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Understanding enthusiasm: structure, function, and social regulation

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Chapter 4

The Appropriateness and Experience of Enthusiasm

This chapter is based on:

Vogelaar, R., Van Dijk, E., Prasastyoga, B., & Van Dijk, W. W. (2025). The appropriateness and experience of enthusiasm across contexts and culture. *Manuscript submitted for publication***.**

Abstract

Enthusiasm is a high-arousal, goal-directed emotion marked by energetic engagement and social expressiveness. Expressing enthusiasm may, however, not always be considered appropriate. This study investigated how the perceived appropriateness of expressing enthusiasm relates to the experience of enthusiasm across private, work, and public contexts in 51 societies[17]. Using data from a large-scale omnibus survey (N = 12,851), we examined whether perceived appropriateness is consistently associated with experienced enthusiasm and whether this relationship differs by context. Results showed that perceived appropriateness was positively associated with experienced enthusiasm in all three studied contexts, with the strongest link found in public settings and the weakest in private settings. Interestingly, perceived appropriateness ratings were highest in work contexts, whereas enthusiasm was experienced most strongly in private contexts. Further analyses indicated that perceived appropriateness partially accounted for context-related differences in enthusiasm, although this indirect pathway was not observed in all context comparisons. Cross-cultural analyses further suggested that cultural values might shape these dynamics in distinct ways. Society levels of individualism-collectivism and power distance were unrelated to perceived appropriateness ratings but significantly associated with experienced enthusiasm. Specifically, societies with higher levels of individualism were linked to lower enthusiasm in private and work contexts, while societies with larger power distance were associated with greater enthusiasm across all three contexts. Overall, these findings indicate that the experience of enthusiasm is shaped in part by social norms, situational context, and broader cultural values.

[17] The term "societies" rather than "countries or nations" is used to acknowledge that the dataset includes both countries and regions, such as Hong Kong, that do not constitute independent nation-states.

Introduction

People are social and emotional beings. Although emotions are personal experiences, they are also shaped by the social contexts in which they occur (Boiger & Mesquita, 2012; Parkinson et al., 2005). In the current study, we focus on enthusiasm, a positive emotion that recent research has identified as a goal-directed emotion marked by energetic engagement and social expressiveness (Vogelaar et al., 2025a). Individuals experiencing enthusiasm often feel a strong urge to share and express their feelings (Vogelaar et al., 2025b). This may enable individuals to engage actively with their social environment and pursue meaningful goals. However, they may primarily do so when the social environment is receptive to expressing these feelings. Individuals who consider expressing enthusiasm must be attuned to the extent to which their emotional display is appreciated or deemed appropriate by others.

While people generally seek to enhance positive emotions, research shows that they may also regulate these emotions downward to align with prevailing social norms (English et al., 2017). For instance, feelings of triumph may be rewarding, yet individuals often downplay them in the presence of others to avoid appearing boastful (Friedman & Miller-Herringer, 1991). Experimental evidence suggests that suppressing emotional expression can alter the subjective experience of emotion. Gross and Levenson (1997) found that suppressing positive emotions diminishes the emotional experience itself. A systematic review and meta-analysis further confirmed this pattern, showing that expressive suppression is associated with reduced positive affect, particularly when individuals inhibit the expression of positive emotions (Fernandes & Tone, 2021).

With social sharing being an essential feature of enthusiasm (Vogelaar et al., 2025a), this raises the question how perceived appropriateness of expressing enthusiasm relates to the experience of enthusiasm. One important way in which emotion regulation is socially guided is through socially shared norms that define the appropriateness of emotional expression across cultural and situational contexts (Ekman &Friesen, 1969). These norms guide how individuals manage their emotional displays so that they align with cultural expectations and social dynamics. While emotion regulation can be intentionally and internally motivated, regulation guided by social norms reflects external expectations

that shape emotional expressions in interpersonal settings. Socially shared norms help individuals adjust their emotions to meet the demands of the social environment, whether by amplifying, downplaying, or suppressing them. Importantly, they apply not only to negative emotions but also to positive emotions, which are often expressed selectively depending on context and audience (Matsumoto, 1990; Tran et al., 2025).

Situational context plays a key role in shaping perceptions of appropriateness. Public settings typically demand stricter adherence to socially shared norms than private ones (Manokara et al., 2023). People tend to feel more emotionally uninhibited in private settings compared to public ones (Minam & Tanaka, 1995). However, some public contexts may encourage rather than restrain emotional expressiveness. For example, McRae et al. (2011) found that participants reported less emotional suppression at the Burning Man festival, a social event characterized by openness and expressive freedom.

In addition to situational variation, the ways in which emotions are expressed —or concealed—vary significantly across cultures (Ford & Mauss, 2015; Kalokerinos et al., 2017; Matsumoto et al., 2008). Collectivistic cultures often regulate emotions to preserve social harmony, either by suppressing or amplifying them, whereas individualistic cultures tend to encourage expressions that reflect internal states, emphasizing autonomy and self-expression (Li et al., 2025; Matsumoto, 1990; Ramzan, 2017).

The present study examined how the perceived appropriateness of expressing enthusiasm is associated with the subjective experience of the emotion. We define perceived appropriateness as individuals' judgments about whether it is socially acceptable to express enthusiasm in a given context. Based on the notion that individuals may feel less inhibited and therefore more open to experiencing enthusiasm when emotional expression aligns with social norms (Fernandes & Tone, 2021; Gross & Levenson, 1997; McRae et al., 2011), we propose that individuals will experience greater enthusiasm in contexts where its expression is perceived more appropriate.

Examining the relationship between the experience of enthusiasm and perceived appropriateness is relevant for several reasons. Positive emotions, in general, are strongly linked to individual well-being (Fredrickson, 2009). In organizational contexts, shared expectations to express positive emotions, have been associated with increased employee retention over time (Nguyen et al., 2024). Moreover, the expression and amplification of

positive emotions can facilitate goal attainment in workplace interactions (Wong et al., 2013). Among positive emotions, enthusiasm may be especially impactful due to its energizing and socially contagious qualities. It not only motivates individuals to pursue meaningful goals but also exerts important interpersonal effects (Vogelaar et al., 2025a). For example, teacher enthusiasm has been shown to enhance students' interest (Keller et al., 2014), intrinsic motivation, (Moè, 2016; Patrick et al., 2000), vitality (Patrick et al., 2000), and recall (Moè, 2016). More recently, Valentín et al. (2022) demonstrated that videos of enthusiastic teachers increased elementary school children's intrinsic motivation and academic achievement. Similarly, in organizational settings, the enthusiasm of a sales training instructor was found to boost employees' intentions to implement positive change (Arndt & Wang, 2014). These findings highlight that enthusiasm benefits not only the individual but also functions as a social catalyst.

The present research

Experienced enthusiasm and perceived appropriateness across three contexts and 51 societies

The current study investigated how social context relates to the experience of enthusiasm and whether this relationship is associated with perceived appropriateness of expressing enthusiasm. Studying these conditions contribute to both psychological theory and practical applications across educational, organizational, and interpersonal domains. To address this, the present research draws on data from a large-scale and world-wide survey conducted across 51 societies. In line with prior research suggesting that socially shared norms are less restrictive in private than public settings (Manokara et al., 2023), we expected that enthusiasm is perceived as more appropriate in private contexts and that higher perceived appropriateness is associated with stronger experiences of enthusiasm. We tested these expectations across three contexts (private, work, and public) using cross-cultural survey data from 51 societies. Based on our preregistration[18], we formulated the following hypotheses:

[18] https://osf.io/6cj9w

H1. Experienced enthusiasm is higher in private contexts than in public and work contexts. We additionally explored differences between the work and public contexts.
H2. Perceived appropriateness of expressing enthusiasm is higher in private contexts than in public and work contexts. We additionally explored differences between the work and public contexts.
H3. Experienced enthusiasm is positively associated with perceived appropriateness of expressing enthusiasm. We further conducted an exploratory analysis examining whether this association is moderated by context, using an interaction model including perceived appropriateness, context, and their interaction.
H4. There is an indirect relationship between context and experienced enthusiasm through perceived appropriateness of expressing enthusiasm.

Finally, we explored cross-cultural differences in both experienced enthusiasm and perceived appropriateness. For this purpose, we also related our analyses to two indicators of cultural differences between the 51 societies, the society-level indicators of individualism-collectivism, and power distance, as identified in previous research by Hofstede (2011). The individualism-collectivism dimension classifies societies on the extent to which people perceive themselves as independent from, or interdependent with, others in their society. Power distance is the extent to which unequal distributions of power are accepted and expected. We explored a relation between these two dimensions because we envisaged that these might impact the extent to which individuals would be influenced by norms set by others and society. Perceived appropriateness of enthusiasm might be stronger in societies with higher scores of collectivism (e.g., because of a greater concern for the collective) and power distance (e.g., because of a greater willingness to defer to the rules set by society). However, in the absence of prior empirical research on this matter, we refrained from formulating hypotheses, and preregistered these analyses as being explorative.

Method

Participants

Participants were recruited through the Toluna Panel, using both its proprietary panel and affiliated third-party providers. The target was 12,750 participants from 51 societies (~250 per society), stratified by age and gender. Recruitment took place between December 2020 and February 2021. In total, 16,659 participants were enrolled, exceeding the initial target due to the panel provider's oversampling to compensate for anticipated exclusions.

Exclusion criteria were: (i) failing a general attention check (e.g., "This is a quality check to see if you are reading this survey carefully. Please do not answer this question."), and (ii) incorrectly answering two comprehension questions from an unrelated concurrent study (Romano et al., 2022). After these exclusions, data from 12,863 participants remained. A second exclusion removed cases with missing responses on any enthusiasm items, yielding a final dataset of 12,851 participants across 51 societies. Of these, data from 253 respondents from South Africa were excluded from exploratory analyses on individualism-collectivism and power distance due to incomplete Hofstede scores, resulting in an analytic sample of 12,598 participants. Descriptive statistics for all societies are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Sample Desciptives per Society

Country	*N*	*% Female*	**Age** *M (SD)*	**Exp. Enth. Priv.** *M (SD)*	**Exp. Enth. Work** *M (SD)*	**Exp. Enth. Publ.** *M (SD)*	**App. Enth. Priv.** *M (SD)*	**App. Enth. Work** *M (SD)*	**App. Enth. Publ.** *M (SD)*
Algeria	198	29.29%	36.77 (10.78)	5.36 (1.11)	5.82 (1.47)	5.23 (1.38)	5.33 (1.20)	5.48 (1.48)	5.22 (1.33)
Argentina	230	55.22%	37.22 (12.57)	5.49 (1.42)	5.00 (1.57)	4.99 (1.68)	3.98 (2.00)	4.98 (1.67)	5.13 (1.71)
Australia	254	53.94%	44.18 (12.74)	4.82 (1.53)	4.37 (1.70)	4.44 (1.64)	4.67 (1.71)	5.12 (1.40)	4.93 (1.50)
Austria	254	52.36%	39.39 (13.41)	4.24 (1.50)	3.71 (1.61)	3.59 (1.50)	4.39 (1.47)	4.35 (1.43)	4.09 (1.38)
Belgium	232	52.16%	41.25 (13.19)	4.77 (1.40)	4.26 (1.60)	4.38 (1.57)	4.84 (1.62)	4.93 (1.46)	4.97 (1.43)
Brazil	252	51.19%	37.67 (12.29)	4.75 (1.78)	4.38 (1.92)	4.60 (1.81)	5.03 (1.72)	5.17 (1.54)	5.25 (1.56)
Bulgaria	251	43.03%	38.73 (11.98)	4.95 (1.55)	4.61 (1.68)	4.43 (1.70)	4.89 (1.78)	4.45 (1.72)	4.75 (1.66)
Canada	277	53.79%	44.68 (12.74)	4.66 (1.49)	4.11 (1.76)	4.23 (1.66)	4.64 (1.72)	5.14 (1.27)	5.10 (1.34)
Chile	234	62.82%	34.49 (12.09)	5.44 (1.45)	4.91 (1.64)	4.96 (1.65)	4.18 (1.94)	4.91 (1.60)	4.71 (1.66)
China	244	47.54%	37.77 (11.36)	4.92 (1.31)	4.83 (1.39)	4.68 (1.48)	5.19 (1.10)	5.02 (1.24)	4.80 (1.35)
Colombia	231	50.22%	38.73 (12.80)	5.71 (1.34)	5.45 (1.46)	5.28 (1.49)	4.09 (2.11)	5.32 (1.55)	5.32 (1.64)
Czech Republic	257	50.97%	39.41 (13.68)	4.73 (1.54)	4.16 (1.59)	4.04 (1.55)	4.21 (1.65)	4.37 (1.37)	4.10 (1.50)
Egypt	246	41.46%	35.03 (11.05)	4.80 (1.79)	4.78 (1.83)	4.02 (1.86)	4.97 (1.76)	4.50 (1.82)	3.76 (2.01)
Finland	276	51.81%	41.69 (12.75)	4.58 (1.50)	3.80 (1.74)	3.68 (1.49)	5.15 (1.43)	4.86 (1.47)	4.38 (1.57)
France	234	52.56%	43.66 (11.91)	4.82 (1.45)	4.40 (1.65)	4.46 (1.53)	4.65 (1.67)	4.63 (1.59)	4.61 (1.54)
Germany	232	51.95%	45.54 (12.37)	4.10 (1.48)	3.70 (1.62)	3.53 (1.53)	4.63 (1.29)	4.42 (1.40)	4.32 (1.39)
Greece	229	54.15%	38.42 (12.19)	4.41 (1.50)	4.00 (1.61)	4.18 (1.55)	4.17 (1.67)	4.50 (1.43)	4.65 (1.54)
Hong Kong	252	50.00%	38.69 (12.49)	4.54 (1.25)	4.43 (1.37)	4.12 (1.30)	4.52 (1.16)	4.69 (1.17)	4.25 (1.25)
Hungary	259	52.12%	40.83 (14.35)	4.78 (1.50)	4.50 (1.68)	4.01 (1.74)	4.63 (1.76)	4.23 (1.73)	4.42 (1.69)
India	225	50.22%	37.65 (12.44)	5.20 (1.47)	5.21 (1.43)	4.84 (1.52)	5.01 (1.52)	5.19 (1.48)	5.00 (1.46)
Indonesia	231	48.05%	37.90 (11.92)	5.05 (1.30)	5.06 (1.35)	4.21 (1.55)	4.92 (1.39)	4.97 (1.31)	4.32 (1.47)
Ireland	266	57.14%	40.67 (11.78)	4.90 (1.37)	4.23 (1.65)	4.29 (1.57)	4.20 (1.78)	4.93 (1.39)	4.67 (1.51)
Israel	254	47.04%	40.07 (13.14)	4.43 (1.45)	3.85 (1.60)	4.00 (1.55)	3.89 (1.92)	4.80 (1.43)	5.00 (1.49)
Italy	258	50.78%	40.91 (13.01)	4.76 (1.47)	4.30 (1.73)	4.36 (1.57)	5.14 (1.46)	4.87 (1.51)	4.95 (1.52)
Japan	225	39.11%	43.00 (11.23)	4.01 (1.40)	3.88 (1.51)	3.08 (1.35)	4.07 (1.23)	4.38 (1.30)	3.55 (1.35)
Kenya	248	58.47%	31.43 (9.33)	5.29 (1.78)	5.11 (1.64)	4.57 (1.79)	4.27 (2.05)	5.24 (1.71)	4.76 (1.80)
Malaysia	258	45.35%	37.28 (12.00)	4.93 (1.44)	4.70 (1.56)	4.28 (1.59)	4.45 (1.60)	5.03 (1.44)	4.43 (1.53)
Mexico	250	50.80%	37.57 (12.03)	5.75 (1.37)	5.54 (1.44)	5.42 (1.48)	4.12 (2.03)	5.59 (1.43)	5.58 (1.52)
Morocco	253	35.18%	30.77 (9.41)	4.95 (1.72)	4.79 (1.88)	4.43 (1.96)	4.70 (1.75)	4.72 (1.91)	3.92 (1.97)
Netherlands	239	53.56%	42.50 (12.54)	5.00 (1.30)	4.44 (1.43)	4.50 (1.32)	4.94 (1.60)	5.04 (1.31)	4.93 (1.36)
Nigeria	225	71.56%	30.20 (10.56)	5.43 (1.65)	5.20 (1.73)	4.29 (1.90)	4.20 (2.08)	5.22 (1.70)	4.62 (1.82)
Peru	267	52.43%	34.09 (11.14)	5.64 (1.47)	5.38 (1.55)	5.26 (1.61)	3.82 (2.01)	5.02 (1.72)	4.94 (1.75)
Poland	252	48.81%	38.45 (13.08)	4.73 (1.33)	4.26 (1.46)	4.32 (1.44)	4.29 (1.38)	3.99 (1.41)	3.92 (1.43)
Portugal	270	51.48%	40.25 (13.21)	4.89 (1.31)	4.39 (1.63)	4.59 (1.40)	4.55 (1.78)	4.89 (1.47)	4.98 (1.47)
Romania	258	49.22%	39.41 (13.54)	5.16 (1.59)	4.53 (1.66)	4.15 (1.85)	4.48 (1.80)	4.30 (1.73)	4.34 (1.83)
Russia	237	51.05%	40.77 (12.46)	4.36 (1.57)	4.65 (1.49)	3.98 (1.53)	4.80 (1.48)	5.10 (1.54)	4.18 (1.55)
Saudi Arabia	236	47.88%	34.03 (9.78)	4.87 (1.52)	4.69 (1.69)	4.39 (1.68)	4.83 (1.52)	4.77 (1.59)	4.15 (1.75)
Singapore	265	47.55%	39.78 (12.55)	4.62 (1.38)	4.57 (1.47)	4.40 (1.51)	4.88 (1.26)	5.01 (1.24)	4.72 (1.38)
South Africa	253	52.57%	37.48 (12.89)	5.20 (1.54)	4.78 (1.67)	4.80 (1.55)	4.35 (1.98)	5.23 (1.50)	5.15 (1.57)
South Korea	260	45.00%	40.59 (11.87)	4.25 (1.28)	3.85 (1.37)	3.63 (1.44)	4.57 (1.29)	4.23 (1.30)	3.99 (1.27)
Spain	253	46.25%	40.45 (12.27)	4.94 (1.41)	4.45 (1.50)	4.59 (1.41)	4.47 (1.72)	4.86 (1.38)	5.02 (1.45)
Sweden	241	50.21%	43.59 (13.29)	4.32 (1.60)	3.85 (1.77)	3.79 (1.56)	4.58 (1.56)	4.82 (1.37)	4.32 (1.51)
Switzerland	282	53.55%	41.60 (13.01)	4.62 (1.46)	4.15 (1.50)	3.84 (1.55)	4.71 (1.52)	4.48 (1.48)	4.13 (1.51)
Taiwan	290	46.55%	36.88 (12.08)	4.56 (1.38)	4.41 (1.50)	4.24 (1.45)	4.84 (1.31)	5.14 (1.22)	4.78 (1.29)
Thailand	311	50.16%	39.84 (13.04)	5.57 (1.30)	5.68 (1.26)	4.79 (1.40)	5.20 (1.35)	5.56 (1.36)	4.75 (1.40)
Tunisia	298	39.60%	40.55 (11.92)	5.20 (1.27)	5.51 (1.32)	5.09 (1.31)	4.99 (1.37)	5.51 (1.27)	5.10 (1.34)
Turkey	270	52.96%	35.33 (11.43)	4.64 (1.60)	4.33 (1.68)	4.46 (1.62)	3.82 (1.73)	4.03 (1.68)	3.98 (1.63)
United Arab Emirates	270	46.67%	34.24 (10.30)	4.95 (1.46)	4.63 (1.50)	4.57 (1.54)	4.77 (1.65)	4.76 (1.60)	4.50 (1.65)
United Kingdom	262	53.82%	43.02 (13.32)	4.81 (1.50)	4.18 (1.73)	4.32 (1.63)	4.63 (1.49)	4.88 (1.38)	4.73 (1.44)
United States of America	229	51.53%	44.00 (14.07)	5.18 (1.76)	4.66 (2.05)	4.94 (1.86)	4.86 (1.94)	5.16 (1.62)	5.18 (1.73)
Vietnam	273	51.65%	33.34 (9.62)	5.43 (1.29)	5.42 (1.27)	4.75 (1.51)	4.85 (1.48)	5.12 (1.36)	4.82 (1.44)

Exp. Enth. Priv. = Experience Enthusiasm Private

Exp. Enth. Work = Experience Enthusiasm Work

Exp. Enth. Publ. = Experience Enthusiasm Public

App. Enth. Priv. = Appropriateness Enthusiasm Private

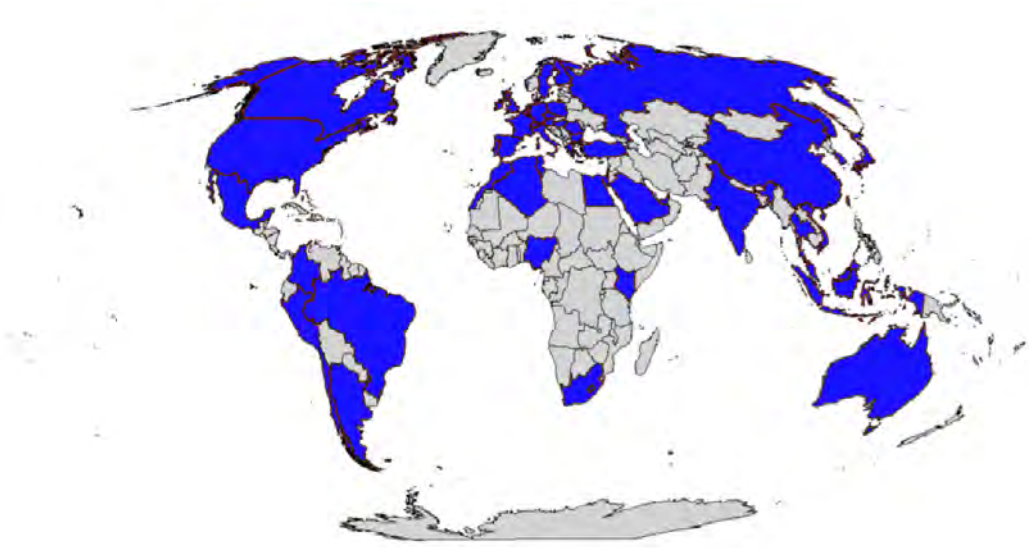
App. Enth. Work = Appropriateness Enthusiasm Work

App. Enth. Publ. = Appropriateness Enthusiasm Public

Data were collected in the following societies: Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, Czech Republic, Egypt, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hong Kong, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Malaysia, Mexico, Morocco, Netherlands, Nigeria, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, United States, and Vietnam.

Figure 1

World Map Displaying Societies Included in the Study in Blue



Ethics and preregistration

The collection of the data for the current study was embedded in a broader survey study that also collected other survey data. This omnibus study was reviewed and approved by the Psychology Research Ethics Committee of Leiden University (application number: 2020-02-03-A.Romano-V1-2068). A detailed description of this study's aims and analytic

strategy can be found in the preregistration, available at https://osf.io/v7qc2. Although the preregistration initially stated that data from participants who failed two comprehension checks embedded in an unrelated task would be retained, we opted to exclude these data before analysis to ensure overall data quality. We also excluded data from participants with incomplete responses on key variables relevant to this study (e.g., missing values on any of the enthusiasm items). It should be noted that the preregistration regarding the current study's analysis and hypotheses was completed after data collection but prior to data analysis.

Procedure

Data were collected online. The questionnaire was developed in English and then translated into the local languages of participants by experts and professional translators to ensure conceptual equivalence across languages. After providing informed consent, participants first completed a behavioral task unrelated to the present study (Romano et al., 2022). They then answered items central to this study, including questions about their experience of enthusiasm and their perceptions of the appropriateness of expressing enthusiasm across three different social contexts. Finally, participants completed additional measures not analyzed here and provided demographic information.

Measures

Experienced enthusiasm

Participants reported the extent to which they experienced enthusiasm in three social contexts using the following items: "I often experience enthusiasm in my private life," "I often experience enthusiasm during my work," and "I often experience enthusiasm in public (for example, in a restaurant or a park)." Enthusiasm was defined in the survey as "a feeling of energetic interest in a particular subject or activity and an eagerness to be involved in it." Responses were given on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*totally disagree*) to 7 (*totally agree*).

Perceived appropriateness of expressing enthusiasm

To assess perceived appropriateness of expressing enthusiasm, participants rated how appropriate they believed it was to express enthusiasm in the same three contexts. The items were: "For people in my country, it is appropriate to express enthusiasm in private," "… at work," and "… in public (for example, in a restaurant or a park)." These items were also rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*totally disagree*) to 7 (*totally agree*).

Individualism-Collectivism and power distance

Data on individualism-collectivism and power distance for the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Algeria, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, and Kenya were obtained from Hofstede Insights' Country Comparison Tool[19]. For all other societies, scores were drawn from the Geert Hofstede Dimension Data Matrix[20]. Higher values indicate stronger individualistic tendencies, whereas lower values reflect a more collectivistic orientation. All scores were last verified on September 19, 2022.

Results

Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1 (H1) predicted that experienced enthusiasm would differ across contexts (private, work, public). Mauchly's test indicated a violation of the sphericity assumption ($W = .982$, $p < .001$); therefore, the Greenhouse–Geisser correction was applied. A repeated measures ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of context, $F(1.97, 25{,}247) = 749.48$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .055$. Planned pairwise comparisons showed that experienced enthusiasm was highest in the private context ($M = 4.89$, $SD = 1.52$), significantly higher than in both the work context ($M = 4.58$, $SD = 1.68$; $t(12{,}850) = 25.05$, $p < .001$), and the public context ($M = 4.39$, $SD = 1.64$; $t(12{,}850) = 38.50$, $p < .001$). This supports H1, which predicted that experienced enthusiasm would be strongest in private settings. Although not hypothesized, experienced enthusiasm was also significantly higher in the work than in the public context, $t(12{,}850) = 13.97$, $p < .001$.

[19] Hofstede Insights Country comparison tool: https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison
[20] Dimension data matrix [dataset]. https://geerthofstede.com/research-and-vsm/dimension-data-matrix

Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2 (H2) proposed that perceived appropriateness of expressing enthusiasm would be higher in private contexts compared to work and public contexts. Mauchly's test again indicated a violation of sphericity, $W = .867$, $p < .001$, so the Greenhouse–Geisser correction was applied. A repeated measures ANOVA revealed a significant effect of context, $F(1.77, 22{,}678) = 176.48$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .014$. Contrary to H2, perceived appropriateness was rated highest in the work context ($M = 4.86$, $SD = 1.53$), significantly higher than in both private contexts ($M = 4.60$, $SD = 1.68$; $t(12{,}850) = 16.50$, $p < .001$) and public contexts ($M = 4.63$, $SD = 1.60$; $t(12{,}850) = 18.80$, $p < .001$). The difference between private and public contexts was not statistically significant, $t(12{,}850) = 1.82$, $p = .069$.

Interestingly, while Hypothesis 2 predicted higher perceived appropriateness in private contexts, our results revealed a different pattern, with work contexts rated as more appropriate. This discrepancy likely reflects differing social functions and expectations across settings, an issue we will return to in the discussion.

Hypothesis 3

Hypothesis 3 (H3) predicted a positive association between perceived appropriateness and experienced enthusiasm. Three linear regressions confirmed significant positive associations in all three contexts: private, $\beta = .23$, $t(12{,}851) = 26.39$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .051$; work, $\beta = .38$, $t(12{,}851) = 46.33$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .143$; and in the public context, $\beta = .47$, $t(12{,}851) = 59.48$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .216$. These results supported H3, showing that perceived appropriateness consistently predicts stronger experienced enthusiasm.

As preregistered, we also tested whether this relationship varied by context. A univariate general linear model (GLM) with context, perceived appropriateness, and their interaction as predictors confirmed a main effect of perceived appropriateness, $F(1, 38{,}547) = 5886.55$, $p < .001$, as well as a significant interaction, $F(2, 38{,}547) = 313.21$, $p < .001$. The strength of the association differed by contexts: in the private context, $\beta = .20$, 95% CI [.19, .22], $t(25{,}698) = 26.63$, $p < .001$; in the work context, $\beta = .41$, 95% CI [.39, .43], $t(25{,}698) = 47.81$, $p < .001$; and in the public context, $\beta = .47$, 95% CI [.46, .49], $t(38{,}547) = 57.79$, $p < .001$. Pairwise comparisons confirmed that the slope in public was significantly

stronger than in private, $\Delta\beta = .27$, $t(38{,}547) = 23.81$, $p < .001$, and stronger than in work, $\Delta\beta = .06$, $t(38{,}547) = 5.23$, $p < .001$. The slope in work was likewise significantly stronger than in private, $\Delta\beta = .06$, 95% CI [.04, .09], $t(25{,}698) = 5.20$, $p < .001$. Taken together, these results indicate that the appropriateness–enthusiasm association was weakest in private, moderate in work, and strongest in public settings.

Hypothesis 4

To test Hypothesis 4 (H4), we examined whether the relationship between context and experienced enthusiasm could be accounted for by an indirect pathway through perceived appropriateness. Three analyses were conducted using Hayes's (2022) PROCESS macro (Model 4), with 5,000 bootstrap resamples. In each analysis, context (coded as 0 and 1) served as the independent variable, perceived appropriateness of enthusiasm was the indirect pathway, and experienced enthusiasm as the dependent variable.

In the private-work comparison, a significant indirect pathway was found, $ab = 0.079$, $SE = 0.006$, 95% CI [0.067, 0.092]. The total effect was significant, $b = –0.308$, $SE = 0.020$, $p < .001$, as was the direct effect, $b = –0.387$, $SE = 0.019$, $p < .001$. These results indicate that the association between context and experienced enthusiasm in the private-work comparison was partially carried through an indirect pathway via perceived appropriateness. For private versus public, the indirect effect was nonsignificant, $ab = 0.011$, $SE = 0.007$, 95% CI [–0.003, 0.024], although the total effect was significant, $b = –0.501$, $SE = 0.020$, $p < .001$, and the direct effect, $b = –0.512$, $SE = 0.019$, $p < .001$, were significant. This non-significant result indicates that there was no evidence of an indirect pathway through perceived appropriateness for the private–public comparison. In the work-public comparison, a significant negative indirect effect emerged, $ab = –0.104$, $SE = 0.009$, 95% CI [–0.123, –0.086], along with a significant total effect, $b = –0.193$, $SE = 0.021$, $p < .001$, and direct effect, $b = –0.089$, $SE = 0.019$, $p < .001$, indicating that the difference between work and public contexts was partially carried through an indirect pathway via perceived appropriateness.

Overall, these results partially support H4: perceived appropriateness accounted for differences in experienced enthusiasm in two of the three comparisons. Notably, the negative indirect pathway in the work–public comparison suggests that lower perceived

appropriateness in public settings contributes to reduced enthusiasm compared with work contexts. This pattern fits the regulatory function of perceived appropriateness: even though appropriateness positively predicts enthusiasm within each context, lower appropriateness in certain settings can suppress emotional engagement.

In the private versus work comparison, the positive indirect effect indicates that higher perceived appropriateness at work would be expected to increase enthusiasm in this context. Yet despite this pathway, overall enthusiasm remained higher in private settings, reflecting the stronger direct effect of context. Considered together with the context by appropriateness interaction reported above, the results suggest that perceived appropriateness has a stronger association with experienced enthusiasm in work settings, whereas in private settings enthusiasm is less contingent on appropriateness.

The indirect pathway was strongest in the work–public comparison, suggesting that appropriateness plays a more pronounced role in differentiating emotional expression in socially regulated settings than in private ones.

Cross-cultural differences in experienced enthusiasm and perceived appropriateness

To examine whether the expression of enthusiasm and beliefs about its appropriateness vary across cultures, and to justify including cultural variables (individualism-collectivism and power distance) in subsequent analyses, we first assessed the proportion of variance in key variables attributable to between-society differences. Intraclass correlation coefficients (ICCs) revealed that societal-level variance accounted for 7.1% of the variability in experienced enthusiasm in private contexts, 10.1% in work contexts, and 8.2% in public contexts. For perceived appropriateness, the corresponding values were 4.9%, 6.0%, and 7.6%, respectively. These results suggest that a meaningful proportion of variance in both experienced enthusiasm and perceived appropriateness is attributable to differences between societies.

Next, we explored how cultural values relate to these differences using society-level regressions with Hofstede's individualism-collectivism and power distance scores as predictors of experienced enthusiasm and perceived appropriateness across the three contexts. For experienced enthusiasm, several associations emerged. Higher society-levels of individualism predicted weaker experienced enthusiasm in private (b = –0.006,

SE = 0.002, *p* = .019) and work contexts (*b* = –0.012, *SE* = 0.003, *p* < .001) and showed a non-significant effect in public contexts (*b* = –0.006, *SE* = 0.003, *p* = .054). Conversely, higher society-levels of power distance were positively associated with experienced enthusiasm across all three contexts: private (*b* = 0.008, *SE* = 0.003, *p* = .004), work (*b* = 0.016, *SE* = 0.003, *p* < .001), and public (*b* = 0.009, *SE* = 0.003, *p* = .008). For perceived appropriateness, neither individualism-collectivism nor power distance showed significant associations in any context. Individualism-collectivism coefficients were: private (*b* = 0.002, *SE* = 0.002, *p* = .476), work (*b* = –0.003, *SE* = 0.002, *p* = .194), and public (*b* = 0.0002, *SE* = 0.003, *p* = .951). Power distance coefficients were: private (*b* = 0.003, *SE* = 0.003, *p* = .265), work (*b* = 0.004, *SE* = 0.003, *p* = .163), and public (*b* = –0.0004, *SE* = 0.003, *p* = .897).

Overall, these findings suggest that while perceived appropriateness of expressing enthusiasm showed limited variation across societies in relation to individualism-collectivism and power distance, the experience of enthusiasm itself was more strongly associated with these specific cultural dimensions.

Discussion

The present study examined how perceived appropriateness of expressing enthusiasm relates to the actual experience of this emotion across private, work, and public contexts in 51 societies. We found that perceived appropriateness was positively associated with experienced enthusiasm in all three contexts. However, the strength of this association varied, being strongest in public settings and weakest in private settings. Contrary to expectations, ratings of perceived appropriateness were highest in work contexts. Analyses further indicated that appropriateness partially explained differences in experienced enthusiasm between contexts, although this relationship was not consistent across all comparisons.

The weaker association between perceived appropriateness and experienced enthusiasm in private contexts suggests that individuals rely less on external social norms and perhaps more on their internal emotional states in these settings. Private environments,

often characterized by familiarity and psychological safety, may allow emotions to emerge spontaneously, regardless of social evaluation. This interpretation aligns with previous research showing that private contexts reduce the salience of normative concerns and promote authentic emotional expression (Kahn, 1990; Matsumoto et al., 2008).

In public contexts, perceived appropriateness judgments are more strongly linked to experienced enthusiasm, likely because expressing high-arousal positive emotions depends more on social acceptance in the presence of strangers or loosely connected others. Even when enthusiasm is considered appropriate in public, uncertainty about others' evaluations may lead individuals to inhibit its display, which in turn can dampen the experience of the emotion itself.

Work contexts present an intriguing contrast. Although work settings were rated as most appropriate for expressing enthusiasm, actual experiences of enthusiasm were weaker than in private contexts. This suggests that high perceived appropriateness at work may reflect prescriptive norms rather than genuine emotional engagement. In some organizational cultures, enthusiasm is considered a desirable display associated with professionalism, motivation, and teamwork. However, when employees feel compelled to express enthusiasm without genuinely experiencing it, this can create emotional dissonance, which has been linked to negative outcomes such as emotional exhaustion and reduced job satisfaction (Goldberg & Grandey, 2007; Taxer & Frenzel, 2018). Thus, promoting enthusiasm in the workplace may be beneficial, but pressuring employees into inauthentic displays can undermine well-being and effectiveness.

Cross-cultural analyses showed that individualism–collectivism and power distance were not significantly associated with perceived appropriateness. In the introduction we considered the possibility that collectivism, through a greater concern for the collective, and power distance, through a greater willingness to defer to societal rules, might be associated with stronger perceptions of appropriateness. Our analyses did not support this assumption, as cross-national differences in perceived appropriateness were limited. However, both dimensions were related to experienced enthusiasm. Higher society-levels of individualism predicted weaker experienced enthusiasm in private and work contexts, whereas higher levels of power distance were associated with stronger experienced enthusiasm across all contexts. These findings suggest that cultural value dimensions can

shape the experience of high-arousal positive emotions, though the underlying mechanisms remain unclear. Future research integrating insights from anthropology and cross-cultural psychology might be useful in exploring these relationships further.

Overall, these findings highlight that enthusiasm, as a high-arousal and socially expressive emotion, is particularly sensitive to the interplay of social norms, contextual constraints, and cultural values. The results extend existing research on positive emotions by demonstrating that the same emotion can be experienced differently depending on whether the social environment supports or constrains its expression, and that these effects vary systematically by context.

Limitations and future directions

Several limitations of the current study should be noted. First, we did not include a direct measure of expressed enthusiasm. Although we assessed perceived appropriateness and experienced enthusiasm, the lack of behavioral data limits our ability to link social norms directly to actual displays of enthusiasm. This limitation was due to space constraints in the omnibus survey from which our data were drawn.

It is also important to note that the present study specifically examined perceived appropriateness as one aspect of how enthusiasm is socially regulated. This focus aligns with the idea that display rules shape emotional expression (Ekman & Friesen, 1969; Matsumoto, 1990; Matsumoto et al., 2008) yet display rules can encompass more than general judgments of appropriateness. They may also specify how emotions may be displayed and with what intensity. For example, display rules may not only prescribe whether enthusiasm should be expressed, but also whether it should be shown through verbal excitement, through visible energy and gestures, or in a more modest form. Future research could therefore extend the current approach by mapping out more detailed display rules, for instance by explicitly asking participants how they believe enthusiasm should be expressed in different contexts.

Second, the simultaneous collection of our key measures limits causal inferences and thus cautions against overinterpretation of the PROCESS-based indirect effect analyses. While appropriateness judgments were associated with experienced enthusiasm, it is also possible that individuals experiencing greater enthusiasm perceive its expression as more

appropriate. Experimental studies systematically varying appropriateness norms would help clarify the direction of this relationship.

Third, the main measures relied on self-report, which may be influenced by social desirability or memory biases. Fourth, although the sample was large and culturally diverse, society-level measures of cultural dimensions may have underestimated within-society variability, limiting the ability to detect finer-grained cultural effects. Fifth, a potential methodological explanation for the lack of significant associations between cultural dimensions and perceived appropriateness is restricted variance in perceived appropriateness ratings. Whereas experienced enthusiasm showed substantial cross-societal variation (ICCs ranging from 7.1% to 10.1%), between-society variance in perceived appropriateness was smaller (ICCs between 4.9% and 7.6%), which could weaken statistical associations.

Future research could address these limitations in several ways. Including measures of expressed enthusiasm alongside perceived appropriateness and experienced enthusiasm would allow for a more comprehensive understanding of how social norms are associated with felt and displayed emotions. Examining the role of relationship closeness more explicitly may also be informative, as prior research suggests that the nature of the relationship between expresser and perceiver can shape appropriateness judgments more strongly than the physical setting alone (Manokara et al., 2023). Investigating how interpersonal factors interact with broader cultural and contextual influences could provide a fuller understanding of the regulation of enthusiasm. Finally, longitudinal or daily diary studies could capture how perceived appropriateness, expression, and experience of enthusiasm fluctuate in real time across different social encounters.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that perceived appropriateness is consistently associated with experienced enthusiasm, although the strength and nature of this relationship vary across social contexts. Private, work, and public settings differ not only in average levels of experienced enthusiasm and perceived appropriateness but also in how strongly these constructs are linked, highlighting the nuanced ways social norms, context, and culture interact to shape emotional experience. Moreover, cross-cultural analyses revealed that

while perceived appropriateness showed little variation across societies, experienced enthusiasm was influenced by individualism and power distance, emphasizing the role of cultural values in shaping emotional experience.