



Coping with negative emotions: Interpersonal effects in organizational settings

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How to cite: Hwang, T. J., Sy, T., & Choi, J. N. (2025). Coping with negative emotions: Interpersonal effects in organizational settings. *Social Behavior and Personality: An international journal*, 53(5), e13885

Drawing on a social functional account of emotions, we explored how different coping approaches (i.e., suppressing, bursting, and sharing) provide information that coworkers use to form interpersonal perceptions (i.e., perceived warmth and competence), and whether these perceptions, in turn, affect coworkers' behavior toward the target employees (i.e., helping or harming). Our survey data from 139 coworker dyads revealed that different coping approaches had distinct effects on perceptions. Coworkers perceived employees who suppressed negative feelings as warm, those who burst with negative emotions as less competent, and those who shared negative emotional experiences as both warm and competent. Coworkers were more helpful and less inclined to harm employees they perceived as warm and competent. These findings extend the literature on the interpersonal outcomes of coping.

Keywords

negative emotion, coping, suppressing, bursting, sharing, interpersonal behavior

Article Highlights

- Employees' coping strategies for negative emotions (suppressing, bursting, and sharing) influenced their coworkers' perceptions and behaviors.
- Coworkers viewed employees who suppressed their negative feelings as more warm, those who burst with emotions as less competent, and those who shared their emotions as both more warm and more competent.
- Coworkers were more helpful to employees they perceived as warm and less harmful to those they perceived as competent.

Since employees in most workplaces must manage their stress in the presence of others, including colleagues, it is crucial to understand how these colleagues perceive and react to the coping efforts of distressed employees. In a meta-analysis of studies on the interpersonal outcomes of suppressing and expressing emotions, Chervonsky and Hunt (2017) found that suppressing emotions, regardless of their valence, generally leads to negative interpersonal outcomes, such as poor social support and low social satisfaction. However, Chervonsky and Hunt's meta-analysis was not specific to the work context, and emotion regulation may have different interpersonal effects in the workplace. In organizational contexts, scholars have theorized and found that the expression of negative emotions can sometimes result in positive social outcomes, such as drawing support from others and helping organizations identify and fix issues (Rimé et al., 2020).

In this study, we examined how coworkers reacted to three different responses to negative emotional experiences:

suppressing, bursting, and sharing. We drew on the emotions as social information (EASI) model (Van Kleef, 2009), which is rooted in a social functional approach to emotions (Frijda & Mesquita, 1994; Keltner & Haidt, 1999), to explain how the suppression and expression of negative emotions can lead to both positive and negative social outcomes. In addition, we used the social psychological framework of interpersonal appraisals (Fiske et al., 2007) to elaborate on the connection between distressed employees' coping efforts and their coworkers' responses.

We aimed to make two contributions to the literature on the interpersonal outcomes of emotional coping efforts. First, we integrated theoretical frameworks regarding the social functions of emotions (Van Kleef, 2009) and social perception (Fiske et al., 2007) to better understand how employees' different ways of coping with their emotions influence coworker perceptions and behaviors. We demonstrated how these two frameworks can complement each other and coherently explain why emotional suppression and expression can have varying effects on interpersonal relationships.

Second, while scholars have typically compared two types of responses to emotional experiences—suppression and expression (Cameron & Overall, 2018; Chervonsky & Hunt, 2017)—we further differentiated between two forms of emotional expression: bursting and sharing. According to the EASI model (Van Kleef, 2009), employees' *emotional expressions* serve to convey information about the employees (e.g., indicating they are emotionally distressed), which subsequently shapes coworkers' perceptions of their warmth and competence (Fiske et al., 2007). These perceptions, in turn, influence how coworkers respond to the employees, such as by engaging in helping or harming behaviors.

Coping Responses: Suppressing, Bursting, and Sharing

Suppressing

Distressed employees may *suppress* their emotional expressions for both self-serving and prosocial reasons. They might restrain their emotions to maintain a positive impression in the workplace, as suppressing negative emotions is often viewed as an implicit norm or even a formal job requirement (Troth et al., 2018). Consequently, expressing negative emotions can adversely affect their performance evaluations. Furthermore, employees may be motivated to suppress their feelings to avoid disrupting their team's daily operations and performance. Since negative emotions are often contagious in the workplace (Barsade et al., 2018; Sy & Choi, 2013), expressing them may distress others and distract them from completing their tasks (Sy et al., 2005).

Hypothesis 1: Negative emotional experience will be positively related to emotional suppressing.

Bursting

Although research on the cathartic effects of emotional bursting is limited, existing studies have suggested that distressed employees might *burst* with negative emotions because they believe such expressions can temporarily alleviate their stress levels, even at the risk of impacting others' psychological well-being (Geddes & Callister, 2007; Keltner et al., 2019; Zhan et al., 2020). Bursting can occur when distressed employees are unable to effectively regulate their emotions (Brown et al., 2005). In response to negative emotional experiences, such as anger or sadness, employees might yell or cry, respectively.

Hypothesis 2: Negative emotional experience will be positively related to emotional bursting.

Sharing

Distressed individuals may try to *share* their feelings with others, particularly those who have experienced similar stressful situations. Sharing their feelings and experiences can help them gain emotional support (e.g., receiving sympathy) and instrumental support (e.g., receiving practical advice for resolving issues), both of which may help mitigate their stress levels (Cameron & Overall, 2018).

For example, nurses in emergency units and rescuers in train crash accidents, both of whom work in highly stressful environments, tend to share their emotional experiences with their colleagues (Rimé, 2009). Coworkers who have experienced similar events can offer sympathy and provide practical advice in times of hardship (Halbesleben &

Wheeler, 2015); these acts facilitate further emotional sharing.

Hypothesis 3: Negative emotional experience will be positively related to emotional sharing.

Interpersonal Effects of Coping Responses

A social functional approach to emotion indicates that emotion can also influence interpersonal interactions (Frijda & Mesquita, 1994; Keltner & Haidt, 1999). Specifically, the EASI model (Van Kleef, 2009) specifies that employees' emotional expressions serve the function of conveying information, such as emotional state, attitude, and intentions, which subsequently shapes coworkers' perceptions of the employees (Fiske et al., 2007). According to Van Kleef (2009), individuals largely respond to others' emotional expression in two ways: affective reaction and cognitive deliberation. First, receivers can emotionally react to senders' emotional display because emotions can be contagious (Barsade et al., 2018; Sy & Choi, 2013) and senders' emotional display can signal their social intentions (e.g., friendly or hostile; Sy et al., 2005). Second, receivers can cognitively infer the underlying motivations and situations of senders on the basis of their emotional display.

The affective reaction and cognitive deliberation processes shape receivers' judgments of senders along two dimensions: warmth and competence. These are the core dimensions of person perception (Cuddy et al., 2011; Fiske et al., 2007). *Warmth* encompasses attributes such as sociability, likability, and helpfulness, and individuals perceive others who appear beneficial and unthreatening as warm. *Competence* includes attributes such as intelligence and determination, with individuals considering those who achieve desirable goals to be competent (Fiske et al., 2007). Perceptions of warmth and competence determine how individuals interact with others. For example, based on judgments of whether another person has good or ill intent (i.e., evaluation of warmth), individuals decide whether to approach or avoid them. In work settings, perceptions of warmth and competence influence several key outcomes, such as employee evaluations and resource allocation (Cuddy et al., 2011).

Suppressing and Interpersonal Perceptions

When distressed employees effectively suppress their emotions, their coworkers receive minimal cues to infer the distressed employees' experiences and internal states. Coworkers can interpret the deliberate hiding of emotions as inauthentic behavior that signals withdrawal and disinterest (Gross & John, 2003), and may perceive distressed employees to be hiding their emotions because of low levels of trust or attachment (Gross & John, 2003). For example, Butler et al. (2003) conducted laboratory experiments to investigate how emotion suppression affects dyadic interactions. When one person in a dyad was instructed to suppress their emotional expression, their partners reported lower levels of rapport and less liking for them compared to individuals in control groups where participants communicated without regulating their emotional expression. These findings support our rationale that emotion suppression diminishes the perception of warmth, which includes attributes such as sociability, likability, and helpfulness (Cuddy et al., 2011; Fiske et al., 2007).

Hypothesis 4a: Suppressing negative emotions will be negatively related to perceived warmth as rated by coworkers.

Coworkers may perceive employees who can remain neutral under stressful working conditions as disciplined and competent (Brown et al., 2005). This perception arises because individuals typically experience negative emotions when they fail to achieve their desired goals (Rowe & Fitness, 2018). According to the EASI model (Van Kleef, 2009), expressing negative emotions can signal a lack of competence, as it suggests that the expressor has not succeeded in reaching their goals. The elimination or restriction of the expression of negative emotions through suppressive efforts can indicate that individuals can competently perform their roles and manage difficult situations (Sy et al., 2013). For example, leaders who display negative emotions tend to be rated as less effective than those who display neutral ones (Lewis, 2000). Distressed employees can signal that they can control and resolve troubling events by suppressing the expression of negative emotions.

Hypothesis 4b: Suppressing negative emotions will be positively related to perceived competence as rated by coworkers.

Bursting and Interpersonal Perceptions

Coworkers may perceive negative emotional outbursts as careless and inconsiderate toward others. Distressed employees who burst with negative emotions in an attempt to improve their own psychological well-being may inadvertently jeopardize their coworkers' psychological well-being and team performance (Barsade et al., 2018). Moreover, such outbursts violate the emotional display rules in most workplaces (Grandey & Sayre, 2019). According to the EASI model (Van Kleef, 2009), perceivers are likely to react emotionally to individuals who burst with negative emotions rather than engaging in cognitive deliberation to carefully consider the contextual factors underlying the senders' emotional display (Sharma et al., 2020). Instead of attempting to understand why employees who burst with negative emotions became distressed in the first place, coworkers may perceive such outbursts as disrespectful and hostile and consider the offending party to be less sociable and agreeable than before (Scherer et al., 2019).

Hypothesis 5a: Bursting with negative emotions will be negatively related to perceived warmth as rated by coworkers.

The negative effect of emotional bursting on warmth perception can be extended to the perception of competence because bursting can signal one's underachievement and inability to meet performance standards at work. Negative emotions arise when problematic events hinder the achievement of goals (Rowe & Fitness, 2018). Employees who exhibit outbursts of negative emotions may signal to others that they cannot fulfill their assigned duties or regulate their emotions. For example, supervisors tend to rate the task performance of salespeople who burst with negative emotions lower than their less expressive colleagues (Brown et al., 2005). Bursting is also indicative of individuals who are neurotic, stress-prone, irresponsible, impulsive, and undisciplined; these characteristics are associated with low competence (Barrick & Mount, 1991).

Hypothesis 5b: Bursting with negative emotions will be negatively related to perceived competence as rated by coworkers.

Sharing and Interpersonal Perceptions

Employees' sharing of their emotions is likely to be perceived as understandable and even desirable in the workplace. In comparison with suppressed or burst emotions, verbally described emotions can include a more detailed set of information (Rimé et al., 2020) that will help coworkers sympathize with the distressed employees and thus perceive emotional sharing as an acceptable behavior.

When perceiving emotional sharing as an understandable behavior at work, coworkers are likely to exert effort to understand distressed employees' situations and motivations (Van Kleef, 2009). Beyond sympathizing with distressed employees, coworkers may further read the distressed employees' affiliative intention from their act of emotional sharing. People disclose themselves to individuals they like; in turn, these individuals tend to like people who engage in intimate disclosure with them (Collins & Miller, 1994).

Hypothesis 6a: Sharing negative emotions will be positively related to perceived warmth as rated by coworkers.

Sharing negative emotions can demonstrate a persistent willingness to address challenges by seeking support and advice from others. Unless distressed employees communicate their difficulties, organizations may struggle to identify and resolve problematic situations (Chen & Treviño, 2023). Emotional sharing allows employees to explain their efforts to meet performance standards despite significant barriers. These explanations help counteract coworkers' tendency to blame the employees and instead provide a basis for making external attributions to account for the situation.

Hypothesis 6b: Sharing negative emotions will be positively related to perceived competence as rated by coworkers.

Behavioral Consequences of Interpersonal Perceptions

Individuals' attitudes toward others influence their interactions (Ajzen, 1989). Therefore, coworkers' perceptions of distressed employees in terms of warmth and competence can affect how much they help or harm these employees (Fiske et al., 2007). Social support is a key positive interpersonal outcome that individuals can expect when expressing their emotions (Chervonsky & Hunt, 2017). Conversely, individuals may seek to punish those who burst with negative emotions in order to restore order and discourage similar behaviors in the future (Cameron & Overall, 2018; Rowe &

Fitness, 2018).

We predicted that the perception of warmth would be positively related to helping behaviors. People tend to feel a sense of connection and intimacy with individuals they consider warm, and close attachment fosters a shared sense of responsibility to assist those in need (Fasseur & Geuens, 2010). The norm of reciprocity may also explain why coworkers help those they perceive as warm, characterized by being sociable, friendly, helpful, and likable (Fiske et al., 2007). Coworkers who help individuals who appear sociable and warm can expect reciprocal support from them in future interactions (Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2015). Therefore, for both affective and instrumental reasons, employees may be more likely to help colleagues they perceive as sociable and warm.

Hypothesis 7: Perceived warmth will be positively related to the helping behaviors of coworkers.

We further proposed that the perception of competence would be negatively related to harmful behavior. Since coworkers cannot formally sanction each other (e.g., through employment termination), they may resort to harming each other through actions such as disapproval of opinions, social exclusion, or even more aggressive behaviors. Coworkers may attribute problematic work situations to incompetent colleagues and attempt to harm these colleagues to actively express blame (Keltner et al., 2019).

Hypothesis 8: Perceived competence will be negatively related to the harming behaviors of coworkers.

Last, as outlined above, we expected coworkers' perceptions of warmth and competence to mediate the relationships between employees' coping responses and their coworkers' behaviors. We hypothesized that the different ways employees cope with negative emotions would predict how coworkers perceive the distressed employees, which would subsequently shape coworkers' behaviors toward them.

Hypothesis 9a: Perceived warmth will mediate the relationship between suppressing negative emotions and the helping behaviors of coworkers.

Hypothesis 9b: Perceived warmth will mediate the relationship between bursting negative emotions and the helping behaviors of coworkers.

Hypothesis 9c: Perceived warmth will mediate the relationship between sharing negative emotions and the helping behaviors of coworkers.

Hypothesis 10a: Perceived competence will mediate the relationship between suppressing negative emotions and the harming behaviors of coworkers.

Hypothesis 10b: Perceived competence will mediate the relationship between bursting negative emotions and the harming behaviors of coworkers.

Hypothesis 10c: Perceived competence will mediate the relationship between sharing negative emotions and the harming behaviors of coworkers.

Our research model is shown in Figure 1.

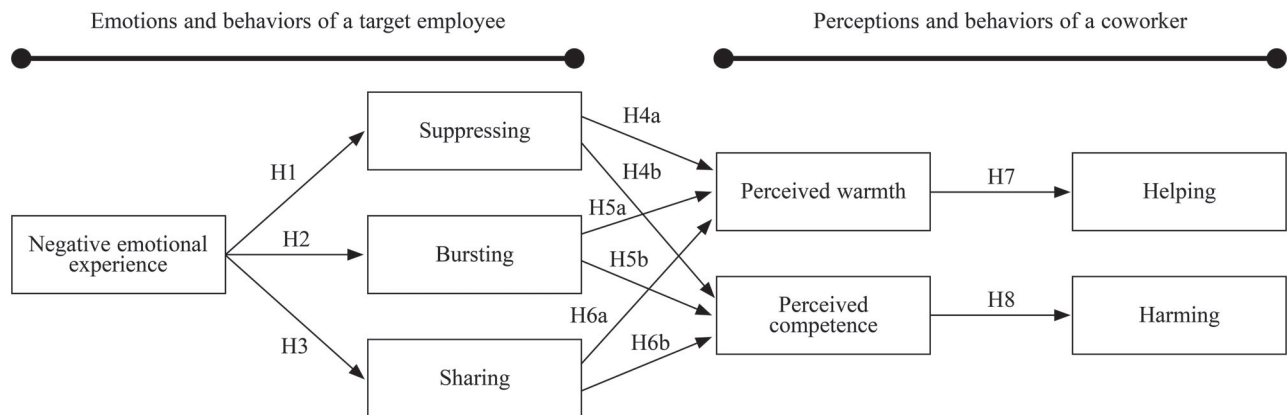


Figure 1. *Conceptual Model of the Interpersonal Influence of Various Coping Responses to Experiencing Negative Emotions*

Method

Participants and Procedure

This research was approved by an institutional review board. Individuals voluntarily participated after being informed about the study purpose and procedure. We collected data from Korean organizations belonging to different industries, including banking, electronics, telecommunications, and medicine. We asked the managers of these organizations to randomly select two members who work in close proximity such that they could closely observe each other's behaviors. Then, we randomly assigned one member as the target employee and the other as the coworker. Prepaid, preaddressed envelopes were provided for participants to return their completed surveys anonymously. We initially distributed surveys to 158 dyads from the same team, and 139 dyads returned completed and matched surveys (response rate = 88%).

The mean company tenure of the target employees was 5.8 years ($SD = 6.4$); their mean age was 37.4 years ($SD = 9.9$, range 24–60). Of this group, 69.1% were men and 30.9% were women. In terms of educational level, 0.7% had a high school diploma, 7.9% had a 2-year college degree, 69.1% had a bachelor's degree, and 22.3% had a graduate degree. In terms of position, 35.3% were entry-level employees, 13.7% were associates, 23.7% were assistant managers, 10.8% were managers, and 10.8% were senior managers. These employees performed various functions, such as general management (33.1%), research and development (23.7%), sales (12.2%), marketing (6.5%), manufacturing (2.9%), and others (19.4%).

The mean company tenure of the coworker sample was 5.0 years ($SD = 6.1$); among this group, 61.3% were men and 38.7% were women, and their mean age was 34.9 years ($SD = 8.7$, range 18–60). In terms of level of education, 3.6% had a high school diploma, 11.5% had a 2-year college degree, 64.0% had a bachelor's degree, and 18.7% had a graduate degree.

Measures

We translated the scales into Korean, then back into English to ensure that the translated Korean versions were comparable. All survey items were measured on a 6-point Likert scale.

Emotional Experience

We used the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule to measure the felt emotional experience of the target employees

during the last month (Watson et al., 1988). Given that we intended to explore their transient affective states or midrange affective experiences, we asked them to indicate how they felt “while at work during the last month.” Negative emotions were measured using 10 items (e.g., scared, depressed; $\alpha = .92$), and positive emotions were measured using 10 items (e.g., enthusiastic, interested; $\alpha = .93$). As explained below, the effects of positive emotions were controlled for to isolate the distinct effects of negative ones.

Emotional Suppressing

We slightly modified four items from the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (Gross & John, 2003) to fit the context of this study ($\alpha = .89$). These items were as follows: “During the last month, when I was feeling negative emotions, (a) I made sure not to express them, (b) I controlled my emotions by not expressing them, (c) I kept my emotions to myself, and (d) I was careful not to express my genuine negative emotions.”

Emotional Bursting

We slightly modified four items from the measure of emotional venting by Carver et al. (1989) to fit the context of this study ($\alpha = .87$). These items were as follows: “During the last month, when feeling a lot of emotional distress, (a) I found myself expressing those feelings a lot, (b) I got upset and let my emotions out, (c) I let my feelings out, and (d) when I was angry or sad, I did not hold my emotion but let it out.”

Emotional Sharing

We used four items from the measure of seeking social support for emotional reasons ($\alpha = .86$) by Carver et al. (1989). These items were as follows: “During the last month, (a) I talked to coworkers about how I feel, (b) I tried to get emotional support from coworkers or supervisors, (c) I discussed my feelings with coworkers, and (d) I got sympathy and understanding from coworkers.”

Perceived Warmth and Competence

Coworkers rated the target employees in terms of their perceived warmth and competence using scales adopted from prior research (Fiske et al., 2007). Warmth was assessed using four items ($\alpha = .93$): “This person is (a) sociable, (b) warm, (c) friendly, and (d) caring.” Similarly, competence was assessed using four items ($\alpha = .92$): “This person is (a) intelligent, (b) motivated, (c) energetic, and (d) organized.”

Helping and Harming

Helping and harming behaviors were assessed by asking coworkers to report their interaction patterns with the target employees over the preceding month. The extent to which the coworkers engaged in helping behaviors was assessed using six items ($\alpha = .82$): “During the last month, my interaction with this person can be characterized by the following behavior: (a) assist, (b) help, (c) protect, (d) cooperate with, (e) unite with, and (f) associate with.” The extent to which coworkers engaged in harming behaviors was assessed using six items ($\alpha = .90$): “During the last month, my interaction with this person can be characterized by the following behavior: (a) fight or attack, (b) sabotage, (c) demean, (d) exclude, (e) hinder, and (f) derogate.”

Data Analysis

We conducted structural equation modeling (SEM) to test the hypotheses. We adopted the parceling approach to improve the ratio of the parameters that would be estimated for the sample size (Bandalos, 2002). Item parceling involves aggregating item-level responses into item parcels by averaging multiple items in a scale and using these parcels as indicators in SEM.

We randomly selected two items in each scale and averaged them to obtain between two and five item parcels for each scale. For example, given that 10 items were used to measure negative emotional experience, five item parcels (i.e., $10/2 = 5$) remained in the analysis to indicate negative emotional experience. Four items were used to measure emotional suppressing; thus, two item parcels (i.e., $4/2 = 2$) indicated emotional suppressing in our analysis model. After item parceling, nine latent constructs were indicated by 26 item parcels in the SEM analysis.

Results

Before we tested the proposed hypotheses, we examined the empirical distinctiveness of the study variables by assessing the measurement model to understand how well the observed variables represented the latent constructs. The measurement model created using the item parcels demonstrated a good fit to the data, $\chi^2(263) = 353.24$, $p < .001$; comparative fit index (CFI) = .97, Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) = .96, root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .050. The chi-square difference tests confirmed that the hypothesized nine-factor model performed better than any of the alternative models (p values $< .001$). Table 1 provides the descriptive statistics and interscale correlations among the study variables.

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Among the Study Variables

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Negative emotion	2.76	1.01	—	-.37**	.17*	.26**	.03	.04	-.05	.02	.02
2. Positive emotion	3.85	0.82	-.37**	—	.07	-.08	.29**	.11	.10	.05	-.07
3. Suppressing	4.00	1.00	.16	.06	—	-.43**	-.12	.09	.00	.04	-.01
4. Bursting	2.80	0.89	.22*	-.08	-.43**	—	.15	.01	-.12	.01	.07
5. Sharing	3.41	1.01	.06	.25**	-.10	.14	—	.35**	.27**	.15	-.20*
6. Perceived warmth	4.59	1.08	.01	.06	.11	.03	.30**	—	.76**	.44**	-.58**
7. Perceived competence	4.63	0.93	-.13	.00	.00	-.08	.23**	.68**	—	.33**	-.67**
8. Helping	4.40	0.66	.06	-.09	.11	-.10	.15	.40**	.30**	—	-.31**
9. Harming	1.65	0.78	.08	-.01	-.03	.10	-.23**	-.50**	-.61**	-.29**	—

Note. Unit of analysis is dyad ($N = 139$). Correlations below the diagonal are among scales created from averaging items. Correlations above the diagonal are among latent variables.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

We tested the hypothesized structural relationships among the variables using the measurement model that confirmed the nine-factor structure of the current data. We controlled for the effects of positive emotions to understand the unique effects of negative emotions on coping responses. The resulting structural model had a good fit with the observed pattern in the data, $\chi^2(279) = 366.74$, $p < .001$; CFI = .97, TLI = .96, RMSEA = .048. Figure 2 illustrates the SEM results with standardized regression coefficients.

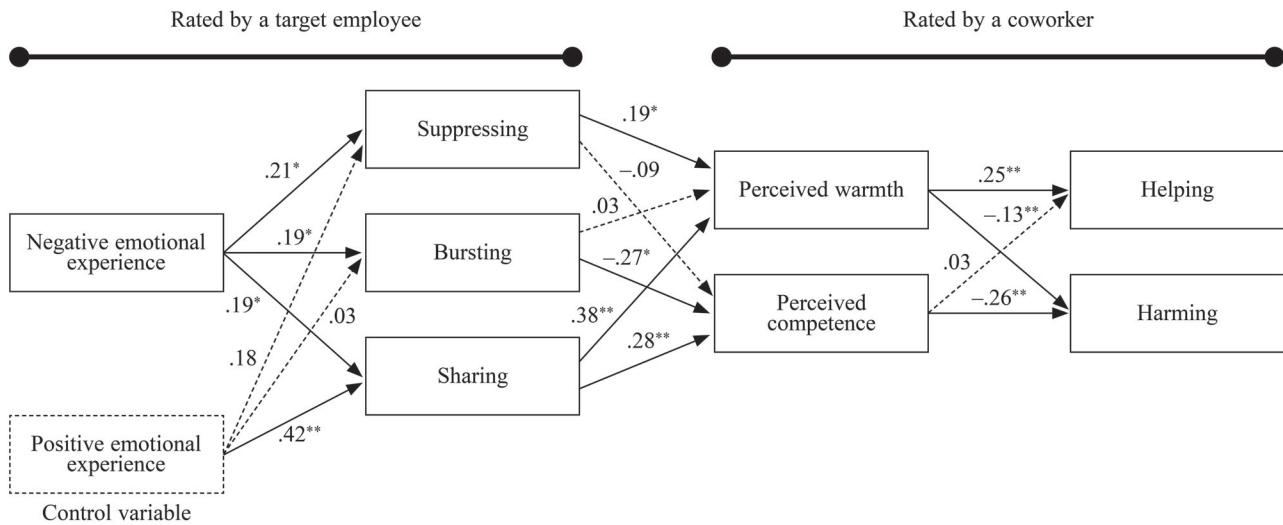


Figure 2. *Structural Equation Model of the Interpersonal Influence of Various Coping Responses to Emotional Experiences*

Note. Dashed lines represent statistically nonsignificant results.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Coping Responses to Negative Emotional Experience

Figure 2 shows that the effect of negative emotional experience on suppressing was statistically significant and positive ($\beta = .21$, $p < .05$), thereby supporting Hypothesis 1. Consistent with Hypothesis 2, the effect of negative emotional experience on bursting was also significant and positive ($\beta = .19$, $p < .05$). Hypothesis 3, which proposed a positive relationship between negative emotional experience and emotional sharing, was also supported ($\beta = .19$, $p < .05$). The relationships of positive emotional experience and the three means of coping were not the focus of this study, but we observed that positive emotional experience was significantly related to sharing ($\beta = .42$, $p < .001$) but not to bursting ($\beta = .03$, ns) or suppressing ($\beta = .18$, ns).

Interpersonal Effects of Coping Responses

As shown in Figure 2, the second half of our SEM analysis tested the hypotheses about the interpersonal implications of employees' coping responses. Hypotheses 4a and 4b, which predicted negative relationships between suppressing with warmth and competence perceptions, were not supported. Contrary to our prediction, suppressing was positively related to the perception of warmth ($\beta = .19$, $p < .05$). Bursting was significantly and negatively related to the perception of competence ($\beta = -.27$, $p < .05$) but not to warmth perception ($\beta = .03$, ns), thus supporting Hypothesis 5b but not Hypothesis 5a. Sharing was positively related to warmth and competence perceptions ($\beta = .38$, $p < .001$; $\beta = .28$, $p < .01$), thus supporting Hypotheses 6a and 6b.

Coworkers' perceptions of warmth and competence were significantly related to their behaviors toward the focal employees. Consistent with Hypothesis 7, the perception of warmth was positively related to helping behavior ($\beta = .25$, $p < .001$). Further, the perception of competence was negatively related to harming behavior ($\beta = -.26$, $p < .001$), thus supporting Hypothesis 8.

Last, three of the six mediation hypotheses were supported. Hypothesis 9c, which proposed that the perception of warmth would mediate the link between emotional sharing and helping behavior, was supported, $b = 0.10$, $p < .01$, 95% confidence interval (CI) [0.025, 0.169]. Supporting Hypotheses 10b and 10c, competence perception mediated the

effects of emotional bursting and sharing on harming behavior, $b = 0.07$, $p < .05$, 95% CI [0.006, 0.131]; $b = -0.07$, $p < .05$, 95% CI [-0.131, -0.014]. However, Hypotheses 9a, 9b, and 10a, regarding perceived warmth mediating the links between suppressing and helping behaviors ($b = 0.05$, *ns*), and between bursting and helping behaviors ($b = 0.01$, *ns*), and perceived competence mediating the link between suppressing and harming behaviors ($b = 0.02$, *ns*), were not supported.

Discussion

In this study, we found that experiencing negative emotions was positively related to three coping responses: emotional suppression, bursting, and sharing. We also discovered that coworkers perceived employees who suppressed their emotions as warmer and those who burst with their emotions as less competent. In addition, coworkers viewed employees who shared their emotions as both warmer and more competent. Consequently, coworkers were more likely to help employees perceived as warm and less likely to harm those perceived as competent.

Suppressing, Bursting, and Sharing

The current findings supported Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3, which predicted suppressing, bursting, and sharing as plausible responses to experiencing negative emotions in the workplace. The existing literature on emotional labor and emotion regulation has primarily focused on the suppression of negative emotions (Troth et al., 2018). However, employees may not always conform to the emotional display rules that emphasize suppressing negative emotions. Instead, we found that employees also cope with their emotions by expressing them through bursting and sharing.

Interpersonal Effects of Suppressing

Regarding the links between coping responses and coworkers' perceptions, half of the related hypotheses (i.e., Hypotheses 5b, 6a, and 6b) were supported. Contrary to Hypothesis 4a, coworkers perceived employees who suppressed their negative feelings as warm and friendly. Emotional suppression typically decreases the quality of discourse and leads to poor social outcomes (Chervonsky & Hunt, 2017). We therefore expected that suppressive coping would negatively influence perceptions of warmth by signaling little trust and attachment toward coworkers. However, as noted, these prior findings were not specific to the workplace (Chervonsky & Hunt, 2017). In our workplace data, employees who suppressed their emotions were evaluated more favorably by their coworkers. We speculate that this is because overt expressions of negative emotions can undermine others' emotional serenity. In other words, employees may signal respect for their coworkers by suppressing their negative emotions.

Different from what we proposed in Hypothesis 4b, emotional suppression was not related to competence perception. This pattern can be explained in two ways. First, coworkers may not have noticed how their colleagues coped with negative emotions if those emotions were hidden effectively. Second, even if coworkers observed their distressed colleagues intentionally suppressing negative emotions, their perceptions might not have changed significantly. If emotional suppression is a strong workplace norm, it may be viewed as normal and predictable, providing little additional information regarding the focal person.

Dysfunctional Interpersonal Effects of Emotional Bursting

Bursting was not significantly related to perceptions of warmth. However, coworkers perceived employees who burst with their negative emotions as incompetent, supporting Hypothesis 5b. Since emotions are contagious (Barsade et al., 2018; Sy & Choi, 2013; Sy et al., 2005), bursting with negative emotions can distress coworkers and decrease group morale. As a result, workplaces tend to have emotional display rules that limit the expression of negative emotions (Grandey & Sayre, 2019). Our findings suggest that employees who violate these emotional display rules may be perceived as less competent.

Functional Interpersonal Effects of Emotional Sharing

Supporting Hypotheses 6a and 6b, emotional sharing was positively related to coworkers' perceptions of warmth and competence. The act of sharing negative emotional experience, along with the informational content conveyed through such an act, may signal employees' trust toward coworkers. Such acts may also indicate employees' willingness and commitment to addressing workplace challenges by seeking support and advice from others. In addition, employees who share the challenging details of a negative event allow coworkers to sympathize and understand its magnitude (Rimé et al., 2020). As such, the desirable social function of emotions is achieved when they are shared.

Our analysis demonstrates that the positive social functions of sharing emotions were not limited to favorable interpersonal perceptions by coworkers. Supporting Hypotheses 7 and 8, the perception of warmth was positively associated with helping behavior, while the perception of competence was negatively associated with harming behavior. This generation of positive social exchange among employees through effective emotional coping should enhance individual and collective performance through increased collaboration among members. In effect, this study has established emotional coping as a significant tool for developing constructive social and professional relationships.

Practical Implications

Our results show that sharing, but not bursting, negative emotions can improve interpersonal relations. The expression of negative emotions provides important information that helps organizations identify issues (Chen & Treviño, 2023). Therefore, managers should be cautious when designing emotional display rules. Instead of discouraging all expressions of negative emotions, managers should encourage employees to carefully articulate what caused them to feel negative. This approach will allow coworkers to better understand each other's feelings and enables organizations to more effectively identify and potentially resolve workplace challenges (Chen & Treviño, 2023). In addition to encouraging employees to share their emotions, organizations can establish consistent routines, such as weekly team meetings, where employees can actively share their feelings and concerns about work matters with their colleagues.

Limitations and Directions for Further Studies

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the cross-sectional design of the study prohibited us from making any causal claims. The data were collected from multiple sources to reduce common method bias, but causality cannot be established without longitudinal or experimental data. In field research, capturing the precise moment when employees engage in coping and the real-time perceptual and behavioral responses that coping elicits from coworkers is challenging. Experimental designs for inducing negative emotions to prompt employees to engage in coping responses, such as bursting, have ethical challenges. Future studies could adopt experience sampling methods to measure real-time experiences and behaviors.

Given our Korean sample, the second limitation of this study is the difficulty of comparing our results with those in the extant literature, which mostly reflect Western cultures and values. Culture significantly influences the emotional experience and regulation efforts of individuals (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Further research efforts are needed to validate and replicate the current findings in other cultural or organizational contexts, which may operate as boundary conditions for our results.

Conclusion

Our study has significantly advanced the existing literature on emotional labor and emotion regulation by elucidating how employees' coping strategies for negative emotions influence coworkers' perceptions and behaviors. By integrating frameworks on the social functions of emotions and social perceptions, we have demonstrated that emotional coping strategies serve as crucial social information, shaping interpersonal interactions in the workplace. One of our key contributions is identifying how emotional expression, particularly the constructive sharing of emotions, can foster positive interpersonal relationships and enhance overall team functioning. Conversely, unregulated emotional outbursts

can undermine perceptions of competence and potentially impair team dynamics through increased interpersonal harming behaviors.

By examining the social functions of emotions in workplace settings, we have highlighted the role of emotional expression in influencing coworker perceptions and behaviors. This approach extends the traditional focus on emotion suppression and offers a more comprehensive view of how employees navigate emotional experiences at work. Overall, our study provides valuable insights for organizations by highlighting the significant interpersonal effects of different emotional coping strategies and offering practical implications for fostering healthier and more supportive work environments.

Acknowledgments

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

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