and communication are higher in individualistic and egalitarian societies (see also Basabe & Ros, 2005). Individualistic cultures are assumed to reinforce emotional expression in general, while collectivism, at least Asian collectivism, is assumed to induce self-restraint and moderation in emotional display, especially for negative emotions. For instance, the Chinese, more collectivist than North Americans, are supposed to suppress more negative emotions in front of in-groups (e.g., family, and including the extended family), in order to maintain a greater degree of harmony. In the individualistic cultures, the verbal and non-verbal display of negative emotions, such as sadness, may be better tolerated under conditions where expressing such emotions enhances the individual's sense of uniqueness and allows the person to be assertive (Kitayama, Mesquita, & Karasawa, 2006; Matsumoto, 1989; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Porter & Samovar, 1998). In fact, individualism correlates positively with the social desirability of negative emotions (see Basabe, Páez, Valencia, Rimé, Pennebaker, Diener, & González, 2000;

Galati, Schmidt, Sini, Tinti, Manzano, Roca, & Estaún Ferrer, 2005). Stephan, White and Cabezas (1996) partially confirm that individualistic participants (North Americans) report more willingness to express negative emotions than collectivist participants (Costa Ricans).

High power distance cultures foster emotional reactions that respect and legitimize status differences, and in these societies the expression of conflictive emotions such as anger may be attenuated. Displaying high-intensity emotions, particularly negative ones, could be interpreted as a lack of respect. In Confucian Asian cultures, the expression of negative emotions in social situations, particularly to high status targets, is strongly discouraged, as the expression and perception of negative emotions such as anger may be viewed as threatening the social order. People who live in low power distance cultures tend to communicate or display emotions more freely, and this includes the display of negative emotions towards social superiors without fear of repercussion (Hofstede, 1991, 2001; Matsumoto, 2001; Porter & Samovar, 1998). Previous research supports the idea that people from high power distance cultures, such as Asians, self-report lower intensity and lower emotional expression (see Basabe et al., 2000).

In the case of the verbal expression of emotion, collectivism and high power distance, at least five studies support the assertion that collectivistic Asians disclose less than individualistic Americans. Japanese, as compared to Americans, generally show strong reluctance to initiate conversations with strangers (Gudykunst & Nishida, 1994), as well as low levels of self-disclosure. The Asian collectivist's highly contextual style of communication reinforces the avoidance of stressing points too directly, and the use of silence and restraint in emotional verbalization (Holtgraves, 1997). In brief, collectivist participants express less to all types of groups, while the opposite occurs with individualistic participants (Stephan, Stephan, Saito, & Barnett, 1998). In any case, it is important to note that Latin American, Mediterranean and Asian collectivism does not show the same expressive emotional style. The Latin American and Arab expressive style emphasizes rhetoric and exaggerated expression (Huici, 2001); Asian collectivists report low levels of expression (see Diener & Larsen, 1993).

Cultural dimensions and emotional experience

Previous research and data support the idea that people belonging to collectivist and high power distance cultures self-report lower intensity and lower emotional expression (see Basabe et al., 2000). At the psychological level, Taylor, Sherman, Kim, Jarcho, Takagi, Dunagan (2004) found that Asian subjects reported lower levels of seeking emotional support to cope with stress, which were usually related to verbal expression and self-disclosure. Basabe et al. (2000) and Scherer (1997) found that cultures reporting higher levels of emotional expression also report higher subjective intensity. In general high non-verbal emotional expression (e.g., facial, meta-analysis Matsumoto, 2000) is related to high subjective intensity (Kennedy-Moore & Watson, 1999).

Oyserman, Coon and Kimmelmeier (2002) argue that members of individualistic cultures are socialized to express their feelings not only because internal attributes are more important, but also because they do not expect others to read their minds in

interactions. In contrast, high power distance and collectivist cultures, at least in the case of Asian collectivism, show an over-regulated emotional style, using in particular secondary coping with self-modification and suppression as the main strategies.

In general, primary coping is defined as attempts to enhance, reward, or reduce punishment by changing objective environmental conditions, whereas secondary coping refers to attempts to enhance, reward or reduce punishment by changing oneself (Rothbaum, Weisz and Snyder, 1982)

Coping reactions such as suppressing negative feelings, self-comforting (positively re-evaluating oneself) and acceptance (minimizing situations) are more highly valued and more frequent in collectivist countries (Diaz-Loving, 1998; Morling, Kitayama, and Miyamoto, 2003). Secondary coping as suppression appears as adaptive, and because voluntary inhibition of expression is associated with minimization of negative experience (Kennedy-Moore and Watson, 1999), low expression and high secondary coping should be associated with low emotional intensity, at least for negative emotions.

Previous studies showing that high power distance cultures were associated with higher frequency of negative emotional feelings (such as anger and sadness), but lower emotional intensity, suggest that norms of lower-intensity of feelings and emotional expression are functional in societies where high inequalities are considered normal and legitimate. High power distance cultures show a low emotional profile and an emotional culture involving more “suffering” (e.g., by minimizing antecedents of negative emotions, not focusing attention on the internal reactions produced by negative emotions and emphasizing self-comforting), combining more frequent experience, higher rejection and lower intensity of negative emotions (Basabe et al, 2000).

Cultural dimensions and Psychological factors

Individualism and collectivism are often related to independent and interdependent self-construals. The independent self tends to express itself directly, to say what it really thinks; the interdependent self-construal emphasizes being indirectly in communication with others and “reading” their minds (Singelis, 1994). As Triandis (1995) proposes, collectivist cultures encourage thoughts and behaviors related to social harmony, while individualist cultures emphasize the individual’s traits. In fact, Taylor et al. (2004) found that collectivist Asians report lower levels of seeking emotional social support because they try to avoid placing stress on social networks rather than because they are less self-reliant or less independent.

A meta-analysis concludes that group loyalty is a core characteristic of interdependent or collectivist self-construal (Oyserman et al., 2002). It was confirmed using a short version of Singelis’s scale that loyalty to the in-group characterizes members of collectivist cultures (Basabe and Ros, 2005). An interdependent self-construal, in the restricted sense of high group loyalty, appears as a potential psychological moderator of low expression and self-control in negative emotions.

The meta-analysis by Oyserman et al. (2002) suggests that competitive attitudes are not associated with Western individualist countries. Green (2005) and Green, Deschamps and Páez (2005) found that students from collectivist and high power distance countries

clearly rated themselves as success-oriented and competitive. The “scarcity hypothesis” predicts that people compete for scarce resources in economically unfavorable conditions (e.g., Inglehart, 1998). In collectivist cultures we can find cooperative actions within the competitive groups for attaining benefits from the out-groups. Finally, elite groups, such as students, in high power distance cultures may value differential rewards and be motivated to compete for scarce high status roles in their societies (Steel and Ones, 2002). Competitive attitude could be a potential psychological mediator of expressiveness in negative emotions.

In our view, collectivism and high power distance psychological constructs, such as the interdependent or group loyalty self-construal, and competitive attitudes, are probably related to lower emotional expression, high self-comforting or secondary coping and low emotional intensity. We chose sadness to test these relationships because sadness is a negative emotion of long duration (usually subjects experience sadness over hours or days) and it is oriented to the receipt of help and support from others, so that it has substantial effects on social relationships; on this view sadness may be more important than fear and anger, in line with the studies by Scherer et al. (1986). Also we were interested in sadness because it is the only basic emotion, on the list proposed by Ekman (1972), with low arousal, so that results on intensity cannot be explained by physical exhaustion.

The first of the two studies reported here focuses on how two psychological variables: interdependent self-construal and competitive attitudes, associated respectively with collectivism-individualism and power distance, are related to: subjective experience (intensity), non-verbal and verbal expression, and coping strategies (suppression and self-comforting) on sadness. The main goal in this work is to check whether these psychological traits could be mediating the relationship between cultural dimensions and emotional reactions. The second study is a new version of the first one, in which participants were asked to report the emotional reactions of people in general (semantic perspective), rather than their personal experience. Reproduction of similar response profiles and associations should confirm that subjective personal reports reflect not only autobiographical knowledge, but also semantic or general cultural knowledge. In this case, we can conclude that self-perceptions of emotional experiences are similar to normative perceived reactions in others. Both studies try to confirm relationships found in previous research (e.g., individualism with higher expression and power distance with suppression).

STUDY 1:

CROSS-CULTURAL RESEARCH ON PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF SADNESS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL VARIABLES (INTERDEPENDENT SELF-CONSTRUAL AND COMPETITIVE ATTITUDES)

METHOD

Participants

Participants were tested during the period 1996–2001 in their own countries by teachers during lecture time, with the exception of those from Taiwan, who were tested at Salamanca University, Spain, during

summer school language training. All the participants were volunteers and were debriefed after they had completed the questionnaire. The sample consisted of 2,359 participants (38.43% male and 61.57% female) with a mean age of 21.78 years ($SD = 4.25$), all of them students from psychology or social science faculties. They were natives of 29 different countries. In this study we used only the autobiographical version (“please think about a sadness experience which you have had in your life”), and because the samples from Brazil and Spain were larger than those of the other countries, we decided to decrease them using the random method. Table 1 shows a description of samples and percentages of females.

Material

The first questionnaire included the items on competitive attitudes for Triandis’ scale (see Green, 2005). The second questionnaire contained a short version of the Singelis Interdependent Self-Construal scale. We selected the items of group loyalty construal (Fernández, Páez, & González, 2005). The third questionnaire requested autobiographical experience on sadness (intensity, verbal expression, secondary coping), as discussed below.

Three scales were translated into Cantonese, French, Greek, German, Iranian, Italian, Russian, Portuguese, Turkish and Spanish by trained bilingual native speakers, and then back-translated. Moreover, most versions were also triangulated with comparison of three languages by trilingual teams (D. Páez, Y. Yabar, A. Vergara and J. C. Deschamps). This was the case for Mandarin/Cantonese (X. L. Bao and L. Cheng), Russian (I. Bovino and A. Zlobina), Italian (F. Stasolla and A. Muscara), Portuguese (R. Ramos), Iranian (S. Mortazavi) German (H. Traue and A. Kirch) and Turkish (O. Parker and M. Bayrakdar). The English version was used in Singapore and the French version in The Lebanon. The Portuguese version was used in both Portugal and Brazil. Accuracy of translation was tested, discrepancies resolved and minor changes made where necessary. In designing these versions, the authors followed the guidelines proposed in the literature on cross-cultural methodology (Brislin, 1986, van de Vijver & Leung, 1997a, 1997b). Brazilian and Portuguese, European and African, and American and European social psychologists checked the similarity in meaning of the Portuguese, French, Spanish and English versions. Colloquial expressions were avoided and standard general language formats were used.

Measures

Interdependent self-construal: This indicator of self-concept from Singelis’ scale was composed of five items related to group loyalty: a) I will sacrifice my self-interest for the benefit of the group I am in; b) It is important for me to respect decisions made by the group; c) I would stay in a group if they needed me, even if I were not happy with the group; d) I often have the feeling that my relationships with others are more important than my own accomplishments; and e) My happiness depends on the happiness of those around me (see alphas of variable by countries in Fernández et al., 2005, p. 47). The coefficient alphas range from .46 to .71.

Competitive attitudes: This construal was composed of five items from Triandis’ scale: a) I feel winning is important in both work and games; b) If you want something done right, you’ve got to do it yourself; c) Doing your best isn’t enough: it is important to win; d) Winning is everything; and e) Success is the most important thing in life (see alphas of variable by countries in Fernández, 2001, p. 192–194).

Respondents answered on a short 4-point scale: 1 = Totally disagree; 4 = Totally agree. This reduced version was preferred to a longer version, as it has been proposed as helping to overcome the problem of response sets. Alphas and confirmatory factor analysis confirm equivalence of measurement in different cultural regions (Fernández, 2001; Fernández et al, 2005; Green, 2005). Finally, in order to deal with response bias, within-subject standardization was used (Smith & Bond, 1993/1998), and correlations were performed separately for nations above and below Hofstede’s mean in Individualism. Collectivistic subjects were considered as participants living in Asian (China, Taiwan), African (Nigeria) and Latin American nations (Brazil, Chile, etc.) and Iran, Turkey and Portugal. Participants living in the USA and European nations were considered as making up individualistic samples.

Experience on sadness: Four items inquired about “your own verbal expression”: a) Not speaking at all; b) Speaking in a low tone, monotonous; c) Expressing sad things; and d) Communicating sad events or feelings.

We also asked about personal reaction, focusing on **secondary coping**: a) Suppressing negative feelings, looking on the bright side of things, acting happily; and b) Self-comforting by means of a positive self-evaluation (I did the best I could do) or minimizing discomfort (it is not so bad). Responses were made on a short 4-point scale: 1 = not typical; 4 = highly typical (Fernández, Carrera, Sánchez, Páez, & Candia, 2000).

Table 1. General Descriptions of Sample from each of the Countries (First study)

Country	N	Gender	Intensity			Verbal expression						Secondary Coping						Interdep. Self- Construal		Competitive attitudes				
			A			B			C			D			A			B			M	SD	M	SD
			M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Argentina	113	59.3%	9.13	1.48	3.24	.95	2.86	1.05	2.93	.96	2.70	.88	2.68	.97	2.59	.95	2.81	.64	1.91	.61				
Belgium	115	51.7%	8.98	1.14	2.83	1.11	2.44	1.07	3.10	.77	2.74	.95	2.07	1.00	2.26	1.06	2.56	.54	1.98	.58				
Bolivia	57	49.1%	9.18	1.14	3.00	.89	2.58	.92	2.86	.90	2.75	.83	2.75	.83	2.64	.84	3.02	.54	2.96	.64				
Brazil	148	59.1%	9.21	1.42	3.12	.89	2.84	1.01	2.89	1.00	2.82	.96	2.78	.97	2.64	.95	3.02	.60	2.41	.58				
Chile	107	65.4%	9.03	1.60	3.21	.87	3.02	.91	3.11	.96	2.71	.92	2.35	.88	2.64	.84	2.77	.48	2.06	.61				
China	76	50.0%	7.79	2.43	3.38	.78	3.03	.92	2.22	1.00	2.29	1.03	2.72	.83	3.03	.83	2.69	.61	2.75	.57				
Colombia	58	50.0%	9.02	1.34	3.34	.93	3.03	1.06	3.28	.99	3.21	.93	2.50	.88	2.81	.96	2.73	.75	2.56	.70				
El Salvador	59	86.4%	8.33	2.18	2.92	1.06	2.81	.96	2.78	1.10	2.67	1.05	2.93	.93	2.92	.97	3.22	.59	2.85	.60				
France	90	51.1%	8.81	1.32	3.31	.86	2.91	.89	2.96	.94	2.59	1.03	2.26	.97	2.49	.96	2.41	.58	2.46	.67				
Germany	56	62.5%	8.89	1.59	3.14	.96	3.09	1.00	2.87	1.15	3.13	.90	2.46	1.01	2.29	.82	2.75	.53	2.09	.39				
Ghana	37	45.5%	5.43	2.44	2.64	.81	2.45	1.21	2.91	.94	3.00	1.10	2.82	1.25	2.91	1.14	2.39	.63	2.95	.59				
Greece	39	76.9%	8.62	1.10	3.42	.76	2.97	.97	3.34	.78	2.63	1.05	2.00	.84	2.37	.75	2.56	.65	2.26	.61				
Guatemala	39	79.3%	9.11	1.21	2.71	1.09	2.26	1.08	2.42	1.03	2.61	.95	2.97	.91	3.03	.91	3.00	.52	2.89	.65				
Iran	60	50.0%	8.01	1.24	2.26	1.08	2.28	.85	2.12	1.26	2.51	.86	2.56	.92	2.87	.93	2.66	.51	2.79	.64				
Italy	61	50.8%	8.87	1.48	3.08	1.09	2.75	.99	2.58	1.07	2.65	1.01	2.64	1.08	2.76	.97	2.56	.71	2.35	.79				
Mexico	179	56.5%	9.19	1.03	2.90	1.01	2.61	1.09	2.65	1.05	2.58	.97	2.84	.93	2.93	.89	2.53	.68	3.00	.64				
Nigeria	35	28.6%	7.45	2.26	2.91	.97	2.77	.97	2.59	1.10	2.86	1.04	2.82	1.01	3.27	.83	2.88	.59	2.98	.67				
Panama	36	61.1%	8.71	2.19	3.06	.95	2.83	.88	2.61	1.02	2.83	1.00	3.03	.86	3.23	.81	2.82	.62	2.77	.59				
Peru	49	38.8%	8.31	2.32	2.94	1.07	2.80	.87	2.96	1.01	2.71	1.02	2.67	.92	2.76	.90	2.94	.64	2.74	.74				
Portugal	129	58.1%	9.08	1.35	3.38	.88	3.14	.92	3.13	.91	2.82	.87	2.45	.88	2.58	.91	2.89	.56	2.32	.55				
Russia	132	53.0%	7.88	2.40	3.32	.83	2.75	.95	3.17	.93	2.79	.97	2.82	.92	2.50	1.00	2.64	.57	2.65	.61				
Singapore	59	47.5%	7.96	1.69	3.53	.65	3.24	.77	3.47	.65	3.08	.79	2.76	.86	2.88	.91	2.88	.41	2.21	.59				
Spain	189	58.0%	9.19	1.38	3.34	.81	2.98	.89	3.23	.83	2.94	.85	2.61	.88	2.71	.92	2.91	.55	1.95	.52				
Switzerland	84	76.2%	8.99	1.29	3.35	.80	2.82	1.04	3.00	.92	3.04	.87	2.33	.97	2.65	.91	2.44	.62	2.01	.53				
Taiwan	34	88.2%	8.06	1.79	3.15	1.03	2.94	1.09	2.94	1.06	2.73	.94	3.24	.79	3.30	.81	2.52	.65	2.48	.57				
The Lebanon	60	46.7%	8.43	1.75	3.07	1.05	2.78	1.10	3.00	.85	2.66	.82	2.34	.96	2.73	.89	2.76	.61	3.06	.62				
Turkey	87	72.4%	8.80	1.51	3.38	.90	3.06	.90	2.87	.98	2.99	.86	2.67	1.21	2.33	1.21	2.44	.52	2.82	.62				
USA	52	53.8%	8.43	1.77	3.25	.91	3.12	.93	3.16	.86	3.02	.93	2.63	.87	2.92	.93	2.92	.47	2.08	.57				
Venezuela	119	49.2%	8.76	1.80	2.84	1.04	2.68	1.01	2.88	.99	2.80	.98	2.95	1.01	2.89	.96	2.78	.63	2.85	.66				

Gender: % of women.

Fernandez's Data (2001): Intensity (1 = low intensity to 10 = high intensity), Verbal expression: A) Not speaking at all; B) Speaking in a low tone, monotonous; C) Expressing sad things; and D) Communicating sad events or feelings, and Secondary coping: A) Suppressing negative feelings, looking on the bright side of things, acting happily; and B) Self-comforting (1 = not typical to 4 = highly typical).

Note: *M* = mean scores with effect on gender as a covariate. *SD* = Standard deviations in *italic*. [Sources: Fernández et al., 2005 and Green, 2005, respectively]

Table 2. Correlation Analysis for Reactions on Sadness with Psychological Factors (Autobiographical Experience)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Verbal expression										
2. a) Not speaking at all	.70**									
3. b) Speaking in a low tone	.75**	.54**								
4. c) Expressing sad things	.76**	.32**	.40**							
5. d) Communicating sad events	.61**	.14**	.17**	.43**						
6. Secondary coping	.01	.02	.03	-.05*	.04					
7. a) Suppressing negative feeling	-.02	-.01	.01	-.07**	.02	.87**				
8. b) Self-comforting	.04	.04	.04	-.01	.06**	.87**	.52**			
9. Intensity	.18**	.12**	.10**	.16**	.10**	-.06**	-.05*	-.06**		
10. Competitive attitudes	-.08**	-.06**	-.06**	-.08**	-.03	.10**	.11**	.06**	-.06**	
11. Interdependent self-construal	.03	.01	.01	.03	-.01	.07**	-.01	-.04	.05*	-.06**

Correlation coefficients (r of Pearson), $n = 2238-54$

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed)

We also examined the intensity of the emotion, this variable being given a value from 1 (low intensity) to 10 (high intensity). See Table 1 for scores and SD of variables by country. Because questions were focused on personal experience we are dealing with actual emotional experience, at least as far as it is measured by self-reports.

RESULTS

In this study, our first objective was to confirm at psychological level, the relationships between the emotional reactions and the cultural dimensions of the collective level studies. Thus, we correlated the measures on autobiographical experience with psychological level measures of individualism-collectivism and power distance, that is interdependent self-construal and competitive attitudes.

Psychological dimensions and emotional reactions and coping: suppression and self-comforting were associated with lower level of intensity, competitive attitudes and interdependent self-construal (see statistical significances in Table 2). Pearson correlations showed that people with less competitive attitudes were characterized by stronger verbal reactions and higher emotional intensity. Also, competitive participants presented more suppression and self-comforting, and less intensity. Furthermore, the participants with higher group loyalty or interdependent self-construal showed secondary coping in the case of suppression, but higher intensity. Self-comforting was not related to interdependent self-construal or group loyalty. The two psychological variables (competitive attitude and interdependent self-construal) were negatively correlated (see Table 2). In order to cope with acquiescence bias supposed to be more important in

collectivistic and hierarchical cultures correlations were performed: a) separately for the cluster of individualistic and collectivistic nations; b) on scores using within subject correlations. The two procedures produce similar correlations, excluding response bias as an alternative explanation.

Finally, the relationship between the psychological factors and the cultural dimensions was assessed. Traditionally, it has considered that people living in individualistic societies are more competitive, whilst those in collectivist societies show greater loyalty to the group. We tried to confirm this in our sample, since this stereotypical view is inconsistent with some empirical studies (e.g., Oyserman et al.'s meta-analysis). In some cultures, the collectivism-high power distance profile is associated with competitive attitudes, but collectivist-low power distance countries show high group loyalty. In order to examine these differences in more depth, we decided to explore the role of psychological variables as mediators between cultural frames and personal reactions.

Cultural dimensions and psychological factors: Participants in low PDI (power distance) countries expressed more group loyalty and less competitive attitude, while some collectivist societies showed more group loyalty (as expected) but more competitive attitude. On the other hand, people living in IDV (individualistic) societies showed less competitive attitude. Thus, individualistic and low power distance countries show less competitive attitudes (see Table 2). These associations show that the hypothesis of competitive attitudes in individualistic societies is not always supported, as indeed previous studies have also suggested (Oyserman et al., 2002). This result may be attributable to the fact that in collectivistic societies people are more competitive because they do not have resources, and need to fight to obtain them. Even so, this would not be incompatible with the fact of people having group loyalty. People take care of their in-groups and fight with out-groups to obtain resources, probably leading to an increase in in-group/out-group differences.

As expected, group loyalty was associated with collectivism, and also with low power distance. These results can be understood in terms of Hofstede's original conception of power distance. In high power distance cultures "a few should be independent; most should be dependent" (Hofstede, 2001, p. 98). A minority is independent and a large majority dependent on high status participants. In contrast, in low power distance cultures, because superiors and subordinates are construed as similar, "all should be interdependent" (Hofstede, 2001, p. 98).

Psychological factors as mediator between cultural dimensions and verbal expression: A series of regression models was carried out following the technique recommended by Baron & Kenny (1986) to test mediation.

Competition as mediator between individualism and verbal expression of sadness: There was a significant negative effect of individualism on competition, $\beta = -.38$, $p < .000$, and a positive effect of it on verbal expression, $\beta = .07$, $p < .002$ (standardized regression coefficient). Second, there was a relevant negative relationship between competition effect and verbal expression, $\beta = -.08$, $p < .000$. However, when both individualism and competition were included as predictors in the regression equation,

competitive attitudes still predicted verbal expression, $\beta = -.07$, $p < .006$, but individualism did not, $\beta = .04$, $p = .07$. The Sobel test (Sobel, 1982) showed that the decrease in the direct effect of individualism on verbal reactions was statistically significant ($z = 2.94$, $p < .01$). Perfect mediation holds that the independent variable has no effect when the mediator is controlled (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Collectivistic cultures show competitive attitudes, individualistic people express themselves more verbally, and competitive attitudes are associated with less verbal reactions. When a collectivistic culture is competitive it shows less verbal reactions than individualistic non-competitive cultures, where people verbally express themselves more.

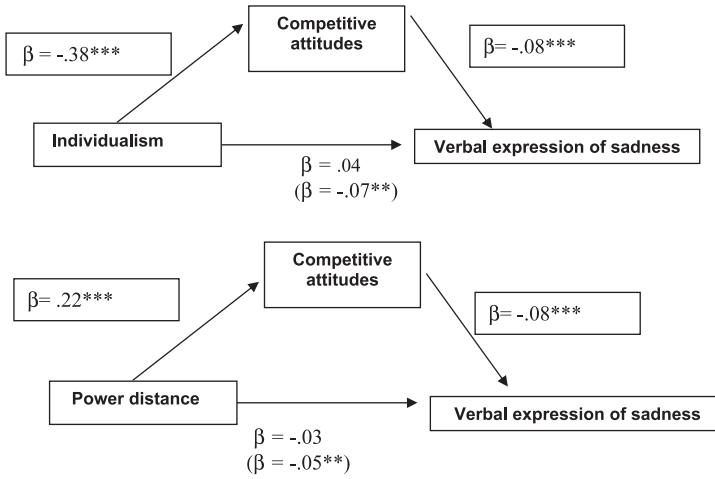
Competition as mediator between power distance and verbal expression of sadness: We made a similar analysis with power distance and competition. Data showed, first, that there was a significant positive relationship between power distance and competitive attitudes, $\beta = .22$, $p < .000$, and a significant negative relationship between power distance and verbal expression, $\beta = -.05$, $p < .034$ (standardized regression coefficient). Second, regressing the mediator (competition) on the dependent variable (verbal expression), there was a relevant negative relation, $\beta = -.08$, $p < .000$. And third, regressing the dependent variable on both the independent variable (power distance) and the mediator (competitive attitudes) as predictors, competitive attitudes still predicted verbal expression, $\beta = -.08$, $p < .001$, but power distance did not, $\beta = -.03$, $p = .18$. (Sobel: $z = -3.31$, $p < .001$). High power distance cultures are associated with competitive attitudes, and they express less sadness. Competition induces lower sharing of one's own emotions. When high power distance and competitive attitudes are combined, people tend to express their feelings less.

The analysis showed that competitive attitudes mediate in cultural factors so as to modify and fit verbal reactions to particular contexts (see Fig. 1).

Competitive attitudes mediate hierarchical values: participants in hierarchical cultures report low verbal expression and high secondary coping, like participants sharing competitive attitudes. Mediation analysis shows that the influence of power distance disappears when competition is included as a predictor.

DISCUSSION

As in previous studies, but using intra-personal measures, individualism and low power distance were related to high verbal expression of sadness. In this type of culture people feel free to express this emotion. Collectivist and high power distance cultures show less verbal expression of sadness and a tendency to self-comforting and suppression, and members report lower subjective emotional intensity. Individualistic and low power distance cultures stress emotional expression and intense subjective reaction, and de-emphasize suppression coping, showing a "cathartic"-regulation emotional style. As a psychological variable, competitive attitude related to hierarchical collectivism could explain low intensity and low expression, as it was related to suppression. We can speculate that a "woman or man of respect" should not show signs of vulnerability, and should control extreme displays of sadness. Participants belonging to hierarchical



Note: Beta coefficients: ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Fig. 1. On the top mediation of the competition between individualism and verbal expression of sadness. On the bottom mediation of the competition between power distance and verbal expression of sadness

Note: Beta coefficients: ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

cultures, because of adaptive suppression and low verbal expression, may remain longer in sadness situations due to successful minimization of feelings.

Participants sharing an interdependent self-construal report higher suppression, but at the same time higher intensity. In collectivist cultures such as those of Latin America or southern Europe, high collectivist attitudes coexist with high emotional expression, particularly positive emotion (e.g., the “sympathy” script emphasizing communication of positive emotions and strong interpersonal links), but also sympathetic displays in the case of sadness.

STUDY 2:

CROSS-CULTURAL RESEARCH ON THE PERCEIVED EXPERIENCE OF OTHERS IN SADNESS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL VARIABLES

The stoical emotional profile, combining low intensity, low verbal expression and high suppression, could be conceived of as reflecting emotional norms. These norms influence feelings, expression and coping in relation to emotional episodes. As Rimé, Philippot and Cisamolo (1990) posit, people share cultural knowledge, and these social representations could influence subjective reports, with a limited relation to personal experience. In this case, participants responding about “other-generalized” emotions should show the same profile of associations. In the second study we shall ask participants to answer general questions (semantic version) about sadness intensity, verbal

expression and secondary coping. Shaver, Schwartz, Kirson and O'Connor (1987), in a study on prototypical emotional reactions, found that participants reported higher levels of mental and coping responses and lower levels of emotional expressions and reactions when reporting on personal experience, as compared to reports about others. These results suggest a sort of observer effect: I perceive others' external emotional behaviors more than my own. At the same time, they could also reflect a uniqueness bias: I'm more self-controlled than others and I cope better. In this study we contrast associations found on the basis of autobiographical experience with "semantic responses", asking participants to report not personal experiences, but the generalized experience of others. Behaviors perceived as high-frequency can be conceived of as social norms in these semantic versions. When the two versions present the same result, we would conclude that people assume and internalize cultural norms as personal frames. If there is a gap between culture and personal experience, this suggests that display rules are unrelated to feelings rules and actual experience.

METHOD

Participants

In this study 2,072 participants were tested in the same countries as in the first study. However, in this study participants responded to the questionnaire in relation to typical emotional responses of members of their national group. This is the only difference with respect to Study 1.

Measures

Measures were the same as in the second study. However the instruction was different "Think about the most frequent or typical sadness experience". This question was focused on emotional knowledge and not on personal actual experience.

For semantic knowledge condition, or the sadness experience of people in general: The three measurements from the second study, asking respondents how typical it is for people in general to react when experiencing sadness in the following items: verbal expression, intensity, and secondary coping. See Table 3 for scores on variables by countries.

RESULTS

Psychological factors and emotional reactions: Our first study found that people with competitive attitudes were characterized by lower verbal reactions and lower emotional intensity, more suppression and high self-comforting coping. This pattern was replicated in this second study. In the first study interdependent self-construal was associated with high expression and more suppression, and the semantic version replicated these results and found a significant relationship to verbal expression and self-comforting. Relationships between competitive attitudes and emotional reaction follow similar patterns in the two versions.

Correlation between verbal expression, coping reactions and emotional intensity: Reported verbal reactions and self-comforting coping were positively associated. Verbal expression and intensity were also positively related. Suppression coping was associated with lower intensity in the first study, and the pattern was replicated in the second study,

Table 3. Descriptions of Sadness Reactions From Each of the Countries (Second Study)

Country	N	Gender	Intensity		Verbal expression								Secondary Coping			
					A		B		C		D		A		B	
			M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Argentina	109	59.82%	9.06	<i>1.57</i>	3.23	<i>.89</i>	2.86	<i>.93</i>	3.07	<i>.83</i>	2.78	<i>.86</i>	2.53	<i>.92</i>	2.50	<i>.88</i>
Belgium	28	75.86%	8.92	<i>1.41</i>	3.43	<i>1.07</i>	3.21	<i>.96</i>	3.46	<i>.84</i>	2.89	<i>.88</i>	2.43	<i>1.00</i>	2.46	<i>1.00</i>
Bolivia	49	54.39%	8.39	<i>2.01</i>	3.12	<i>.87</i>	2.86	<i>.83</i>	3.21	<i>.76</i>	3.11	<i>.80</i>				
Brazil	165	87.95%	8.22	<i>2.35</i>	3.25	<i>.89</i>	3.19	<i>.85</i>	3.30	<i>.91</i>	3.03	<i>.90</i>	2.55	<i>.95</i>	2.58	<i>1.06</i>
Chile	65	60.61%	8.92	<i>1.25</i>	3.41	<i>.80</i>	3.24	<i>.79</i>	3.42	<i>.70</i>	3.02	<i>.81</i>	2.49	<i>.87</i>	2.88	<i>.76</i>
China	56	48.33%	8.72	<i>1.54</i>	3.38	<i>.93</i>	2.89	<i>1.04</i>	2.55	<i>.93</i>	2.45	<i>1.09</i>	2.73	<i>.98</i>	3.00	<i>.89</i>
Colombia	69	55.07%	8.26	<i>1.96</i>	3.58	<i>.65</i>	3.29	<i>.77</i>	3.52	<i>.72</i>	3.25	<i>.74</i>	2.52	<i>.88</i>	2.71	<i>.94</i>
El Salvador	58	81.36%	8.98	<i>1.74</i>	2.97	<i>.88</i>	2.91	<i>.86</i>	3.34	<i>.85</i>	2.93	<i>.89</i>	2.71	<i>1.03</i>	2.79	<i>.97</i>
France	99	52.00%	9.21	<i>1.14</i>	3.41	<i>.79</i>	3.14	<i>.88</i>	3.24	<i>.88</i>	2.78	<i>.97</i>	2.26	<i>.95</i>	2.51	<i>.93</i>
Germany	53	61.54%	8.83	<i>1.60</i>	3.57	<i>.75</i>	3.13	<i>.90</i>	3.02	<i>.91</i>	2.98	<i>.84</i>	2.43	<i>1.05</i>	2.40	<i>.79</i>
Ghana	17	44.44%	6.53	<i>1.85</i>	2.71	<i>1.26</i>	2.47	<i>1.07</i>	2.94	<i>.75</i>	3.06	<i>.68</i>	3.00	<i>.87</i>	2.76	<i>.90</i>
Greece	76	83.33%	8.99	<i>1.47</i>	3.32	<i>.80</i>	3.17	<i>.90</i>	3.29	<i>.81</i>	2.80	<i>.85</i>	2.07	<i>.94</i>	2.16	<i>.83</i>
Guatemala	30	100%	10.0	<i>0</i>	3.33	<i>.58</i>	2.67	<i>1.15</i>	3.00	<i>.00</i>	3.00	<i>.00</i>	2.00	<i>.00</i>	3.00	<i>.00</i>
Iran	85	49.15%	7.66	<i>1.73</i>	3.15	<i>.73</i>	3.01	<i>.90</i>	3.09	<i>.81</i>	2.84	<i>.82</i>	2.38	<i>.90</i>	2.62	<i>.87</i>
Italy	57	60.92%	8.62	<i>2.21</i>	3.23	<i>.96</i>	2.84	<i>.98</i>	3.00	<i>.89</i>	2.72	<i>.94</i>	2.70	<i>.93</i>	2.75	<i>.97</i>
Mexico	70	52.54%	8.38	<i>2.07</i>	3.36	<i>.95</i>	3.09	<i>.93</i>	3.24	<i>.91</i>	2.96	<i>1.01</i>	2.70	<i>1.03</i>	2.94	<i>.88</i>
Nigeria	14	52.11%	7.31	<i>1.65</i>	3.21	<i>.97</i>	3.14	<i>.66</i>	3.07	<i>.83</i>	3.14	<i>.77</i>	2.79	<i>.58</i>	2.86	<i>.53</i>
Panama	44	14.29%	8.42	<i>2.14</i>	3.26	<i>.88</i>	3.02	<i>.99</i>	3.07	<i>1.01</i>	3.07	<i>.94</i>	2.70	<i>.93</i>	2.91	<i>.94</i>
Peru	71	86.36%	8.26	<i>1.85</i>	3.00	<i>1.01</i>	2.63	<i>1.05</i>	2.96	<i>.89</i>	3.00	<i>.80</i>	2.96	<i>.92</i>	2.93	<i>.99</i>
Portugal	132	57.75%	8.54	<i>1.84</i>	3.26	<i>.92</i>	3.26	<i>.83</i>	3.25	<i>.86</i>	2.92	<i>.86</i>	2.61	<i>.95</i>	2.66	<i>.98</i>
Russia	133	60.00%	8.17	<i>2.01</i>	3.34	<i>.89</i>	3.14	<i>.90</i>	3.36	<i>.82</i>	3.02	<i>.86</i>	2.71	<i>.95</i>	2.66	<i>1.02</i>
Singapore	60	48.87%	8.14	<i>1.34</i>	3.47	<i>.70</i>	3.30	<i>.67</i>	3.40	<i>.64</i>	3.03	<i>.66</i>	3.05	<i>.67</i>	3.00	<i>.84</i>
Spain	182	49.52%	9.09	<i>1.40</i>	3.59	<i>.69</i>	3.27	<i>.72</i>	3.50	<i>.60</i>	3.03	<i>.74</i>	2.51	<i>.90</i>	2.63	<i>.94</i>
Switzerland	91	50.00%	9.36	<i>1.17</i>	3.54	<i>.76</i>	2.90	<i>.88</i>	3.25	<i>.82</i>	2.84	<i>.91</i>	2.27	<i>.98</i>	2.51	<i>.96</i>
Taiwan	33	85.71%	8.23	<i>1.22</i>	3.11	<i>1.12</i>	2.84	<i>1.18</i>	2.74	<i>1.24</i>	2.61	<i>.91</i>	3.21	<i>.77</i>	3.31	<i>.83</i>
The Lebanon	60	51.67%	8.44	<i>1.69</i>	3.28	<i>1.06</i>	2.97	<i>.96</i>	3.02	<i>.91</i>	2.78	<i>.96</i>	2.42	<i>.89</i>	2.80	<i>.92</i>
Turkey	16	17.65%	8.44	<i>.89</i>	3.29	<i>.77</i>	3.35	<i>.61</i>	2.71	<i>.85</i>	2.65	<i>.86</i>	1.33	<i>.58</i>	2.00	<i>.00</i>
USA	49	30.61%	8.05	<i>1.54</i>	3.41	<i>.81</i>	3.37	<i>.76</i>	3.31	<i>.77</i>	2.98	<i>.88</i>	2.61	<i>.86</i>	2.76	<i>.78</i>
Venezuela	101	68.27%	8.56	<i>2.02</i>	3.09	<i>.92</i>	3.00	<i>.99</i>	3.11	<i>.84</i>	2.96	<i>.89</i>	2.89	<i>.93</i>	3.03	<i>.88</i>

Gender: % of women.

Fernandez's Data (2001): Intensity (1 = low intensity to 10 = high intensity). Verbal expression: A) Not speaking at all; B) Speaking in a low tone, monotonous; C) Expressing sad things; and D) Communicating sad events or feelings. Secondary coping: A) Suppressing negative feelings, looking on the bright side of things, acting happily; and B) Self-comforting (1 = not typical to 4 = highly typical).

Note: *M* = mean scores of emotional reactions with effect on gender as a covariate. *SD* = Standard deviations in *italics*.

Table 4. Correlations of Sadness Reactions with Psychological Factors (Semantic Experience)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Verbal expression										
2. a) Not speaking at all	.71**									
3. b) Speaking in a low tone	.76**	.51**								
4. c) Expressing sad things	.76**	.37**	.43**							
5. d) Communicating sad events	.62**	.16**	.21**	.40**						
6. Secondary coping	.04	.01	.03	.00	.07**					
7. a) Suppressing negative feeling	.00	-.02	.00	-.03	.03	.87**				
8. b) Self-comforting	.07**	.04	.05*	.03	.09**	.87**	.52**			
9. Intensity	.18**	.15**	.15**	.12**	.09**	-.03	-.03	-.02		
10. Competitive attitudes	-.09**	-.12**	-.07**	-.08**	-.01	.09**	.09**	.07**	-.10**	
11. Interdependent self-construal	.06**	.01	.05*	.05**	.00	.06**	-.03	-.03	.01	-.06*

Correlation coefficients (Pearson's r), $n = 2025-48$.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed).

though non-significantly (see Table 4). People associate high verbal expression and high intensity in both versions. However when people talk about coping reactions, in the autobiographical version we found these strategies to be associated with lower intensity, while in the semantic condition the relationships were also negative, but weaker and non-significant.

Semantic versus autobiographical condition, cultural dimensions and emotional reactions:

A one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was carried out to check the hypothesis on high uniqueness in individualistic cultures and high power distance. A 2 (high/low IDV) by 2 (high/low PDI) by 2 (autobiographical versus semantic) analysis was performed on intensity, verbal expression, and secondary coping (self-comfort and suppression coping). Main effect for manipulation showed that participants report higher verbal expression in the semantic condition, $M = 3.15$, $SD = .62$, than in the autobiographical condition, $M = 2.99$, $SD = .07$, $F_{(1,3654)} = 31.47$, $p < .0001$. Intensity, $F_{(1,3690)} = 41.03$, $p < .0001$, and secondary coping, $F_{(1,3658)} = 35.45$, $p < .0001$, were higher in the autobiographical condition, respectively, $M = 8.71$, $SD = 1.74$; $M = 5.43$, $SD = 1.66$, than in the semantic condition, $M = 8.59$, $SD = 1.81$; $M = 5.24$, $SD = 1.64$. Intensity and secondary coping showed a significant interaction between individualism and power distance, $F_{(1,3642)} = 17.31$, $p < .0001$, and $F_{(1,3656)} = 30.22$, $p < .001$. Intensity was lowest in hierarchical collectivist participants, $M = 8.41$, $SD = 1.63$, and highest in hierarchical individualistic respondents, $M = 9.08$, $SD = 1.72$. Low power distance participants showed intermediate and similar mean profiles, $M = 8.70$, $SD = 1.22$ for low PDI collectivist and $M = 8.84$, $SD = 1.64$ for low PDI individualistic (see Fig. 2). Secondary coping (self-comfort) was highest in hierarchical collectivist participants, $M = 5.6$,

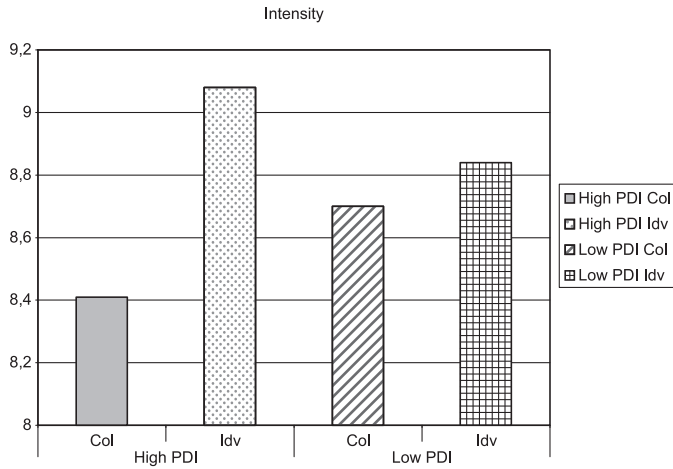


Fig. 2. Cultural dimensions: Individualism-Collectivism (IDV-COL) by Power Distance (PDI) for intensity

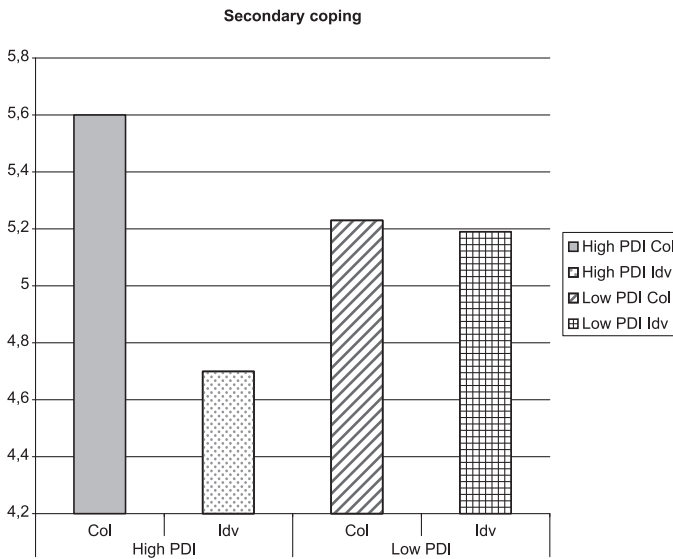


Fig. 3. Cultural dimensions: Individualism-Collectivism (IDV-COL) by Power Distance (PDI) for secondary coping

$SD = 1.24$, and lowest in hierarchical individualistic respondents, $M = 4.7$, $SD = 1.18$. Low power distance subject showed intermediate and similar mean profiles, $M = 5.23$, $SD = 1.23$ for low PDI collectivist and $M = 5.19$, $SD = 1.17$ for low PDI individualistic (see Fig. 3).

Finally, a significant interaction of condition by PDI by IDV was found for intensity, $F_{(1,3654)} = 11.13$, $p < .001$. Egalitarian participants, or low PDI and COL participants,

Table 5. Autobiographical vs. Semantic Emotional Intensity by Cultural Dimensions (IDV and PDI)

	Low PDI				High PDI			
	Low IDV, Col		High IDV		Low IDV, Col		High IDV	
	Autobio- graphical	Semantic	Autobio- graphical	Semantic	Autobio- graphical	Semantic	Autobio- graphical	Semantic
Intensity	8.71 (.09)	8.70 (.09)	9.01 (.08)	8.69 (.08)	8.52 (.06)	8.28 (.06)	8.93 (.12)	9.23 (.12)

PDI = power distance

IDV = individualistic cultures

Col = collectivistic cultures

Intensity (1 = low intensity to 10 = high intensity)

(Standard deviations in brackets)

report similar levels of intensity in the semantic and autobiographical conditions. Horizontal individualists and hierarchical collectivists report higher levels of intensity in the autobiographical than the semantic condition. However, hierarchical individualists reverse this pattern, reporting the highest intensity in the semantic condition (see Table 5).

Correlations between secondary coping, verbal expression and intensity were assessed for individuals living in high versus low collectivist and power distance cultures. High verbal expression was associated similarly to high intensity in all cultural contexts: $r = .13$, $p < .01$ high PDI, $r = .21$, $p < .01$ low PDI, $r = .15$, $p < .01$ COL, and $r = .17$, $p < .01$ IDV. However secondary coping was significantly associated with low intensity only in the cases of the low IDV and COL contexts, $r(740) = -.04$, $p < .03$, and the correlation was higher in high PDI contexts, $r = -.05$, than in low PDI contexts, $r = -.035$, both $p < .05$. These data are also coincident with tendencies found in the first study: those in individualistic countries feel stronger sadness, express it more openly and do not try to modify it. In general, effects across power distance dimension and kind of version were not significant. No evidence for higher uniqueness in individualist or in hierarchical cultures was found—the semantic and autobiographical profiles were similar in high and low PDI and COL. However, the interactions between cultural dimensions were significant, showing that hierarchical collectivists report the most over-regulated reaction in sadness. The interaction partially supports the importance of hierarchical values: in the case of high PDI, individualistic participants report higher intensity in the general or other person condition. Finally, and suggesting that secondary coping is normative—more frequent and adaptive—in hierarchical cultures, secondary coping was associated with low intensity in the case of participants living in COL, and the association was stronger in high PDI countries.

DISCUSSION

Our results indicate the association of cultural hierarchical values and competitive attitudes with low intensity in sadness and secondary coping (self-comfort and

suppression). Given that associations are similar in personal experience and perceived experience in others, we can conclude that minimization and secondary coping in sadness are normative processes related to core cultural values and mediated by competitive attitudes. The profile is similar for collectivist values and interdependent self-construal. Results suggest that secondary coping, and to a lesser extent intensity level, are internalized in a congruent manner with hierarchical collectivist cultural values and internalized competitive and group-dependence social beliefs, and that participants are aware of these tendencies or report similar results when answering from a general or personal perspective: the suppressive style is framed as clear normative pattern. A stoical emotional profile, combining low intensity and high suppression, could be conceived of as reflecting emotional norms and reproducing cultural orientation at a conscious level. These norms influence feelings and coping with emotional episodes. Moreover, results suggest that real “suppressors” are hierarchical collectivists, reporting simultaneously low intensity and high secondary coping. However, results for verbal expression are significant for competitive attitudes and hierarchical and collective cultures only in the autobiographical conditions: in the semantic version only psychological variables were correlated with verbal expression, competitive people see others as less talkative, and the value of group loyalty produces the opposite result. These results suggest that participants living in hierarchical collectivist cultures share feelings rules of lower verbal expression, but that they do not perceive lower-level expression as a display rule in their culture. The results cannot be explained by in-group comparison of behavior or by the fact that participants frame their evaluations with respect to others’ responses. In fact, it was in the case of internal reactions (intensity and secondary coping) that participants produced similar profiles of responses.

Despite the fact that the verbal expression reported was higher in the semantic condition, no interaction was found between manipulation of perspective and cultural dimensions. Limited evidence was found for uniqueness bias in individualistic and high power distance cultures: participants report lower level of sadness in the autobiographical condition, suggesting a norm of emotional self-control. It is important to bear in mind that correlations or effect sizes are low. However, in psychological studies it is common to find two-thirds of correlations below .30 (Hemphill, 2003). Moreover, as Scherer (1997) argues, the effect size decreases with increases in sample size: both error and the effect of unmeasured variables increase continuously with a larger sample size. Even so, collectivism and power distance were measured with just two scales. More complex measures, including values, for example, should improve the validity of our measurement. Even though our scales correlate with collectivistic and power distance context in the expected direction, these correlations are low, and our two attitudinal measures are unlikely to represent the entire meaning of cultural syndromes. Nonetheless, since simplistic dichotomies are unable to capture cross-cultural differences, our scales aid the analysis of collectivism and power distance as psychological continua.

CONCLUSIONS

Results suggest that low emotional intensity, verbal expression and suppression are more typical of collectivist and high power distance cultures. This suggests the prevalence of a stoical style of regulation of suffering and minimization of feelings. Individualistic and egalitarian cultures reinforce verbal expression of negative emotion and show lower levels of self-comforting; they adopt a “cathartic” style, in which sharing negative emotions represents a good form of coping.

Collectivistic and egalitarian cultures reinforce group loyalty. Hierarchical and collectivist cultures reinforce competitive attitudes, as the study by Green et al. (2005) shows.

Competition mediates the influence of hierarchical culture on emotional reactions in the case of sadness, and suggests a normative stoical emotional style. Competitive attitudes also mediate the influence of high power distance on lower verbal expression. Data on mediation suggest an interesting explanation for lower verbal expression in collectivist and high power distance and competitive countries. When social and economic conditions are negative, people have to compete with others in order to obtain resources, and thus try to protect themselves and their groups. Talking about one’s own feelings could mean opening the door to being hurt or seeming vulnerable. They therefore adopt a “closed doors” style in order to protect themselves.

Participants living in high power distance, collectivist cultures and sharing competitive attitudes report low verbal expression, high suppression and, consequently, low emotional intensity. Results were similar when reporting personal experience and when reporting frequent reactions of people in general, suggesting that feelings are framed in terms of shared emotional norms. Negative emotions have bad consequences not only for people who feel them: empathy, especially in collectivistic and horizontal cultures, could be the cause of collective contagion that disturbs social harmony and social order. When competitive attitudes are added we find protective behaviors for appearing strong and not vulnerable.

Sadness probably means vulnerability in hierarchical and competitive societies, where protective strategies are welcome. Our results are important, since we include a large sample of non-Asian collectivists. In our sample, interdependent self-construal was related to high emotional intensity and partially to higher emotional expression, confirming previous results showing that Latin-American and Mediterranean collectivists present a different and more emotional profile than Asian collectivists (Diener & Larsen, 1993; Scollon, Diener, Oishi, & Biswas-Diener, 2004). Moreover, the fact that collectivist self-construal is associated with secondary coping, but not with low expression and intensity, suggests that concern over group harmony is not a main motive for suppressing negative emotions like sadness. This aspect probably relates only to Asian collectivists, since emotional expression and support is important in the case of non-Asian collectivists. Taylor et al. (2004) also found that Asian collectivists report lower level of seeking emotional support, and also a more self-reliant profile, suggesting that collectivists may combine suppression with an independent and probably more competitive attitude.

A clear limitation of our study is that participants are university students, an elite group in poorer, collectivist and high power distance countries, and probably more competitive than other social groups. The question of whether our results are valid for non-students, and particularly for Asian collectivist countries, remains open. Effect sizes were low, but this is accepted when using large samples and short-step scales, since error measurement and unmeasured variables decrease effect size, as Scherer (1997) reports in his large cross-cultural study. Finally, our data rely on self-report, and the relationship to actual experience is indirect. Given the similarity of results for personal and general experience, this study supports and reinforces the idea that we are dealing more with socially constructed knowledge than with emotional experience.

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