Navigating Emotions: The Influence of Goals on Perceived Effectiveness of Interpersonal Emotion Regulation Strategies

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Abstract

Romantic partners often serve as emotional support regulating each other's emotions, especially after stressful events. This study investigates how the perceived effectiveness of interpersonal emotion regulation (IER) strategies in romantic relationships is influenced by the regulatory goal of the recipient. Specifically, we examine how hedonic (seeking to feel better) and instrumental (seeking to get things done) goals affect the perceived effectiveness of various IER strategies. It was expected that the goal would influence the perceived effectiveness of IER strategies. Using a sample of 986 participants in romantic relationships, an experimental design was employed where participants were assigned either a hedonic or instrumental goal and subsequently rated the effectiveness of seven IER strategies: suppression, distraction, co-rumination, reappraisal, acceptance, problem-solving, and ignoring. Results indicate that goal type significantly influences the perceived effectiveness of IER strategies. Participants with hedonic goals generally rated IER strategies as more effective than those with instrumental goals. Moreover, in line with expectations engaging strategies co-rumination and acceptance were perceived as more effective for hedonic goals compared to those with instrumental goals, while the perceived effectiveness of disengaging strategies suppression and distraction was higher for those with instrumental goals than those with hedonic goals. Against expectations, reappraisal and problem-solving were perceived as equally effective for both goal types. These findings suggest that the effectiveness of IER strategies is context-dependent, influenced by the goal of the individual seeking regulation.

Keywords: Interpersonal emotion regulation, hedonic goal, instrumental goal, suppression, distraction, co-rumination, reappraisal, acceptance, problem-solving, ignoring

Navigating Emotions: The Influence of Goals on Perceived Effectiveness of Interpersonal Emotion Regulation Strategies

Imagine, your partner comes home after a rough day at work, their boss is unhappy with the work they delivered, and as a result, they had to endure a lot of criticism. Your partner is angry and sad at how their day went and now comes to you to talk about how they feel. This might be a very recognizable situation if you are currently in a romantic relationship, as romantic partners are often perceived as people with whom we can share both positive and negative emotions and are expected to regulate these emotions (Clark et al., 2017; Rimé, 2009; Westman, 2001). However, what is an appropriate response? With the emotional connection between partners being a core part of our romantic relations, it is crucial to stay emotionally connected (Sels et al., 2020). An inappropriate or non-supportive response to emotions can lead to a reduction in well-being and relationship quality (Chan & Rawana, 2021; Tepeli Temiz & Elsharnouby, 2022). Previous research focused on the effectiveness of IER strategies by measuring whether these strategies were adaptive or not (Aldao et al., 2015; Brockman et al., 2017). The present research focuses on whether the perceived effectiveness of IER strategies is different based on the goal of the individual getting regulated.

In the aforementioned scenario, where an individual shares their feelings with their romantic partner, the sharing of emotions can be seen as a form of interpersonal emotion regulation (IER). IER, as defined by Zaki and Williams (2013), is a social phenomenon in which individuals attempt to regulate the emotions of others (i.e., extrinsic IER) or seek out others to regulate their own emotions (i.e., intrinsic IER). When engaging in extrinsic IER, there is a person who regulates (i.e., the regulator) and a person who wants to be regulated (i.e., the target). How the regulator responds to the target affects both emotional and relational factors (Chan & Rawana, 2021; Zaki & Williams, 2013). When people regulate their own emotions (intrapersonal) or the emotions of others (interpersonal), they use emotion-regulation strategies (Tamir, 2009). Different IER strategies are not inherently right or wrong as the effectiveness depends more on factors such as social context or the type of relationship between people (Aldao et al., 2015; Battaglini et al., 2023; Brockman et al., 2017; Cheung et al., 2015; Dixon-Gordon et al., 2015; English et al., 2017; Pauw et al., 2019). While some IER strategies have been shown to be generally more adaptive than other IER strategies (e.g., reappraisal), research has shown that more adaptive does not necessarily mean more effective, as that is dependent on the context (Aldao et al., 2013).

An important contextual factor proposed by this study is the goal the regulation target has when engaging in IER. Two intrinsic goals are identified: using emotion regulation when upset to make yourself feel better (i.e., hedonic goal) or to get work done (i.e., instrumental goal; Tamir, 2009). These goals can influence the perceived effectiveness of IER strategies because people weigh the benefits of emotions differently based on their goals. For those with a hedonic goal, pleasure and immediate benefits are more important, and for those with an instrumental goal, utility, and future benefits are more important. When it comes to these goals, does one feel that the IER strategy used by the other person effectively regulates the emotion so they can reach their goal? In the present study, we examine whether people with different goals (i.e., hedonic or instrumental) perceive different IER strategies (e.g., reappraisal, co-rumination, or suppression) as more or less effective.

Interpersonal Emotion Regulation Strategies

Emotion regulation strategies fall into two broad types: engaging and disengaging strategies (Parkinson & Totterdell, 1999). Engaging strategies involve actively handling the emotion one is experiencing, while disengaging strategies aim to actively avoid the emotion. This research investigates seven IER strategies in their extrinsic forms: *suppression, distraction, ignoring, co-rumination, reappraisal, acceptance*, and *problem-solving*.

Disengaging IER Strategies

The first IER strategy is the disengaging strategy *suppression*. Suppression is a strategy people use to actively stop expressing, thinking about, and feeling an ongoing emotion (Gross et al., 1993; Webb et al., 2012). When used in an interpersonal sense, one encourages the other to engage in suppression. Research has shown that suppression is effective for suppressing the expression but less effective in suppressing the experience of emotion (Brockman et al., 2017; Gross et al., 1993; Webb et al., 2012).

The second disengaging IER strategy is *distraction*, a strategy for redirecting attention away from the emotional situation or focusing on the non-emotional part of the situation (Gross, 1998; Webb et al., 2012). The underlying process of distraction is to distract another person from the undesirable emotion. This can be done by distracting the other with activities (e.g., watching funny videos together) or encouraging the other to do or think about something else (Pauw et al., 2024). Distraction is the preferred strategy to neither experience nor express emotion (Greenaway et al., 2021).

The third IER strategy is *interpersonal ignoring*. In the context of IER, it is simply not responding or reacting to the other's emotions. Ignoring another's emotions can indirectly encourage the other to hide their emotions, and like suppression, it can be effective at

changing emotional expression but ineffective at reducing the feeling of that emotion (Pauw et al., 2024; Webb et al., 2012).

Engaging IERS

The fourth strategy and the first of the engaging strategies is *co-rumination*. Co-rumination is a strategy defined as extensively discussing and revisiting problems with others while focusing on negative feelings (Rose, 2002, 2021). Co-rumination is used in an attempt to exert control over negative emotions (Christensen & Haynos, 2020). Co-rumination has been shown to have links to depression and anxiety (Hankin et al., 2009; Jose et al., 2012; Spendelow et al., 2016).

The fifth IER strategy and second engaging strategy is *reappraisal*. Reappraisal is a form of cognitive change in how a person thinks about a situation that changes its emotional impact (Gross & John, 2003). It generally involves taking an optimistic viewpoint of the situation, resulting in the experience and expression of more positive and less negative emotions. It has been shown to be effective in both down-regulating the expression and experience of emotions (Jackson et al., 2000). Reappraisal is linked to improved emotional control and physiological and psychological well-being (Gross & John, 2003).

The sixth IER strategy and third engaging strategy is *acceptance.* Interpersonal acceptance is defined as accepting another person's emotions without judgment or any attempts to change or influence those emotions (Loskot, 2019). In intrapersonal research, acceptance has been shown to be a strong predictor of higher psychological well-being (Pauw et al., 2020).

The seventh IER strategy and final engaging strategy is *problem-solving*. This strategy involves undertaking specific actions to solve a problem. Actions such as brainstorming can lead to beneficial effects on emotion by changing the source of negative emotion (Aldao et al., 2010). This strategy is often not a direct attempt to regulate emotions but leads to outcomes that have beneficial effects on emotions. Poor problem-solving has been linked to depression, anxiety, substance use and eating disorders (Aldao et al., 2010).

IER Goals and Strategies

These seven IER strategies can be used to effectively (or ineffectively) regulate different people with different goals. An IER goal is the goal that the person whose emotions are being regulated (i.e., regulation target) pursues when engaging in IER (Tamir, 2009, 2016; Netzer et al., 2015). In the example at the start of this paper, the partner coming home is upset and has either one of two goals for engaging in IER: they want to feel better (i.e., a hedonic IER goal), or they want to get work done (i.e., an instrumental IER goal).

Prior research suggests that the goal the target has may be an important determinant of strategy selection (English et al., 2017; Greenaway et al., 2021; Millgram, 2019; Tamir, 2009, 2016; Tamir et al., 2020). For example, people are more likely to use reappraisal when having a hedonic goal (versus an instrumental goal; Eldesouky & English, 2019). This selection of strategies based on goal is grounded in perceived effectiveness (Tamir et al., 2020). People choose a certain strategy because they expect it to be more effective in regulating their emotions compared to other strategies (even though this might not be the case; Millgram et al., 2018; Vishkin et al., 2019). While this dependency on goal is not yet fully investigated for the perceived effectiveness of IER strategies from the target's perspective, research has shown that people use similar strategies when regulating others as when they regulate themselves (Matthews et al., 2021).

Placing this in the context of engaging and disengaging strategies, research has shown that some strategies are generally perceived as more effective than other strategies based on goal. Acceptance (engaging), for example, is generally perceived as effective when down-regulating unpleasant emotions, while suppression (disengaging) is generally perceived as ineffective for the same purpose (Bonanno & Burton, 2013; Dunn et al., 2009). However, suppression is used more often when an individual has an instrumental goal, as this strategy is perceived as more effective for getting work done (English, 2017). Reappraisal (engaging) is used more often when regulating emotions with a hedonic goal. With this, it is expected that individuals perceive engaging IER strategies as more effective for those with a hedonic goal compared to those with an instrumental goal because these strategies actively deal with the emotions one is experiencing rather than only dealing with the expression (Bonanno & Burton, 2013; Brockman et al., 2017; Dunn et al., 2009; Gross et al., 1993; Webb et al., 2012). This dealing with the emotion, however, could be perceived as distracting for those with an instrumental goal. It is, for that same reason, expected that disengaging IER strategies are perceived as more effective for those with an instrumental goal than for those with a hedonic goal. These strategies involve redirecting attention away from the emotion and postponing actively dealing with this emotion until after the work is done.

Present Study

The present study aims to investigate whether the perceived effectiveness of different (extrinsic) IER strategies in romantic relationships depends on the goal of the target. The lack of current knowledge about the influence of goals (English et al.,2017) and the importance of an appropriate emotional response in romantic relationships (Chan & Rawana, 2021; Clark et al., 2017; Rimé, 2009; Sels et al., 2020; Westman, 2001), highlight the relevance to further

investigate the influence of goal type. We hypothesize that there is an overall difference in the perceived effectiveness of IER strategies between targets with a hedonic goal and targets with an instrumental goal (*H1*; English et al., 2017; Tamir, 2009, 2016; Tamir et al., 2020). More specifically, it is hypothesized that engaging IER strategies are perceived as more effective by targets when they have a hedonic goal compared to when they have an instrumental goal (*H2a*; Tamir, 2009; Eldesouky & English, 2019). Moreover, it is hypothesized that disengaging IER strategies are perceived as more effective by targets when they have an instrumental goal compared to when they have a hedonic goal (*H2b*; English et al., 2017; Tamir, 2009).

To test these hypotheses, participants were asked to rate the effectiveness of seven IER strategies. Participants were randomly assigned to think of situations in which they were upset and either had a hedonic or an instrumental goal.

Methods

Participants

Participants were recruited using Prolific's participant pool. To determine the minimum sample size to test the hypothesis, an a priori power analysis was conducted using G*Power version 3.1.9.7 (Faul et al., 2007). Results for a repeated measures ANOVA with a within-between interaction indicated we needed a sample size of 930 ($F = 0.15$, $1-\beta = .95$, $\alpha = .05$, 2 groups, 7 measurements). A total of 1017 participants were recruited. Using the following inclusion criteria: participants were at least 18 years old, had been in a romantic relationship for 6 months or longer, successfully passed at least 2 attention checks, indicated that they answered the questions honestly, and gave consent to use their data. This resulted in a usable sample for data analysis of 986 participants ($M_{age} = 44.1$, $SD = 13.2$; 62.6% identified as female and 36.5% as male; 90.2% identified as white). It took participants, on average, no more than 7 minutes to complete the survey. Participants were financially compensated for participation as long as they passed at least 2 attention checks. With a wage of £8.- per hour, their final pay was calculated by Prolific based on the average time all participants took to complete the survey.

Procedure

A survey was set up using Qualtrics software. Before starting the first questionnaire, participants read an information letter and were asked to give their informed consent (see Appendix 1). Afterward, they were asked if they were currently in a romantic relationship and if that relationship was longer than six months. If participants were in a relationship for more than six months, they were shown a welcome text encouraging them to answer truthfully and

to trust their instincts. Participants were then given instructions for one of the two conditions (hedonic or instrumental) for the IER strategies questionnaire (21 items + 1 attention check). This was followed up by a manipulation check (2 questions) for both goal types (condition). The survey also contained other questionnaires measuring attachment, well-being, and relationship satisfaction; these are beyond the scope of this study and were not used in data analysis. Demographics about participants' romantic relationships and themselves were the final questions, with a final attention check asking participants if they were honest and if they thought we should discard their data because they were not honest. Participants were thanked, debriefed, and offered the opportunity to give written feedback.

Materials

Goal Manipulation

Participants were presented with one of two conditions representing the different goal types (hedonic or instrumental; see Appendix 2). They were instructed to think about either a hedonic or an instrumental goal. Some of the text in the goal instruction was bolded and underlined to ensure that participants' attention went to the most important parts of the text.

Perceived Effectiveness of IER Strategies

The perceived effectiveness of the seven IER strategies was measured using a questionnaire based on previous research. The effectiveness was measured per IER strategy using three items for each strategy. The statements were presented in a random order to prevent an order effect (Suchman & Presser, 1996). The item stem for each IER strategy was: "I find it helpful when my partner..". Participants rated the following strategies, each with three items: co-rumination (e.g., "tries to get me to talk over and over about what is bothering me.", $\alpha = .64$), suppression (e.g., "tells me not to feel bad (e.g., "don't cry, don't be sad, don't worry", $\alpha = .58$), distraction (e.g., "tries to direct my attention to something else.", $\alpha = .75$), reappraisal (e.g., "tries to make me think differently about the situation.", $\alpha = .80$), acceptance (e.g., "expresses that it's OK to feel the way I'm feeling.", $\alpha = .78$), problem-solving (e.g., "gives me practical advice on how to approach the situation.", $\alpha = .82$), and ignoring (e.g., "does not get involved in the situation.", $\alpha = .78$). For each statement a seven-point Likert-type scale was used for participants to rate perceived effectiveness (1 = Completely disagree, 7 = Completely agree). No items needed recoding as all statements were asked in the same direction for the IER strategies (i.e., a higher score indicates higher perceived effectiveness of that IER strategy).

Manipulation Check

To ensure that the manipulation worked, a manipulation check was set up. The manipulation check had two questions, presented to all participants. The first question regarded how much of a hedonic goal a participant had; "When answering the questions on the previous page, **I tried to think of situations in which I'm upset and want to feel better.**" The second question asked how much of an instrumental goal a participant had; "When answering the questions on the previous page, **I tried to think of situations in which I'm upset and want to get work done.**" Both questions used a seven-point Likert-type scale to rate how much they thought about that goal (1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree).

Attention Check

Attention checks were used throughout the survey to ensure that careless responses did not influence the validity of the scales (Bowling et al., 2016). These attention checks were in line with Prolific's requirements. An example of an attention check is: "Please select 'Completely agree' to show you are paying attention to this question." These attention checks also influenced the participants' pay, with failing two or more attention checks resulting in not getting paid by Prolific. A separate final attention check was set up in which participants were asked if they answered the questionnaire honestly or not and were told that the answer would not impact their payment. Participants could choose between two options: "Yes - discard my data because I gave some random responses and/or responses that were not completely honest" or "No - I took the study seriously and provided reliable data." Data from participants who chose the first option was excluded, but participants were still paid.

Data-Analysis

IBM SPSS (version 29) was used to analyze the data. First, the inclusion criteria were run to clean data from participants who did not match the sample or failed 2 or more attention checks. Second, data from participants who did not complete the main part of the survey (i.e., perceived effectiveness of the IER strategies) was cleaned. Third, any strong outliers that were found during analysis were excluded if impossible and investigated further if these created a problem. These outliers are based on impossible answers (e.g., being 150 years old or being in a relationship longer than a participant is alive) or participants who had data three times the interquartile range (IQR) on the IER strategies questionnaire (Taylor, 2023). One strong outlier was found (data higher than three times the IQR), but it was determined that this single person did not tip the balance in any of the tests. Finally, participants were excluded based on their answer to the final attention check (this did not count as passing or failing an attention check).

Ethical Review

Prior to data collection, the Ethics Review Board of the Faculty of Social and Behavioral Sciences of Utrecht University approved this study (FERB; UU-SER reference number **24-0378**). No directly identifiable data was collected, making the survey as anonymous as possible within the study's limits. Participants were also given the contact details of the head researcher of this study and an independent employee of the same department if they had any questions. If participants had any official complaints, contact information was also given to the complaints officer of Utrecht University.

Results

Before any statistical test was conducted, assumptions were checked for each test. First, for the repeated measures ANOVA, only the assumption of sphericity was violated based on Mauchly's test ($p < .001$; Field, 2018). For this reason, the results of the repeated measures ANOVA were corrected using Greenhouse-Geisser Epsilon (*H1, H2a,* and *H2b*).

Manipulation Check

A manipulation check was used to check if participants were thinking about the assigned goal type when filling out the IER strategies survey. A repeated measures ANOVA was used to test for the effect of condition on the manipulation checks. First, there was a significant main effect of self-reported goals, $F(1, 984) = 82.54$, $p < .001$, indicating that participants overall had a stronger hedonic goal ($M = 5.66$, $SD = 1.48$) in mind when rating the perceived effectiveness of IER strategies compared to an instrumental goal ($M = 5.09$, $SD = 1.73$; see Figure 1). Importantly, this main effect is qualified by a significant interaction effect between self-reported goal and goal condition $F(1, 984) = 464.79$, $p < .001$. As intended, those in the hedonic goal condition tried to think more about a situation in which they felt upset and wanted to feel better than those in the instrumental goal condition $t(984) = 10.80$, $p < .001$. Conversely, participants in the instrumental goal condition reported thinking more about a situation in which they were upset and wanted to get work done compared to those with a hedonic goal, $t(984) = -18.87$, $p < .001$. These results show that manipulation was successful for both conditions.

Figure 1

Mean Self-Reported Goals Based on Condition
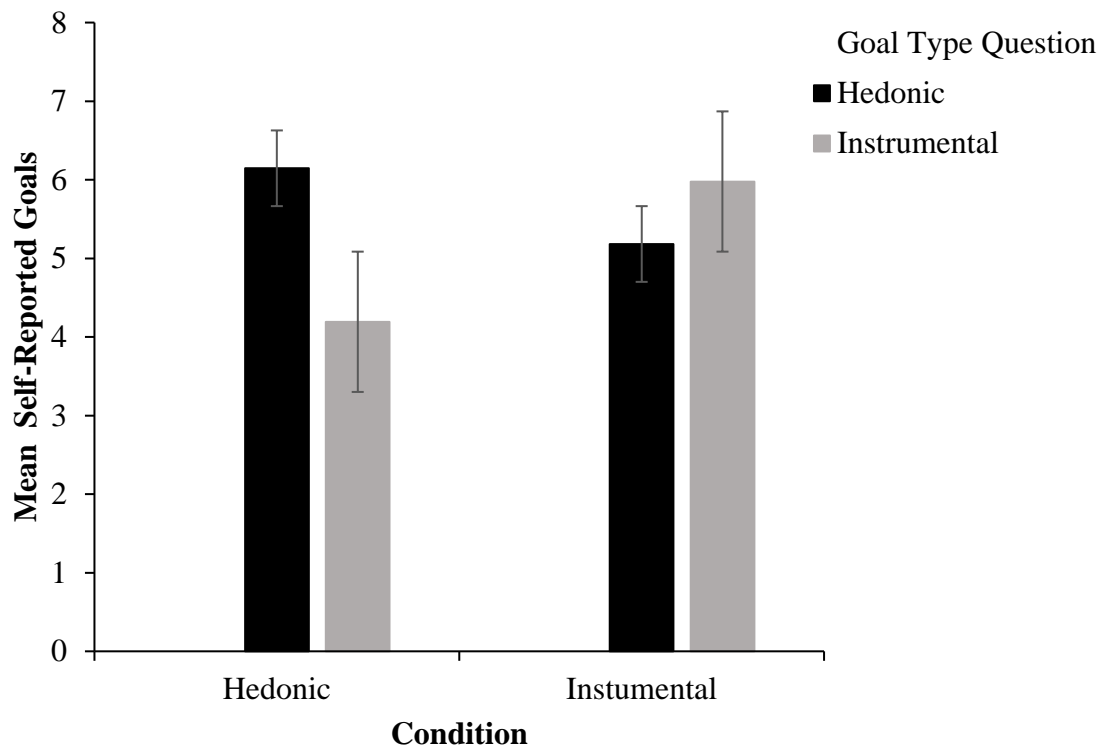
Note. This figure shows the main effect of self-reported goals and the interaction effect between self-reported goals and conditions. Those in the hedonic condition reported that they thought more about a hedonic goal than thinking about an instrumental goal. And those in the instrumental condition reported that they thought more about an instrumental goal than a hedonic goal.

Hypothesis Testing

To test whether there was an effect of goal type on the perceived effectiveness of IER strategies (*H1*), a repeated measures ANOVA with a Greenhouse-Geisser correction was conducted. There was a main effect of goal type on perceived effectiveness, $F(1, 984)= 5.28$, $p = .022$, indicating that overall, those with a hedonic goal ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 0.55$) perceived IER strategies as more effective than those with an instrumental goal ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 0.61$). The ANOVA also showed a main effect of IER strategies, $F(3.86)= 1284$, $p < .001$, revealing that regardless of goal type, strategies are perceived as differentially effective. Most importantly, and in line with the hypothesis, the test also revealed an interaction effect between IER strategies and goal type, $F(3.86)= 35.66$, $p < .001$, showing that the perceived effectiveness of the IER strategies was different depending on the goal type.

To examine the effect of goal type on the perceived effectiveness of each strategy separately (*H2*), the results of the repeated measures ANOVA were investigated further. It was hypothesized that those with a hedonic goal would perceive engaging strategies as more effective compared to those with an instrumental goal (*H2a*). And that those with an instrumental goal perceived disengaging strategies as more effective than those with a hedonic goal (*H2b*). Contrary to hypotheses, reappraisal, and problem-solving – two engaging IER strategies - were perceived as equally effective for both goal types (see Table 1). As hypothesized, participants with a hedonic goal perceived co-rumination and acceptance – two engaging IER strategies – as significantly more effective than those with an instrumental goal. Contrary to the hypothesis, distraction, a disengaging IER strategy, was perceived as significantly more effective by those with a hedonic goal than those with an instrumental goal. Finally, in line with the hypotheses, those with an instrumental goal perceived disengaging strategies suppression and ignoring as more effective than those with a hedonic goal.

Table 1

Perceived Effectiveness of IER Strategies Based on Goal Type

IER strategy	Condition	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*p*
Engaging					
Co-rumination	Hedonic	4.13	1.17	4.91*	<.001
	Instrumental	3.75	1.26		
Reappraisal	Hedonic	5.24	1.03	0.95	.343
	Instrumental	5.18	1.06		
Acceptance	Hedonic	5.44	1.01	4.50*	<.001
	Instrumental	5.14	1.09		
Problem-solving	Hedonic	5.39	1.05	1.37	.170
	Instrumental	5.29	1.14		
Disengaging					
Distraction	Hedonic	4.76	1.14	7.89*	<.001
	Instrumental	4.15	1.26		
Suppression	Hedonic	2.81	1.12	-3.95*	<.001
	Instrumental	3.10	1.16		
Ignoring	Hedonic	2.07	1.06	-7.53*	<.001
	Instrumental	2.63	1.26		

*$p<.001$

Discussion

Summary

This study aimed to investigate the perceived effectiveness of different IER strategies based on goal type in romantic relationships. First, it was expected that the type of goal an IER target has influences the perceived effectiveness of IER strategies in general (*H1*; English et al., 2017; Tamir, 2009, 2016; Tamir et al., 2020). Results from this study support this hypothesis showing that how effectively a target perceives an IER strategy is dependent on the goal they have. Second, it was hypothesized that those with a hedonic goal would perceive engaging IER strategies as more effective compared to those with an instrumental goal (*H2a*). The results of this study partly support this hypothesis, showing that participants with a hedonic goal perceive the engaging IER strategies co-rumination and acceptance as more effective than those with an instrumental goal. In addition, it was also hypothesized that those with an instrumental goal perceive a disengaging IER strategy as more effective than those with a hedonic goal (*H2b*; English et al., 2017; Tamir, 2009). The present findings partly provide evidence for this hypothesis, showing that when someone has an instrumental goal, they perceive the disengaging IER strategies suppression and ignoring as more effective than those with a hedonic goal. Contrary to this hypothesis, the disengaging IER strategy distraction was perceived as more effective by those with a hedonic goal compared to those with an instrumental goal. Contrary to both *H2a* and *b*, findings also show that there is no difference in perceived effectiveness based on the goal for both engaging IER strategies reappraisal and problem-solving. Meaning that regardless of the goal, these strategies are perceived as equally effective.

Main Findings and Implications

As expected, the goal of a regulation target influences the perceived effectiveness of IER strategies (*H1*). This is consistent with the growing body of research showing that context is an important factor in how people perceive IER strategies (Aldao et al., 2015; Brockman et al., 2017; Cheung et al., 2015; Dixon-Gordon et al., 2015; English et al., 2017; Pauw et al., 2019), and, more specifically, that the goal someone has plays an important role in that context (English et al., 2017; Tamir, 2009, 2016; Tamir et al., 2020). The present findings emphasize the importance of the goal by filling in the gap in knowledge about how goals influence IER. They show that the perceived effectiveness of an IER strategy depends on the type of goal the target of regulation has. This means that the goal a romantic partner has when seeking regulation is important in understanding what strategy they would prefer.

Providing the right support improves relationship quality and well-being (Chan & Rawana, 2021; Tepeli Temiz & Elsharnouby, 2022).

Delving deeper into the influence of goal, it was expected that engaging IER strategies would have been perceived as more effective by those with a hedonic goal compared to those with an instrumental goal (*H2a*; Tamir, 2009; English et al., 2017). This effect was confirmed for both engaging IER strategies co-rumination and acceptance. This means that in a situation in which an individual is upset and wants to feel better (i.e., a hedonic goal), they perceive engaging IER strategies co-rumination and acceptance as more effective compared to if they want to get work done (i.e., an instrumental goal). This effect was, contrary to expectations, not found for the engaging IER strategies reappraisal and problem-solving. Findings show that IER strategies, reappraisal, and problem-solving goals had no effect on perceived effectiveness. An explanation for these findings is that both IER strategies, reappraisal and problem-solving, are shown to be perceived as highly effective IER strategies (Aldao et al., 2010; Webb et al., 2012). As such making goals less relevant for reappraisal and problem-solving. In other words, these IER strategies are effective regardless of the goal a target has.

Furthermore, it was expected that disengaging IER strategies would have been perceived as more effective by those with an instrumental goal compared to those with a hedonic goal (*H2b*; English et al., 2017; Tamir, 2009). Individuals who want to get regulated and have an instrumental goal indeed perceived disengaging IER strategies suppression and ignoring as more effective compared to when an individual has a hedonic goal. This means that in a situation in which an individual is upset and wants to get work done they perceive IER strategies suppression and ignoring as more effective compared to those that are upset and want to feel better. However, against expectations, it was found that individuals who have a hedonic goal perceived distraction as more (instead of less) effective compared to those with an instrumental goal. A possible explanation for this could be that the distraction used by others is perceived in a way that it could also distract them from the work one would like to get done. This means that this distraction would get in the way of getting work done and thus be perceived as less effective for those with an instrumental goal compared to those with a hedonic goal.

The findings regarding both parts of the second hypothesis show that while engaging and disengaging are indeed different types of IER strategies (Parkinson & Totterdell, 1999), the perceived effectiveness of the same type of strategy is different depending on the type of goal. Thus, whether a target has a hedonic or instrumental goal it does not necessarily mean

that an IER strategy from one type is more effective than an IER strategy from the other type. These findings suggest that the notion of grouping IER strategies together based on engaging or disengaging with emotion when researching effectiveness could result in a limited understanding of that effectiveness (Fitzpatrick & Kuo, 2021).

Strengths, Limitations, and Future Research

When interpreting the findings of this study, it is important to be aware of strengths and limitations. Starting with the strengths, this study had a large sample size contributing to the power and generalizability of the results (Faul et al., 2007). Another strength is that this study fills a gap in knowledge about the perceived effectiveness of IER strategies in the context of different goals. Contributing to a better understanding of IER, strategies involved with IER, and the goals when engaging in IER. Showing that the goal matters for how effective most IER strategies (co-rumination, acceptance, distraction, suppression, and ignoring) are perceived. These results are also relevant to society as providing support to one's romantic partner increases relationship quality and well-being (Chan & Rawana, 2021; Tepeli Temiz & Elsharnouby, 2022).

There were also significant limitations that have to be addressed. First, the absence of any information about the reliability and validity of the questionnaire used to measure the perceived effectiveness of IER strategies. Analysis of the internal reliability based on Cronbach's alpha showed limitations for IER strategies co-rumination and suppression (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). With reliability and validity being crucial components of a measurement, the absence of any information on this could hurt this study's quality (Kimberlin & Winterstein, 2008). It could be that, for example, we are measuring something else than what we intended to measure, possibly leading to misleading results.

A second limitation of this study is that we asked people to think about moments when they were upset. How emotionally intense that moment was can differ from person to person, and also, the type of emotion might influence how one perceives an IER strategy. This is because research has shown influences of strategy deployment by others (Pauw et al., 2019) and ourselves (Dixon-Gordon et al., 2015; Fitzpatrick & Kuo, 2021). For example, suppression is more used to regulate intense sadness than anger. This shows that if a participant was thinking of sadness instead of anger (or the other way around), it could influence how effective that participant would rate suppression.

A third limitation is that while the manipulation check was successful, people in general still thought more about a hedonic goal than an instrumental goal. This is in line with previous research (e.g., Tran et al., 2023), generally people use IER to feel better. This could

have impacted the validity of the results on instrumental goals, as instrumental goals might not have truly been represented. The general preference for feeling better makes it difficult to determine if the found effects are the result of goal type or only the result of the hedonic goal being more or less present. This could be avoided by exploring situations in which the instrumental goal is better represented, for example, in the work context (Niven, 2016).

For future research, we could expand the scope of the analysis by investigating the effectiveness of IER strategies based on goal. When an individual has either a hedonic or instrumental goal, which strategy would be most effective? Additionally, while the current study found support for a difference in the perceived effectiveness of IER strategies between goals, future research could examine why people perceive this difference. Qualitative research could give a more in-depth insight into why these differences are perceived (Rich & Ginsburg, 1999).

Another aspect of IER future research should investigate is whether this perception of effectiveness also relates to actual effectiveness, as previous research has shown a difference in perceived and actual effectiveness for intrapersonal emotion regulation (Millgram et al., 2018; Vishkin et al., 2019). To investigate if this is also the case for IER, prospective research could use follow-up measures to investigate whether an IER strategy actually had the desired effect.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the present study adds to the growing body of evidence that context influences interpersonal emotion regulation (e.g., Tamir, 2020). Results confirm that the perceived effectiveness of interpersonal emotion regulation strategies in romantic relationships is influenced by the target's goal type. In line with expectations participants found co-rumination and acceptance more effective when they had a hedonic goal compared to when they had an instrumental goal. While suppression and ignoring where preferred if participants had an instrumental goal compared to when they had a hedonic goal. Against expectation, suppression was perceived as more effective by those with a hedonic goal compared to those with an instrumental goal. Additionally, reappraisal and problem-solving were perceived as equally effective regardless of goal type. This study reinforces the importance of context for how different strategies are perceived in their effectiveness. Where other studies take context as a broader concept, we zoomed in on a specific part of that context. That is, the goal of the individual who seeks regulation. Findings show that when people regulate the emotions of their romantic partner, they should take the goal that their

partner has into account. This is because an appropriate response to emotion benefits the relationship quality and increases well-being.

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Appendix 1:

Information Letter and Informed Consent

Information letter
Can you help me regulate my emotions?

Dear participant,

First, thank you for your interest in the research project, "Can you help me regulate my emotions?". Before the study starts, it is important that you are informed about the procedure. Therefore, we would like you to read this information letter carefully.

Purpose of the investigation
The goal of this study is to investigate the ways in which romantic partners can best help you manage your emotions.

Procedure and compensation
This study requires you to be in a committed romantic relationship since at least 6 months. In this study, you will be asked to report how helpful you find various forms of support from your romantic partner when you experience negative emotions. After that, you will be asked some questions related to your relationship and demographic information. On average, this study will take about 5-10 minutes to complete. You will be paid.

Confidentiality of data processing
This study requires us to collect some of your personal data (regarding age, gender, sexual satisfaction). This information will not allow us to identify you. We need this data to be able to answer the research question properly, as we are also examining relationship satisfaction. We never ask for more of this data than is necessary to answer the specific question. You can also decide to skip these personal questions if you feel uncomfortable answering them. Your data will be stored for at least 10 years. This is according to the appropriate guidelines of the Universities of the Netherlands (formerly VSNU). Anonymized data from this research might eventually be included in a so-called open access database (Open Science Framework), which means that other researchers will also be able to view these data. Any personal information that could in any way identify you will be removed or modified before the files are shared with other researchers or the results are made public. Other researchers can access this data only if they agree to maintain the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form. Please refer to the website of the Authority for Personal Data: https://autoriteitpersoonsgegevens.nl/nl/onderwerpen/avg-europese-privacywetgeving, for more information about privacy.

Voluntary participation
If you decide now not to participate in this study, there are no consequences. You can end your participation in the study at any time, without any explanation, and without any negative consequences simply by closing the browser window.

Independent contact and complaints officer
At any moment, if you have questions about this study, please contact the responsible

researcher: dr. Lisanne Pauw (l.s.pauw@uu.nl), or an independent employee of the department: dr. Chris Harris (c.a.harris@uu.nl). If you have an official complaint about the study, you can send an email to the complaints officer at klachtenfunctionaris-fetcsocwet@uu.nl. If, after reading this information letter, you decide to take part in the research, please click to go to the next page to begin the study!

With kind regards,
Dr. Lisanne Pauw

Consent Statement

I hereby declare that I have read the information letter about the study "Can you help me regulate my emotions?" and agree to participate in the study. I understand that the research data, without any personal information that could identify me (not linked to me), may be shared with others with the condition that further research is in line with this research in terms of design and purpose. This means that I agree to:
(1) Participation in the study
(2) The research data collected for the study being published or made available, provided that my name or other identifying information is not used.

Appendix 2:

Text Used for the Different Goal Types

Condition 1 (hedonic):

People often try to manage (or regulate) their partner's emotions, including what their partners are feeling on the inside and what they are showing on the outside. The questions below are focused on **ways** in which your partner might try to regulate your emotions.

We would like to ask you to think of **moments when you're upset and want to feel better.** To what extent do you find it helpful when your partner responds in the following ways:

When I want to feel better, I find it helpful when my partner..

Condition 2 (instrumental):

People often try to manage (or regulate) their partner's emotions, including what their partners are feeling on the inside and what they are showing on the outside. The questions below are focused on **ways** in which your partner might try to regulate your emotions.

We would like to ask you to think of **moments when you're upset and want to get work done.** To what extent do you find it helpful when your partner responds in the following ways:

When I want to get work done, I find it helpful when my partner..