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Monischa B. Amlinger-Chatterjee\*<sup>1</sup>  
 Nicola Baumann\*\*

### The We Helps Me: Poor Emotion-regulators Benefit from Relatedness

**Abstract:** Since the construct of action versus state orientation was introduced more than 30 years ago, this measure of individual differences in the ability to intuitively self-regulate emotions has become the focus of more than 100 published studies. These studies have related action orientation to smooth psychological functioning. In contrast, state orientation is associated with a low ability to self-regulate negative emotional states intuitively and a higher risk to suffer from psychological impairments. In the present article, we investigate whether relatedness mitigates detrimental effects of state orientation. Our analysis includes relatedness on the levels of (a) culture, (b) personal values, and (c) situational cues. The findings indicate that action-state orientation matters and works similarly across non-Western (Bangladesh, India) and Western cultures (Germany, New Zealand). Merely being a member of a presumably interrelated culture does not mitigate adverse effects of state orientation. In contrast, personally valuing relatedness (i.e., benevolence) and situationally cueing relatedness (i.e., thinking about similarities with a friend) both compensate state orientation – especially in conjunction with each other.

**Keywords:** action versus state orientation, relatedness, personal values, benevolence, priming similarities, culture

The ability to exert volitional control over one's emotions without external support is regarded as a building block for many domains of psychological functioning and an important precondition for well-being (e.g., Baumeister & Tierney, 2012; Gross & John, 2003; Koole, 2009; Kuhl, 2001). Despite this pivotal role, research shows that deficits in emotional self-regulation are a common psychological condition rather than the exception: Around 50% of the general population in Western countries have a dispositional inability to self-regulate emotions (Koole, Kuhl, Jostmann, & Vohs, 2005). Yet, not all poor emotion-regulators suffer to the same degree from their deficit. This raises the question how deficits in emotional self-regulation may be successfully compensated.

This review aims at contributing to the ongoing research on factors that help individuals with deficits in emotional self-regulation by exploring interpersonal aspects of the self (i.e., relatedness). Most research on emotional self-regulation is based on the conception of

the self as independent. However, humans are social creatures who feel related to others and the social world. Such interdependent aspect of the self may compensate some of the deficits in emotional self-regulation. In the following, we introduce the construct of action versus state orientation that captures individual differences in emotional self-regulation. Next, we explore whether relatedness may compensate poor emotional self-regulation. Our review considers relatedness on three levels of analysis: culture, personal values, and situational cues. We propose that when emotional self-regulation is weak, the “We” helps “Me” to maintain and restore psychological functioning and well-being.

#### Action versus State Orientation

Now and then, everybody gets stuck in negative emotions, ruminates about past events, and feels paralyzed. This may help us to rethink a situation and prevents us

\* University of Trier, Germany; Free University Amsterdam, Netherland

\*\* University of Trier, Germany

Corresponding author: Nicola Baumann, e-mail: nicola.baumann@uni-trier.de

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from rush decisions and premature action. However, some individuals are unable to leave a state of rumination and cannot down-regulate negative emotions even when the situations necessitates it. The construct of action-state orientation defines rather stable individual differences in the ability to self-regulate emotions (Kuhl, 1981, 2001; Kuhl & Beckmann, 1994). There are two dimensions of action-state orientation: *Failure-related* action (vs. state) orientation is the high (vs. low) ability to intuitively down-regulate negative emotions, disengage from ruminations about failure and other negative events, and maintain or increase in a compensatory way access to the self under stressful conditions (Baumann, Kaschel, & Kuhl, 2005, 2007; Brunstein, 2001). *Prospective* action (vs. state) orientation is the high (vs. low) ability to intuitively up-regulate positive affect, stop hesitation, and initiate intention-related actions under stressful conditions. In the present article, we focus on negative mood states and failure-related action-state orientation. Although it is also possible to induce an action-oriented “mind set” during neutral mood states (Harmon-Jones & Harmon-Jones, 2002) or in therapy (Hartung & Schulte, 1994), we focus on the disposition towards action-state orientation and its effects in negative mood states.

Action orientation represents a qualitatively distinct form of emotion regulation (Koole & Jostmann, 2004). It is neither deliberative nor automatic but shares characteristics with both emotion regulation processes. Similar to deliberative emotion regulation, action orientation is flexibly attuned to individuals’ ongoing goal pursuit. However, action orientation is not controlled by explicit intentions like suppression or reappraisal (Gross & John, 2003) and does not draw on limited volitional resources like self-control (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Muraven, & Tice, 1998). Similar to automatic emotion regulation, action orientation is rapid and highly efficient but not controlled by low-level reflexes like repression (Weinberger, 1990). Unlike repression (Langens & Mörth, 2003), action orientation does not interfere with automatic vigilance to negative affect (Koole & Jostmann, 2004). Action orientation is also different from self-efficacy (Bandura, 1991), optimism (Scheier & Carver, 1985), and self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965) because it does not concern *contents* of the self or self-concept (e.g., beliefs about being efficient, successful, or worthy) but *access* to the self and its stress-regulatory capacity. Consistent with this conceptualization, self-access has been found to mediate the relationship between action orientation and regulatory outcomes (Baumann, Kaschel, & Kuhl, 2005; Koole & Jostmann, 2004). Taken together, action orientation represents an intuitive form of emotion regulation that relies on high-level, parallel-holistic cognitive processing and the implicit self (Baumann, Kazén, & Quirin, 2017; Baumann & Kuhl, 2002).

A lack of this vital resource in emotion regulation (i.e., state orientation) is associated with numerous, stress-related impairments in psychological functioning. For example, detrimental effects of state orientation under stressful conditions have been found across many life domains that

range from work behavior (Diefendorff, Hall, Lord, & Streat, 2000; Wojdylo, Baumann, & Kuhl, 2017), academic achievement (Diefendorff, 2004; Jaramillo & Spector, 2004), and health behavior (Palfai, 2002). Furthermore, the effects of action-state orientation have been shown to occur over and above of reappraisal and suppression (Koole & Jostmann, 2004), self-efficacy (Diefendorff, 2004; Wolf, Herrmann, & Brandstätter, 2017), optimism (Bossong, 2001), and self-esteem (Kazén, Baumann, & Kuhl, 2005).

As mentioned above, a unique aspect of action orientation is the role of the self in emotion regulation. The ability to regulate emotions through the self develops in responsive parent-child interactions during early childhood and responsive relationships across the lifespan (Kaschel & Kuhl, 2004; Kuhl, 2001; Kuhl & Keller, 2008). Whenever interaction partners respond promptly and adequately to self-expressions (e.g., soothing in case of anxiety) the emotion-regulatory effect (relaxation) is conditioned to the self. Thereby, an initially external regulation turns into self-regulation (self-relaxation). Consistent with this view, responsive parental behavior during childhood has been found to promote self-regulation in children (Hirschauer, Aufhammer, Bode, Chasiotis, & Künne, 2017) and adults (Liesenfeld, 2017). Furthermore, many findings show that state-oriented individuals lose access to the self (i.e., implicit representations of personal needs, motives, goals, and preferences) under stressful conditions whereas action-oriented individuals maintain or even increase self-access (Baumann et al., 2005; Baumann & Kuhl, 2003; for an overview see Baumann et al., 2017). Finally, Koole and Jostmann (2004, Exp. 3) show that action-oriented individuals’ downregulation of negative affect is mediated by self-access. Thus, action orientation represents a *self-reliant* way of coping.

Since its introduction more than 30 years ago (Kuhl, 1981, 2001; Kuhl & Beckmann, 1994), the vast majority of studies on action-state orientation has been conducted in Europe and the US and adopted a Western conception of the individual as unique and separate from its social world. However, humans are strongly interrelated. Indeed, a growing body of literature in social cognition and cross-cultural research demonstrates that varying degrees of feeling related to others affects a multitude of psychological processes (Fitzsimons & Finkel, 2010; Markus & Kitayama, 1991, 1994, 2010; Kuhl & Keller, 2008). In line with this reasoning, it is possible that self-reliant emotion-regulation represents a path towards well-being that is more important in independent contexts (Koole et al., 2005; Kuhl & Keller, 2008). In interdependent contexts, in contrast, the feeling of relatedness with others may compensate deficits in self-reliant coping (i.e., state orientation).

Some initial evidence for this assumption stems from experiments showing that visualizing an accepting person (over)compensates detrimental effects of state orientation (Baumann et al., 2005; Koole & Jostmann, 2004). In addition, theoretical work has meanwhile turned attention to emotion regulation within social contexts

(Aldao, 2013; Grecucci, Theuninck, Frederickson, & Job, 2015). However, empirical research on the influences of relatedness (vs. social distance) on action-state orientation is still scarce. In our own research, we investigated relatedness on different levels of analysis that vary in duration (cultural membership vs. stable values vs. short-lived priming effects) and scope (content vs. accessibility of self-cognitions).

### Culture

Our first approach to relatedness was on the level of culture. From cross-cultural literature, two opposing hypotheses can be derived for our comparison of Western (e.g., North-American and European) and non-Western (e.g., Eastern/Asian) cultures. On the one hand, action orientation can be described as the hallmark of Western cultures. In Western cultures, achieving independence is a cultural goal that requires to construe oneself as unique and separated from others. Furthermore, the unique composition of an individual's inner attributes is regarded as the reason for a person's feelings and actions (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2006; Kagitcibasi, 2005; Markus & Kitayama, 1991, 2010). Thus, individuals have to deal with their emotions by themselves. Non-Western cultures, in contrast, foster an interdependent orientation in which identity is construed in relation to significant others or a social group. Relatedness, belonging, and harmony represent central cultural ideals that foster well-being and may compensate deficits in self-reliant coping (Greenfield, Keller, Fuligni, & Maynard, 2003; Kagitcibasi, 2005; Kuhl & Keller, 2008; Markus & Kitayama, 1991, 2010). Thus, individuals may rely on an external (social) regulation of their emotions. Accordingly, action orientation should be more important for well-being in Western compared to non-Western cultures.

On the other hand, a growing number of cross-cultural studies does not support a clear-cut Western-Eastern differentiation (Fiske, 2002; Oyserman, Coon, & Kimmelmeier, 2002). In their meta-analysis of cultural-comparative research on self-concepts, Oyserman et al. (2002) conclude that cultural differences between East and West are "neither as large nor as systematic as often perceived" (Oyserman et al., 2002, p. 40). Accordingly, action orientation should be important for well-being across cultural contexts – a view that we adopted in our current study. Consistent with this view, the few studies conducted in non-Western countries such as China (e.g., Song, Wanberg, Niu, & Xie, 2006) and Ecuador (e.g., Jaramillo, Locander, Spector, & Harris, 2007) as well as the few cross-cultural studies (e.g., Helmke & Tuyet, 1999, Germany vs. Vietnam; Niemivirta, Rijavec, & Yamauchi, 2001, Croatia vs. Germany vs. Japan) indicate that action orientation has a similar functional meaning across cultures. These studies have focused on achievement motivation, academic performance, job search, and personal preferences. To our knowledge, no study has investigated whether action-state orientation is important for well-being across cultures and mediated

by the same mechanisms (i.e., need satisfaction) across cultures.

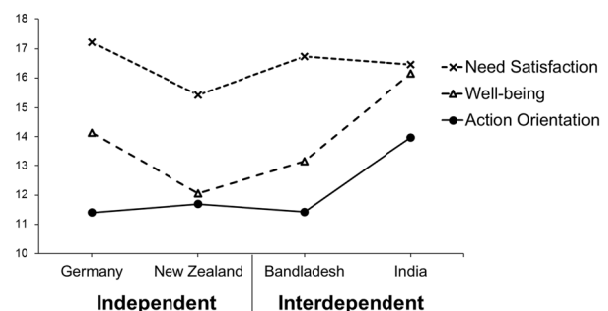
To fill this gap in cross-cultural research, we designed a study to explore the association between action orientation and self-regulatory outcomes in two Western (Germany and New Zealand) and two Eastern (India and Bangladesh) countries (Chatterjee, Baumann, Osborne, Mahmud, & Koole, under review). Whereas action orientation has been extensively studied in Germany, to our knowledge, no study has investigated action orientation in the other three countries so far. With this selection of countries, we followed Van de Vijver and Leung's (1997) recommendation to look for universal patterns in countries with large cultural differences (e.g., Germany and Bangladesh) but also for cultural differences in countries with cultural similarities (e.g., India and Bangladesh).

Our hypotheses were further guided by cross-cultural findings that individuals in Western *and* non-Western cultures report higher levels of well-being when their goals correspond with their personal needs (Chirkov, Ryan, Kim, & Kaplan, 2003; Church et al., 2013; Sheldon et al., 2004). Because research in Western cultures shows that action-oriented individuals are more likely to pursue need-congruent goals (Baumann & Kuhl, 2003; Baumann & Quirin, 2006), we expected higher action orientation to be associated with higher well-being across Western and non-Western cultures (H1). In addition, we expected the association between action orientation and well-being to be mediated by need satisfaction across Western and non-Western cultures (H2).

In all four cultural samples, participants were university students (40–70% female) from middle class families (around 83%) who voluntarily participated in an online survey containing self-report measures of action orientation, need satisfaction, and subjective well-being. As depicted in Figure 1, action orientation, need satisfaction, and well-being varied greatly between countries. Interestingly, this variation was even greater within independent cultures (e.g., Germany vs. New Zealand) than between independent and interdependent cultures (e.g., New Zealand vs. Bangladesh). However, our main interest was not in mean-level differences between cultural samples, but rather in functional relationships

**Figure 1. Mean level differences in action orientation, need satisfaction, and well-being between cultures**

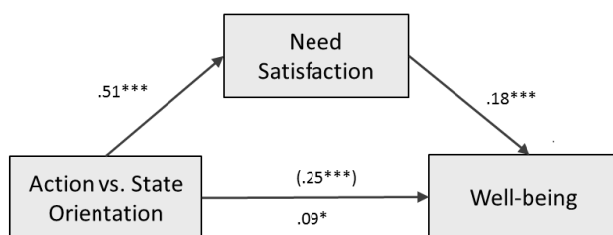
(Germany:  $N = 282$ ; New Zealand:  $N = 332$ ; Bangladesh:  $N = 248$ , India:  $N = 113$ )



between our study variables. As illustrated in Figure 2, a mediation model for the total sample ( $N=975$ )<sup>2</sup> with all variables standardized within each cultural group yielded a positive relationship between action orientation and well-being that was (partially) mediated by need satisfaction. Additional mediation analyses for each separate cultural sample showed that need satisfaction (partially) mediated the link between action orientation and well-being in each of the four countries (for statistical details see Chatterjee et al., under review).

**Figure 2. Mediation model with need satisfaction mediating the direct relationship between action-state orientation and well-being across cultures (Germany, New Zealand, Bangladesh, India)**

(adapted from Chatterjee et al., under review)



Taken together, our findings are in line with prior research reporting equivalent effects of action orientation in Western and non-Western countries (e.g., Jaramillo et al., 2007; Song et al., 2006). In our study, samples in all countries displayed similar associations between action orientation and well-being. Furthermore, across four cultural samples, need satisfaction was a mediator for the relationship between action orientation and well-being. Finally, our findings indicate that relatedness on a cultural level does not reduce or compensate adverse effects of state orientation. State orientation had similar detrimental effects on well-being across Western and non-Western cultures. Stated differently, non-Western cultures do not per se offer a form of external (social) regulation that reduces the strain on self-regulation. Taken together, the findings suggest that, across cultures, state orientation is detrimental for need satisfaction and, in turn, well-being. This cross-cultural similarity in the functioning of state orientation further underlines the necessity to search for factors that can compensate state orientation.

### Personal Values

Our second approach to relatedness was on the level of values. Although values are profoundly shaped by culture, individuals who share a similar cultural background may differ in how much importance they give to specific personal values (e.g., Bardi & Schwartz, 2003; Schwartz,

<sup>2</sup> In the multi-group structural equation model (SEM) that we report in Chatterjee et al. (under review), we excluded the Indian sample because the sample size did not meet the criteria necessary to conduct a SEM. However, regardless of whether the Indian sample is included or excluded, results of the mediation model remain the same. We thank Ritu Tripathi from the Indian Institut of Management in Bangalore for her help to collect the data in India.

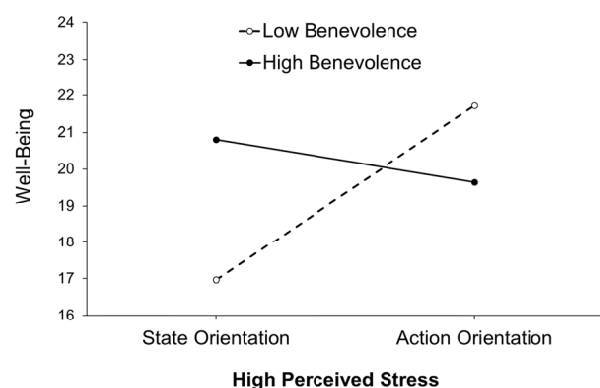
2011). Value orientations are rooted in specific cultural socialization experiences rather than global cultural norms, represent abstract beliefs, and serve as general guiding principles for how individuals perceive and evaluate events (Schwartz, 1992). Prosocial values such as benevolence (loyalty, harmony, and cooperation) can be considered as internal representation of supportive socialization experiences (Mikulincer et al., 2003; Schwartz, 2011) and prerequisites for detecting opportunities for receiving external support (Schwartz & Bardi, 2001).

We were interested to learn whether valuing benevolence would help state-oriented individuals to buffer the adverse effect of stress on well-being. To test our hypothesis, we conducted an online survey ( $N=151$  psychology undergraduates from a university in the US) in which we investigated the effects of action orientation, benevolence, and stressful life circumstances (as well as their two- and three-way interactions) on subjective well-being (see Chatterjee, Baumann & Osborne, 2013, Study 1). The analysis yielded a significant Action Orientation  $\times$  Benevolence  $\times$  Stress interaction. To clarify the nature of this three-way interaction, we looked separately at participants perceiving low versus high stress in their life circumstances. Among participants with low stress in life circumstances, there was a main effect of benevolence: well-being scored around 21 when benevolence was low and around 26 when benevolence was high. There were no main or interaction effects of action orientation (findings not depicted here).

Among participants with high stress in life circumstances, there was a significant Action Orientation  $\times$  Benevolence interaction. As depicted in Figure 3, when benevolence was low there was a significant effect of action orientation on well-being. In this high stress condition, state-oriented individuals had a drop in well-being to 17 whereas action-oriented participants were able to maintain well-being around 22. In contrast, when benevolence was high there was no significant effect of action orientation on well-being. Despite high stress in life circumstances, both state- and action-oriented participants maintained high well-being (around 21 and 20, respectively). Taken together, the

**Figure 3. Subjective well-being among participants with stressful life circumstances as a function of action-state orientation and prosocial values (i.e., benevolence)**

(adapted from Chatterjee et al., 2013, Study 1)



findings show that action-oriented individuals did not depend on relatedness to down-regulate negative emotions. Based on prior research it can be assumed that self-access is the process that mediated their regulatory capacity (e.g., Koole & Jostmann, 2004). In comparison, relatedness on the level of personal values (i.e., benevolence) helps state-oriented individuals to compensate their self-regulatory deficit and buffers the adverse effects of stress on well-being. But how exactly does benevolence help to regulate emotions?

Benevolence values are rooted in socialization experiences of social support that individuals have integrated into the self. These experiences and resulting values represent cognitive *contents* that buffer (i.e., regulate) stress but may not always be accessible. Action orientation, in contrast, represents *access* to the self and its regulatory potential at one's own volition (i.e., self-regulation). It is also learned in supportive, albeit slightly different social contexts than benevolence. Note that the two constructs do not correlate ( $-.14 < r > -.03$ ; Chatterjee et al., 2013, 2017). According to Kuhl (2001), responsiveness makes a crucial difference. For the development of action orientation, social support has to be responsive (i.e., prompt and adequate) to self-expressions of emotions so that the regulatory effect (relaxation) is conditioned to the self and accessible at one's own volition (self-relaxation). For benevolence, any kind of social support may be sufficient (e.g., prosocial behavior towards the group before a member expresses a need). Consequently, benevolence has a regulatory but not necessarily a *self*-regulatory potential. When being state-orientated, for example, benevolent individuals may still need external help or cues to access stress-reducing contents of the self. Before testing this interaction hypothesis, we elaborate on situational cues for benevolence and relatedness

### Situational Cues

Our third approach to relatedness was on the level of situational cues. While values reflect longer lasting orientations, situational cues affect the accessibility of specific self-cognitions in a given situation (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Hannover & Kühnen, 2002; Higgins & Bargh, 1987). Results from priming studies show that situational cues can facilitate (or impede) a person's orientation toward relatedness (Kühnen, Hannover, & Schubert, 2001; Oyserman, Sorensen, Reber, & Chen, 2009; Pöhlmann & Hannover, 2006). Additionally, experimentally activating supportive relationships (e.g., by visualizing an accepting person) has been shown to help state-oriented individuals (Baumann et al., 2005; Koole & Jostmann, 2004). However, we could not locate a study that has investigated the direct impact of priming relatedness (e.g., feeling related to a close other).

### Priming Relatedness Helps

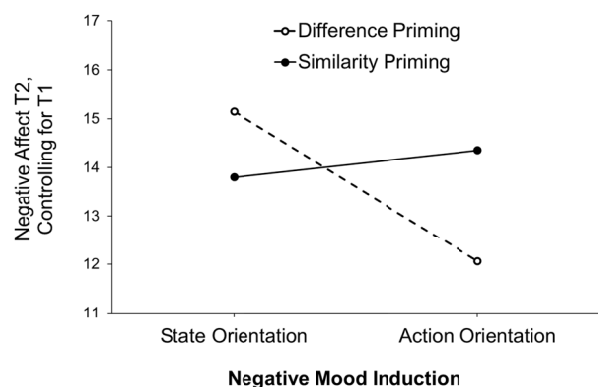
Our first priming study was set up to investigate if priming relatedness could compensate low self-regulation abilities among state-oriented individuals (cf. Chatterjee et al., 2013, Study 2). To prime relatedness, we used

a variation of the similarities and differences with family and friends task (SDFF, Trafimow, Triandis, & Goto, 1991): Participants ( $N = 152$  psychology undergraduates from a university in Germany) were invited to bring a friend to the experimental session who would also take part as a participant. Then, half of the participants were asked to write down everything that makes them different (difference priming) from their friend. The other half was asked to write down everything they have in common with their friend (similarity priming) to increase the feeling of relatedness. After the SDFF task, participants were randomly assigned to one of two (negative vs. neutral) mood conditions (i.e., watching a sad vs. neutral film sequence). Mood ratings were collected at the beginning of the experiment (T1) and after watching the film sequence (T2).

Consistent with expectations, the regression analysis conducted on mood at T2 (controlling for mood at T1), yielded a significant Action Orientation x Priming x Mood Condition interaction. To clarify the nature of this three-way interaction, we looked separately at participants in each mood condition. In the neutral mood induction condition, we could not detect a significant relationship between action orientation and mood recovery (findings not depicted here). In the negative mood induction condition, in contrast, there was a significant Action Orientation x Priming interaction. As shown in Figure 4 (adapted from Chatterjee et al., 2013, Study 2), after thinking about differences to their friend, action-oriented people down-regulated negative emotions better than state-oriented participants. This result is in line with the typical finding that state-oriented participants are less able to down-regulate negative affect compared to action-oriented participants. In the similarity condition, in contrast, state-oriented participants recovered from negative mood states as much as action-oriented participants. In other words, thinking of similarities with friends compensated state-oriented participants' self-regulatory deficit.

**Figure 4. Recovery from a negative mood induction as a function of action-state orientation and priming for similarities (vs. differences) with a close friend**

(adapted from Chatterjee et al., 2013, Study 2)



Our priming manipulation was a clearly external form of regulation that helped to cure symptoms (i.e., negative mood) but not the disease (i.e., self-regulatory deficits). In a next step, we tested whether priming interacts with

given values. This is informative for two reasons: On the one hand, it informs about the boundaries of priming effects. Does priming relatedness even help state-oriented individuals with low relatedness values? On the other hand, it informs about the process *how* relatedness values help. If state-oriented individuals do not profit from relatedness values unless externally cued by a matching prime, we can ascribe benevolence regulatory but not self-regulatory functions (as expected). If state-oriented individuals profit from benevolence values despite a mismatching prime, we cannot rule out self-regulatory functions of benevolence (contrary to expectations).

### Priming Activates Chronic Values

Drawing on our findings on value orientations, we assumed that not all state-oriented individuals would perceive external support to be helpful in emotion regulation to the same extent. Indeed, there is empirical support that chronic personal preferences influence the perception of situational cues (Lisjak et al., 2012; Pöhlmann & Hannover, 2006). For instance, Pöhlmann and Hannover (2006) could show that the importance of feeling and thinking interconnected with close others also increases the responsiveness to the situational activation (priming) of interdependence. Therefore, we designed a study to investigate whether state-oriented individuals profit more from a similarity priming the more they value relatedness (cf. Chatterjee, Baumann, & Koole, 2017, Study 2,  $N=177$  psychology undergraduates from a university in Germany).

Consistent with expectations, there was a significant Action Orientation  $\times$  Benevolence  $\times$  Priming interaction. The left side of Figure 5 depicts results for state-oriented participants (adapted from Chatterjee et al., 2017, Study 2): When differences were primed, valuing benevolence did not help state-oriented participants to recover from a negative mood. By contrast, when similarities were primed, higher

benevolence was associated with better recovery from a negative among state-oriented participants. The results for action-oriented participants show a reversed pattern indicating that they do not see the necessity to unfold their full self-regulatory capacity unless there is a mismatch between situational cues and personal values (findings not depicted here).

Taken together, the results of this study support the idea that state-oriented individuals profit more from relatedness cues the more they endorse relatedness values. Stated differently, short interventions such as priming may activate inner resources (i.e., high benevolence) but do not compensate a lack of inner resources (i.e., low benevolence) among state-oriented individuals. Furthermore, state-oriented individuals can access the regulatory potential of benevolence only with external help (e.g., when similarities were primed) but not by themselves (e.g., when differences were primed). This is consistent with the idea that benevolence is a regulatory but not a self-regulatory resource.

### Mere Imagination Is Sufficient

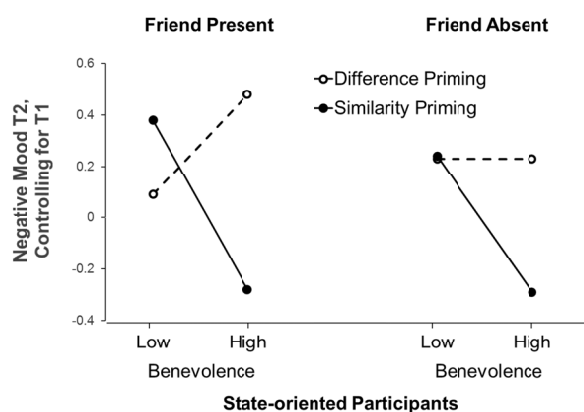
So far, in both priming studies, we primed similarities (vs. differences) with respect to a friend who was physically present in the lab. In everyday life, in contrast, we often have to cope without a friend sitting next door. Nevertheless, the mere thought of being close (similar) to a friend may support us. Because previous research has shown that visualizing an accepting person supports state-oriented individuals' self-access and well-being (Baumann et al., 2005; Koole & Jostmann, 2004), we were interested whether priming similarities also helps benevolent state-oriented participants when the friend is not physically present during the experiment (cf. Chatterjee et al., 2017, Study 1,  $N=170$  psychology undergraduates from a university in Germany).

Consistent with expectations, there was a significant Action Orientation  $\times$  Benevolence  $\times$  Priming interaction. The right side of Figure 5 depicts the results for state-oriented participants (adapted from Chatterjee et al., 2017, Study 1): When differences were primed, state-oriented participants recovered poorly from a negative mood – irrespective of benevolence. By contrast, when similarities were primed, higher benevolence was associated with better recovery from negative mood among state-oriented participants. Again, the results for action-oriented participants show a reversed pattern indicating that they are not motivated to self-regulate their emotions unless there is a mismatch between situational cues and personal values (findings not depicted here).

In line with previous findings (e.g., Baumann et al., 2005; Koole & Jostmann, 2004), our results show that mere imagination suffices to help state-oriented individuals: Even without the physical presence of a friend, thinking about similarities with a close friend can compensate state orientation – at least when individuals value relatedness. However, priming for similarities is not strong enough to override a mismatching value orientation.

**Figure 5. Recovery from naturally occurring negative mood states among state-oriented participants as a function of prosocial values (i.e., benevolence) and priming for similarities (vs. differences) with a friend who is physically present or not**

(adapted from Chatterjee et al., 2017, friend present: Study 2, friend absent: Study 1)



## Discussion

Taken together, our research contributes to the growing evidence that relatedness helps state-oriented individuals to compensate their deficits in emotional self-regulation by providing alternative (social) ways of regulation. We investigated relatedness on three levels of analysis: culture, personal values, and situational cues. On the level of culture, our findings show that state orientation impairs need satisfaction and, in turn, well-being across Western (Germany, New Zealand) and non-Western (Bangladesh, India) cultures (see Figure 2 and Chatterjee et al., under review). Mere membership in a presumably interdependent culture does not compensate state orientation. Stated differently, none of the four cultures provides social support to an extent that self-regulatory deficits do not matter. Thus, the search for other compensatory factors is a task of universal importance.

On the level of personal values, our findings show that state-oriented individuals who value benevolence maintain as much well-being in face of stressful life circumstances as action-oriented individuals (see Figure 3 and Chatterjee et al., 2013, Study 1). On the level of situational cues, our findings show that state-oriented individuals who were primed for similarities with a close friend recover from a negative mood induction as well as action-oriented individuals (see Figure 4 and Chatterjee et al., 2013, Study 2). Moreover, personal values and situational cues interact in their compensatory effects. Our findings show that priming relatedness better supports state-oriented individuals' recovery from naturally occurring negative moods states the more they generally value relatedness (see Figure 5 and Chatterjee et al., 2017). Finally, close others do not have to be physically present to support state-oriented individuals. Our findings show that mere imagination (i.e., thinking about similarities with a close friend) is sufficient to compensate the adverse effects of state orientation.

Note that we obtained convergent results for beneficial effects of relatedness on two levels of analysis that have a different duration (chronic values vs. short-lived priming effects) and scope (content vs. accessibility of self-cognitions). Furthermore, results were consistent across different demands (stressful life circumstances, watching a sad movie, and naturally occurring negative mood states), across regulatory outcomes (well-being and mood), and across cultures (USA and Germany). This methodological convergence increases our confidence in the robustness of the finding that relatedness compensates state orientation. Nevertheless, many questions are still open for future research. First, our findings suggest that it would be helpful for state-oriented individuals to give high importance to prosocial values such as benevolence. However, is it possible to change personal values deliberately? Is it possible to learn valuing benevolence and by these means regulate emotions?

Second, we focused on benevolence that Schwartz (1992) and Schwartz and Bardi (2001) identified as the most important value in a pan-cultural hierarchy. Our

studies indicate that benevolence represents a helpful value for state-oriented people to protect them against stressful experiences. However, other values might also interact with emotional self-regulation. Self-direction (e.g., feeling independent, curious, and choosing own goals), for example, could affect emotional self-regulation in a different manner. Self-direction might not comfort and down-regulate negative affect but it might energize and up-regulate positive affect, and by these means influence completely different outcomes (e.g., divergent thinking). Moreover, self-direction and other values might respond to different situational cues.

Third, relatedness is not only a matter of values but also part of other overlapping constructs such as the need for affiliation, social identity, and relational-interdependent self-construal. Whereas benevolence and the need for affiliation encompass motivational directions (i.e., desired rather than actual states), social identity and self-construal tap into cognitions regarding relatedness versus separation from others. In future research, it would be informative to explore whether the need for affiliation or construing the self as belonging to a group facilitates emotion regulation among state-oriented individuals.

Finally, we do not know whether it is possible to make priming more useful for all state-oriented people regardless of how much they value relatedness. In our experiments, priming relatedness activated given personal values but was not strong enough to override or compensate them. Therefore, future research will have to show whether other priming techniques, for instance implicit priming techniques (e.g., the pronoun circling test, Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Oyserman et al., 2009), could be stronger cues to activate relatedness.

## Conclusion

In days of fast political, economic, and technological changes, more and more people experience high levels of stress. In Western cultures, the ability to self-regulate perceived stress and negative emotions independently and autonomously is a cultural goal that makes action orientation a hallmark of Western societies. Our findings show that action orientation is equally important for well-being in non-Western cultures. Nevertheless, well-being is inextricably linked to social environments (e.g., Hawkey & Capitano, 2015; Riva, Wirth & Williams, 2011). Social environments are involved in the development of action orientation and in compensating state orientation. Our findings show that state-oriented individuals benefit from a shift from "Me" to "We". Furthermore, an inner "We" is sufficient for compensating adverse effects of state orientation.

The present research focuses on psychological functioning. Nevertheless, our findings may have important implications for political and societal functioning in general. It is conceivable that what we observed on a personal level might also apply on a national level and across regulatory domains. The revival of independent, nationalistic orientations in many countries turns the spotlight on cultural differences ("Them" vs. "Us") and

narrow solutions (e.g., something is either good for me or for you). However, in times of global challenges (e.g., climate change), the focus on cultural similarities (“We”) might provide us with a broader scope of action and more sustainable solutions: something that is good for me and for you. In this sense, we hope that our research contributes to more relatedness and strengthens the focus on the “We” across cultures and domains.

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