

## **A multi-country test of brief reappraisal interventions on emotions during the COVID-19 pandemic**

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Ke Wang<sup>1</sup>, Amit Goldenberg<sup>2</sup>, Charles A. Dorison<sup>3</sup>, Jeremy K. Miller<sup>4\*</sup> ([millerj@willamette.edu](mailto:millerj@willamette.edu)), Andero Uusberg<sup>5</sup>, Jennifer S. Lerner<sup>6</sup>, James Gross<sup>7</sup>, Bamikole Bamikole Agesin<sup>8</sup>, Márcia Bernardo<sup>9</sup>, Olatz Campos<sup>10</sup>, Luis Eudave<sup>11</sup>, Karolina Grzech<sup>12</sup>, Daphna Hausman Ozery<sup>13</sup>, Emily A. Jackson<sup>14</sup>, Elkin Oswaldo Luis Garcia<sup>15</sup>, Shira Meir Drexler<sup>16</sup>, Anita Penić Jurković<sup>17</sup>, Kafeel Rana<sup>18</sup>, John Paul Wilson<sup>19</sup>, Maria Antoniadis<sup>20</sup>, Kermeka Desai<sup>21</sup>, Zoi Gialitaki<sup>22</sup>, Elizaveta Kushnir<sup>23</sup>, Khaoula Nadif<sup>24</sup>, Olalla Niño Bravo<sup>25</sup>, Rafia Nauman<sup>26</sup>, Marlies Oosterlinck<sup>27</sup>, Myrto Pantazi<sup>28</sup>, Natalia Pilecka<sup>29</sup>, Anna Szabelska<sup>30</sup>, I. M. M. van Steenkiste<sup>31</sup>, Katarzyna Filip<sup>32</sup>, Andreea Ioana Bozdoc<sup>33</sup>, Gabriela Mariana Marcu<sup>34</sup>, Elena Agadullina<sup>35</sup>, Matúš Adamkovič<sup>36</sup>, Marta Roczniewska<sup>37</sup>, Cecilia Reyna<sup>38</sup>, Angelos P. Kassianos<sup>39</sup>, Minja Westerlund<sup>40</sup>, Lina Ahlgren<sup>41</sup>, Sara Pöntinen<sup>42</sup>, Gabriel Agboola Adetula<sup>43</sup>, Pinar Dursun<sup>44</sup>, Azuka Ikechukwu Arinze<sup>45</sup>, Nwadiogo Chisom Arinze<sup>46</sup>, Chisom Esther Ogbonnaya<sup>47</sup>, Izuchukwu L. G. Ndukaihe<sup>48</sup>, Ilker Dalgar<sup>49</sup>, Handan Akkas<sup>50</sup>, Paulo Manuel Macapagal<sup>51</sup>, Savannah Lewis<sup>52</sup>, Irem Metin-Orta<sup>53</sup>, Francesco Foroni<sup>54</sup>, Megan Willis<sup>55</sup>, Anabela Caetano Santos<sup>56</sup>, Aviv Mokady<sup>57</sup>, Niv Reggev<sup>58</sup>, Merve A. Kurfali<sup>59</sup>, Martin R. Vasilev<sup>60</sup>, Nora L. Nock<sup>61</sup>, Michal Parzuchowski<sup>62</sup>, Mauricio F. Espinoza Barría<sup>63</sup>, Marek Vranka<sup>64</sup>, Markéta Braun Kohlová<sup>65</sup>, Ivan Ropovik<sup>66</sup>, Mikayel Harutyunyan<sup>67</sup>, Chunhui Wang<sup>68</sup>, Elvin Yao<sup>69</sup>, Maja Becker<sup>70</sup>, Efisio Manunta<sup>71</sup>, Gwenael Kaminski<sup>72</sup>, Dafne Marko<sup>73</sup>, Kortnee Evans<sup>74</sup>, David M. G. Lewis<sup>75</sup>, Andrej Findor<sup>76</sup>, Anais Thibault Landry<sup>77</sup>, John Jamir Benzon Aruta<sup>78</sup>, Manuel S. Ortiz<sup>79</sup>, Zahir Vally<sup>80</sup>, Ekaterina Pronizius<sup>81</sup>, Martin Voracek<sup>82</sup>, Claus Lamm<sup>83</sup>, Maurice Grinberg<sup>84</sup>, Ranran Li<sup>85</sup>, Jaroslava Varella Valentova<sup>86</sup>, Giovanna Mioni<sup>87</sup>, Nicola Cellini<sup>88</sup>, Sau-Chin Chen<sup>89</sup>, Janis Zickfeld<sup>90</sup>, Karis Moon<sup>91</sup>, Habiba Azab<sup>92</sup>, Neil Levy<sup>93</sup>, Alper Karababa<sup>94</sup>, Jennifer L. Beaudry<sup>95</sup>, Leanne Boucher<sup>96</sup>, W. Matthew Collins<sup>97</sup>, Anna Louise Todsen<sup>98</sup>, Kevin van Schie<sup>99</sup>, Jáchym VINTR<sup>100</sup>, Jozef Bavolar<sup>101</sup>, Lada Kaliska<sup>102</sup>, Valerija Križanić<sup>103</sup>, Lara Samojlenko<sup>104</sup>, Raziieh Pourafshari<sup>105</sup>, Sandra J. Geiger<sup>106</sup>, Julia Beitner<sup>107</sup>, Lara Warmelink<sup>108</sup>, Robert M. Ross<sup>109</sup>, Ian D. Stephen<sup>110</sup>, Thomas J. Hostler<sup>111</sup>, Soufian Azouaghe<sup>112</sup>, Randy McCarthy<sup>113</sup>, Anna Szala<sup>114</sup>, Caterina Grano<sup>115</sup>, Claudio Singh Solorzano<sup>116</sup>, Gulnaz Anjum<sup>117</sup>, William Jimenez-Leal<sup>118</sup>, Maria Bradford<sup>119</sup>, Laura Calderón Pérez<sup>120</sup>, Julio E. Cruz Vásquez<sup>121</sup>, Oscar J. Galindo-Caballero<sup>122</sup>, Juan Camilo Vargas-Nieto<sup>123</sup>, Ondřej Kácha<sup>124</sup>, Alexios Arvanitis<sup>125</sup>, Qinyu Xiao<sup>126</sup>, Rodrigo Cárcamo<sup>127</sup>, Saša Zorjan<sup>128</sup>, Zuzanna Tajchman<sup>129</sup>, Iris Vilares<sup>130</sup>, Jeffrey M. Pavlacic<sup>131</sup>, Jonas R. Kunst<sup>132</sup>, Christian K. Tamnes<sup>133</sup>, Claudia C. von Bastian<sup>134</sup>, Mohammad Atari<sup>135</sup>, MohammadHasan Sharifian<sup>136</sup>, Monika Hricova<sup>137</sup>, Pavol Kačmár<sup>138</sup>, Jana Schrötter<sup>139</sup>, Rima-Maria Rahal<sup>140</sup>, Noga Cohen<sup>141</sup>, Saiedeh FatahModarres<sup>142</sup>, Miha Zrimsek<sup>143</sup>, Ilya Zakharov<sup>144</sup>, Monica A Koehn<sup>145</sup>, Celia Esteban-Serna<sup>146</sup>, Robert J. Calin-Jageman<sup>147</sup>, Anthony J Krafnick<sup>148</sup>, Eva Štrukelj<sup>149</sup>, Peder Mortvedt Isager<sup>150</sup>, Jan Urban<sup>151</sup>, Jaime R. Silva<sup>152</sup>, Marcel Martončík<sup>153</sup>, Sanja Batić Očovaj<sup>154</sup>, Dušana Šakan<sup>155</sup>, Anna O. Kuzminska<sup>156</sup>, Jasna Milosevic Djordjevic<sup>157</sup>, Inês A. T. Almeida<sup>158</sup>, Ana Ferreira<sup>159</sup>, Ljiljana B. Lazarevic<sup>160</sup>, Harry Manley<sup>161</sup>, Danilo Zambrano Ricaurte<sup>162</sup>, Renan P. Monteiro<sup>163</sup>, Zahra Etabari<sup>164</sup>, Erica Musser<sup>165</sup>, Daniel Dunleavy<sup>166</sup>, Weilun Chou<sup>167</sup>, Hendrik Godbersen<sup>168</sup>, Susana Ruiz-Fernández<sup>169</sup>, Crystal Reeck<sup>170</sup>, Carlota Batres<sup>171</sup>, Komila Kirgizova<sup>172</sup>, Abdumalik

Muminov<sup>173</sup>, Flavio Azevedo<sup>174</sup>, Daniela Serrato Alvarez<sup>175</sup>, Muhammad Mussaffa Butt<sup>176</sup>, Jeong Min Lee<sup>177</sup>, Zhang Chen<sup>178</sup>, Frederick Verbruggen<sup>179</sup>, Ignazio Ziano<sup>180</sup>, Murat Tümer<sup>181</sup>, Abdelilah C. A. Charyate<sup>182</sup>, Dmitrii Dubrov<sup>183</sup>, María del Carmen M. C. Tejada Rivera<sup>184</sup>, Christopher Aberson<sup>185</sup>, Bence Pálfi<sup>186</sup>, Mónica Alarcón Maldonado<sup>187</sup>, Barbora Hubena<sup>188</sup>, Asli Sacakli<sup>189</sup>, Chris D. Ceary<sup>190</sup>, Karley L. Richard<sup>191</sup>, Gage Singer<sup>192</sup>, Jennifer T. Perillo<sup>193</sup>, Tonia Ballantyne<sup>194</sup>, Wilson Cyrus-Lai<sup>195</sup>, Maksim Fedotov<sup>196</sup>, Hongfei Du<sup>197</sup>, Magdalena Wielgus<sup>198</sup>, Ilse L. Pit<sup>199</sup>, Matej Hruška<sup>200</sup>, Daniela Sousa<sup>201</sup>, Balazs Aczel<sup>202</sup>, Barnabas Szaszi<sup>203</sup>, Sylwia Adamus<sup>204</sup>, Krystian Barzykowski<sup>205</sup>, Leticia Micheli<sup>206</sup>, Nadya-Daniela Schmidt<sup>207</sup>, Andras N. Zsido<sup>208</sup>, Mariola Paruzel-Czachura<sup>209</sup>, Michal Bialek<sup>210</sup>, Marta Kowal<sup>211</sup>, Agnieszka Sorokowska<sup>212</sup>, Michal Misiak<sup>213</sup>, Débora Mola<sup>214</sup>, María Victoria Ortiz<sup>215</sup>, Pablo Sebastián Correa<sup>216</sup>, Anabel Belaus<sup>217</sup>, Fany Muchembled<sup>218</sup>, Rafael R. Ribeiro<sup>219</sup>, Patricia Arriaga<sup>220</sup>, Raquel Oliveira<sup>221</sup>, Leigh Ann Vaughn<sup>222</sup>, Paulina Szwed<sup>223</sup>, Małgorzata Kossowska<sup>224</sup>, Gabriela Czarnek<sup>225</sup>, Julita Kiełńska<sup>226</sup>, Benedict Antazo<sup>227</sup>, Ruben Betlehem<sup>228</sup>, Stefan Stieger<sup>229</sup>, Gustav Nilsonne<sup>230</sup>, Nicolle Simonovic<sup>231</sup>, Jennifer Taber<sup>232</sup>, Amélie Gourdon-Kanhukamwe<sup>233</sup>, Artur Domurat<sup>234</sup>, Keiko Ihaya<sup>235</sup>, Yuki Yamada<sup>236</sup>, Anum Urooj<sup>237</sup>, Tripat Gill<sup>238</sup>, Martin Čadek<sup>239</sup>, Lisa Bylinina<sup>240</sup>, Johanna Messerschmidt<sup>241</sup>, Murathan Kurfalı<sup>242</sup>, Adeyemi Adetula<sup>243</sup>, Ekaterina Baklanova<sup>244</sup>, Nihan Albayrak-Aydemir<sup>245</sup>, Heather B. Kappes<sup>246</sup>, Biljana Gjoneska<sup>247</sup>, Thea House<sup>248</sup>, Marc V. Jones<sup>249</sup>, Jana B. Berkessel<sup>250</sup>, William J. Chopik<sup>251</sup>, Sami Çoksan<sup>252</sup>, Martin Seehuus<sup>253</sup>, Ahmed Khaoudi<sup>254</sup>, Ahmed Bokkour<sup>255</sup>, Kanza Ait El Arabi<sup>256</sup>, Ikhlas Djamai<sup>257</sup>, Aishwarya Iyer<sup>258</sup>, Neha Parashar<sup>259</sup>, Arca Adiguzel<sup>260</sup>, Halil Emre Kocalar<sup>261</sup>, Carsten Bundt<sup>262</sup>, James O. Norton<sup>263</sup>, Marietta Papadatou-Pastou<sup>264</sup>, Anabel De la Rosa-Gomez<sup>265</sup>, Vladislav Ankushev<sup>266</sup>, Natalia Bogatyreva<sup>267</sup>, Dmitry Grigoryev<sup>268</sup>, Aleksandr Ivanov<sup>269</sup>, Irina Prusova<sup>270</sup>, Marina Romanova<sup>271</sup>, Irena Sarieva<sup>272</sup>, Maria Terskova<sup>273</sup>, Evgeniya Hristova<sup>274</sup>, Veselina Hristova Kadreva<sup>275</sup>, Allison Janak<sup>276</sup>, Vidar Schei<sup>277</sup>, Therese E. Sverdrup<sup>278</sup>, Adrian Dahl Askelund<sup>279</sup>, Lina Maria Sanabria Pineda<sup>280</sup>, Dajana Krupić<sup>281</sup>, Carmel A. Levitan<sup>282</sup>, Niklas Johannes<sup>283</sup>, Nihal Ouherrou<sup>284</sup>, Nicolas Say<sup>285</sup>, Sladjana Sinkolova<sup>286</sup>, Kristina Janjić<sup>287</sup>, Marija Stojanovska<sup>288</sup>, Dragana Stojanovska<sup>289</sup>, Meetu Khosla<sup>290</sup>, Andrew G. Thomas<sup>291</sup>, Franki Y. H. Kung<sup>292</sup>, Gijsbert Bijlstra<sup>293</sup>, Farnaz Mosannenzadeh<sup>294</sup>, Busra Bahar Balci<sup>295</sup>, Ulf-Dietrich Reips<sup>296</sup>, Ernest Baskin<sup>297</sup>, Byurakn Ishkhanyan<sup>298</sup>, Johanna Czamanski-Cohen<sup>299</sup>, Barnaby James Wyld Dixson<sup>300</sup>, David Moreau<sup>301</sup>, Clare A. M. Sutherland<sup>302</sup>, Hu Chuan-Peng<sup>303</sup>, Chris Noone<sup>304</sup>, Heather Flowe<sup>305</sup>, Michele Anne<sup>306</sup>, Steve M. J. Janssen<sup>307</sup>, Marta Topor<sup>308</sup>, Nadyanna M Majeed<sup>309</sup>, Yoshihiko Kunisato<sup>310</sup>, Karen Yu<sup>311</sup>, Shimrit Daches<sup>312</sup>, Andree Hartanto<sup>313</sup>, Milica Vdovic<sup>314</sup>, Lisa Anton-Boicuk<sup>315</sup>, Paul A. G. Forbes<sup>316</sup>, Julia Kamburidis<sup>317</sup>, Evelina Marinova<sup>318</sup>, Mina Nedelcheva-Datsova<sup>319</sup>, Nikolay R. Rachev<sup>320</sup>, Alina Stoyanova<sup>321</sup>, Kathleen Schmidt<sup>322</sup>, Jordan W. Suchow<sup>323</sup>, Maria Koptjevskaja-Tamm<sup>324</sup>, Teodor Jernsäther<sup>325</sup>, Jonas K. Olofsson<sup>326</sup>, Olga Bialobrzeska<sup>327</sup>, Magdalena Marszalek<sup>328</sup>, Srinivasan Tatachari<sup>329</sup>, Reza Afhami<sup>330</sup>, Wilbert Law<sup>331</sup>, Jan Antfolk<sup>332</sup>, Barbara Žuro<sup>333</sup>, Natalia Van Doren<sup>334</sup>, Jose A. Soto<sup>335</sup>, Rachel Searston<sup>336</sup>, Jacob Miranda<sup>337</sup>, Kaja Damnjanovic<sup>338</sup>, Siu Kit Yeung<sup>339</sup>, Dino Krupić<sup>340</sup>, Karlijn Hoyer<sup>341</sup>, Bastian Jaeger<sup>342</sup>, Dongning Ren<sup>343</sup>, Gerit Pfuhl<sup>344</sup>, Kristoffer Klevjer<sup>345</sup>, Nadia S. Corral-Frías<sup>346</sup>, Martha Frias-Armenta<sup>347</sup>, Marc Y. Lucas<sup>348</sup>, Adriana Olaya Torres<sup>349</sup>, Mónica Toro<sup>350</sup>, Lady Grey Javela Delgado<sup>351</sup>, Diego Vega<sup>352</sup>, Sara Álvarez Solas<sup>353</sup>, Roosevelt Vilar<sup>354</sup>, Sébastien Massoni<sup>355</sup>, Thomas Frizzo<sup>356</sup>, Alexandre Bran<sup>357</sup>, David C. Vaidis<sup>358</sup>, Luc Vieira<sup>359</sup>, Bastien Paris<sup>360</sup>, Mariagrazia Capizzi<sup>361</sup>, Gabriel Lins de Holanda Coelho<sup>362</sup>, Anna Greenburgh<sup>363</sup>, Cassie M. Whitt<sup>364</sup>, Alexa M. Tullett<sup>365</sup>, Xinkai Du<sup>366</sup>, Leonhard Volz<sup>367</sup>, Minke Jasmijn Bosma<sup>368</sup>, Cemre Karaarslan<sup>369</sup>, Eylül Sarioğuz<sup>370</sup>, Tara Bulut Allred<sup>371</sup>, Max Korbmacher<sup>372</sup>, Melissa F. Colloff<sup>373</sup>, Tiago J. S. Lima<sup>374</sup>, Matheus Fernando Felix

Ribeiro<sup>375</sup>, Jeroen P. H. Verharen<sup>376</sup>, Maria Karekla<sup>377</sup>, Christiana Karashiali<sup>378</sup>, Naoyuki Sunami<sup>379</sup>, Lisa M. Jaremka<sup>380</sup>, Daniel Storage<sup>381</sup>, Sumaiya Habib<sup>382</sup>, Anna Studzinska<sup>383</sup>, Paul H. P. Hanel<sup>384</sup>, Dawn Liu Holford<sup>385</sup>, Miroslav Sirota<sup>386</sup>, Kelly Wolfe<sup>387</sup>, Faith Chiu<sup>388</sup>, Andriana Theodoropoulou<sup>389</sup>, El Rim Ahn<sup>390</sup>, Yijun Lin<sup>391</sup>, Erin C. Westgate<sup>392</sup>, Hilmar Brohmer<sup>393</sup>, Gabriela Hofer<sup>394</sup>, Olivier Dujols<sup>395</sup>, Kevin Vezirian<sup>396</sup>, Gilad Feldman<sup>397</sup>, Giovanni A. Travaglino<sup>398</sup>, Afroja Ahmed<sup>399</sup>, Manyu Li<sup>400</sup>, Jasmijn Bosch<sup>401</sup>, Nathan Torunsky<sup>402</sup>, Hui Bai<sup>403</sup>, Mathi Manavalan<sup>404</sup>, Xin Song<sup>405</sup>, Radoslaw B. Walczak<sup>406</sup>, Przemysław Zdybek<sup>407</sup>, Maja Friedemann<sup>408</sup>, Anna Dalla Rosa<sup>409</sup>, Luca Kozma<sup>410</sup>, Sara G. Alves<sup>411</sup>, Rita C. Correia<sup>412</sup>, Peter Babinčák<sup>413</sup>, Gabriel Banik<sup>414</sup>, Luis Miguel Rojas-Berscia<sup>415</sup>, Marco A. C. Varella<sup>416</sup>, Jim Uttley<sup>417</sup>, Julie E. Beshears<sup>418</sup>, Katrine Krabbe Thommesen<sup>419</sup>, Behzad Behzadnia<sup>420</sup>, Shawn N. Geniole<sup>421</sup>, Miguel A. Silan<sup>422</sup>, Princess Lovella G. Maturan<sup>423</sup>, Johannes K. Vilsmeier<sup>424</sup>, Ulrich S. Tran<sup>425</sup>, Sara Morales Izquierdo<sup>426</sup>, Lukasz Walasek<sup>427</sup>, Michael C. Mensink<sup>428</sup>, Piotr Sorokowski<sup>429</sup>, Agata Groyecka-Bernard<sup>430</sup>, Theda Radtke<sup>431</sup>, Vera Cubela Adoric<sup>432</sup>, Joelle Carpentier<sup>433</sup>, Asil Ali Özdoğru<sup>434</sup>, Jennifer A. Joy-Gaba<sup>435</sup>, Mattie V. Hedgebeth<sup>436</sup>, Tatsunori Ishii<sup>437</sup>, Aaron L. Wichman<sup>438</sup>, Jan Philipp Röer<sup>439</sup>, Thomas Ostermann<sup>440</sup>, William E. Davis<sup>441</sup>, Lilian Suter<sup>442</sup>, Konstantinos Papachristopoulos<sup>443</sup>, Chelsea Zabel<sup>444</sup>, Charles R. Ebersole<sup>445</sup>, Christopher R. Chartier<sup>446</sup>, Peter R. Mallik<sup>447</sup>, Heather L. Urry<sup>448</sup>, Erin M. Buchanan<sup>449</sup>, Nicholas A. Coles<sup>450</sup>, Maximilian A. Primbs<sup>451</sup>, Dana M. Basnight-Brown<sup>452</sup>, Hans IJzerman<sup>453</sup>, Patrick S. Forscher<sup>454</sup>, Hannah Moshontz<sup>455</sup>

## Institutions

<sup>1</sup>Harvard Kennedy School, Harvard University, Cambridge, United States. <sup>2</sup>Harvard University, Cambridge, United States. <sup>3</sup>Management & Organizations Department, Kellogg School of Management, Northwestern University, Evanston, United States. <sup>4</sup>Department of Psychology, Willamette University, Portland, United States. <sup>5</sup>University of Tartu, Tartu, Estonia. <sup>6</sup>Harvard Kennedy School and Department of Psychology, Harvard University, Cambridge, United States. <sup>7</sup>Stanford University, Stanford, United States. <sup>8</sup>Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba Akoko, Nigeria. <sup>9</sup>Faculdade de Psicologia e Ciências da Educação, Universidade do Porto, Porto, Portugal. <sup>10</sup>University of Deusto, Barakaldo, Spain. <sup>11</sup>University of Navarra, Pamplona, Spain. <sup>12</sup>University of Valencia; Stockholm University, Valencia, Spain. <sup>13</sup>California State University, Northridge, Los Angeles, United States. <sup>14</sup>Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Indiana, United States. <sup>15</sup>Universidad de Navarra, Pamplona, Spain. <sup>16</sup>Department of Cognitive Psychology, Institute of Cognitive Neuroscience, Ruhr University Bochum, Bochum, Germany. <sup>17</sup>Kindergarten Kustošija, Zagreb, Croatia. <sup>18</sup>GC University Lahore, Lahore, Pakistan. <sup>19</sup>Montclair State University, Jersey City, United States. <sup>20</sup>European University of Cyprus, Nicosia, Cyprus. <sup>21</sup>Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Akron, United States. <sup>22</sup>Leiden University, Culemborg, Netherlands. <sup>23</sup>Unaffiliated, Stockholm, Sweden. <sup>24</sup>Unaffiliated, Poggio Imperiale, Italy. <sup>25</sup>Unaffiliated, Barakaldo, Spain. <sup>26</sup>Unaffiliated, Unknown. <sup>27</sup>Unaffiliated, Gent, Belgium. <sup>28</sup>Oxford Internet Institute, University of Oxford, Oxford, United Kingdom. <sup>29</sup>Unaffiliated, Warszawa, Poland. <sup>30</sup>Queen's University Belfast, Kraków, Poland. <sup>31</sup>Universiteit Leiden, Leiden, Netherlands. <sup>32</sup>Institute of Psychology, Jagiellonian University, Krakow, Poland. <sup>33</sup>Department of Psychology, "Lucian Blaga" University of Sibiu, Sibiu, Romania. <sup>34</sup>Department of Psychology, "Lucian Blaga" University of Sibiu; Carol Davila University of Medicine and Pharmacy Bucharest, Sibiu, Romania. <sup>35</sup>National Research University Higher School of Economics, Moscow, Russia. <sup>36</sup>Institute of Psychology, Faculty of Arts, University of Presov; Institute of Social Sciences, CSPA Slovak Academy of Sciences, Prešov, Slovakia. <sup>37</sup>Department

of Psychology, SWPS University of Social Sciences and Humanities; Department of Learning, Informatics, Management, and Ethics, Karolinska Institutet, Sopot, Poland. <sup>38</sup>Facultad de Psicología, Universidad Nacional de Córdoba (UNC); Instituto de Investigaciones Psicológicas (IIPSI), Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas (CONICET)-UNC, Córdoba, Argentina. <sup>39</sup>Department of Psychology, University of Cyprus; Department of Applied Health Research, University College London, Nicosia, Cyprus. <sup>40</sup>Åbo Akademi University, Turku, Finland. <sup>41</sup>Faculty of Arts, Psychology, and Theology, Åbo Akademi University, Turku, Finland. <sup>42</sup>Faculty of Arts, Psychology, and Theology, Åbo Akademi University, Turku, Finland. <sup>43</sup>Department of Pure and Applied Psychology, Faculty of Social and Management Sciences, Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba, Nigeria. <sup>44</sup>Department of Psychology, Afyon Kocatepe University, Afyonkarahisar, Turkey. <sup>45</sup>Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu-Alike, Ndufu-Alike, Nigeria. <sup>46</sup>Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu-Alike, Ndufu-Alike, Nigeria. <sup>47</sup>Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu-Alike, Ndufu-Alike, Nigeria. <sup>48</sup>Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu-Alike, Ndufu-Alike, Nigeria. <sup>49</sup>Department of Psychology, Ankara Medipol University, Ankara, Turkey. <sup>50</sup>MIS Department, Ankara Science University, Ankara, Turkey. <sup>51</sup>School of Psychology, Arellano University, Manila, Philippines. <sup>52</sup>Ashland University, Ashland, Ohio. <sup>53</sup>Department of Psychology, Atilim University, Ankara, Turkey. <sup>54</sup>Australian Catholic University, North Sydney, New South Wales, Australia. <sup>55</sup>School of Behavioural and Health Sciences, Australian Catholic University, North Sydney, New South Wales, Australia. <sup>56</sup>Aventura Social and DESSH, Faculty of Human Kinetics, University of Lisbon; Institute of Environmental Health, Medicine Faculty, University of Lisbon; ISCTE-Instituto Universitário de Lisboa, Lisbon, Portugal. <sup>57</sup>Department of Psychology, Ben Gurion University, Beersheba, Israel. <sup>58</sup>Department of Psychology and Zlotowski Center for Neuroscience, Ben Gurion University, Beersheba, Israel. <sup>59</sup>Department of Political Science, Bilkent University, Ankara, Turkey. <sup>60</sup>Department of Psychology, Bournemouth University, Poole, United Kingdom. <sup>61</sup>Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, United States. <sup>62</sup>Center for Research on Cognition and Behavior, SWPS University of Social Sciences and Humanities in Sopot, Sopot, Poland. <sup>63</sup>Universidad del Desarrollo, Centre of Attachment and Emotional Regulation (CARE), Las Condes, Chile. <sup>64</sup>Charles University, Prague, Czechia. <sup>65</sup>Environment Center, Charles University, Prague, Czechia. <sup>66</sup>Institute for Research and Development of Education, Faculty of Education, Charles University; Faculty of Education, University of Presov, Prague, Czechia. <sup>67</sup>Institute of Economic Studies, Charles University, Prague, Czechia. <sup>68</sup>Chinese Center of Disease Prevention and Control, Beijing, China. <sup>69</sup>Claremont Graduate University, Claremont, United States. <sup>70</sup>CLLE, Université de Toulouse, Toulouse, France. <sup>71</sup>CLLE, Université de Toulouse, Toulouse, France. <sup>72</sup>CLLE, Université de Toulouse, Toulouse, France. <sup>73</sup>Cognitive Science, Faculty of Education, University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia. <sup>74</sup>College of Science, Health, Engineering and Education, Murdoch University, Perth, Australia. <sup>75</sup>College of Science, Health, Engineering and Education, Murdoch University; Centre for Healthy Ageing, Health Futures Institute, Murdoch University, Perth, Australia. <sup>76</sup>Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences, Comenius University in Bratislava, Bratislava, Slovakia. <sup>77</sup>Concordia University, Montréal, Canada. <sup>78</sup>De La Salle University, Manila, Philippines. <sup>79</sup>Departamento de Psicología, Laboratorio de Estrés y Salud, Universidad de La Frontera, Temuco, Chile. <sup>80</sup>Department of Clinical Psychology, Wolfson College; University of Oxford, Al Ain, United Arab Emirates. <sup>81</sup>Department of Cognition, Emotion, and Methods in Psychology, Faculty of Psychology, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria. <sup>82</sup>Department of Cognition, Emotion, and Methods in Psychology, Faculty of Psychology, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria. <sup>83</sup>Department of

Cognition, Emotion, and Methods in Psychology, Faculty of Psychology, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria. <sup>84</sup>Department of Cognitive Science and Psychology, Research Center for Cognitive Science, New Bulgarian University, Sofia, Bulgaria. <sup>85</sup>Department of Experimental and Applied Psychology, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Amsterdam, Netherlands. <sup>86</sup>Department of Experimental Psychology, Institute of Psychology, University of São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil. <sup>87</sup>Department of General Psychology, University of Padova, Padua, Italy. <sup>88</sup>Department of General Psychology, University of Padua; Department of Biomedical Sciences, University of Padua; Padua Neuroscience Center, University of Padua; Human Inspired Technology Center, University of Padua, Padua, Italy. <sup>89</sup>Department of Human Development and Psychology, Tzu-Chi University, Hualien, Taiwan. <sup>90</sup>Department of Management, Aarhus University, Aarhus, Denmark. <sup>91</sup>Department of Management, Kingston University London, Kingston, England. <sup>92</sup>Department of Neurosurgery, Baylor College of Medicine, Houston, United States. <sup>93</sup>Department of Philosophy, Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia. <sup>94</sup>Department of Psychological Counselling and Guidance, Faculty of Education, Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University, Muğla, Turkey. <sup>95</sup>Department of Psychological Sciences, Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne, Australia. <sup>96</sup>Department of Psychology and Neuroscience, Nova Southeastern University, Pembroke Pines, United States. <sup>97</sup>Department of Psychology and Neuroscience, Nova Southeastern University, Fort Lauderdale, United States. <sup>98</sup>Department of Psychology and Neuroscience, University of St Andrews, St Andrews, United Kingdom. <sup>99</sup>Department of Psychology, Education & Child Studies, Erasmus School of Social and Behavioural Sciences, Erasmus University Rotterdam; MRC Cognition and Brain Sciences Unit, University of Cambridge, Rotterdam, Netherlands. <sup>100</sup>Department of Psychology, Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Prague, Czechia. <sup>101</sup>Department of Psychology, Faculty of Arts, Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice, Košice, Slovakia. <sup>102</sup>Department of Psychology, Faculty of Education, Matej Bel University, Banská Bystrica, Slovakia. <sup>103</sup>Department of Psychology, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, J. J. Strossmayer University of Osijek, Osijek, Croatia. <sup>104</sup>Department of Psychology, Faculty of Mathematics, Natural Sciences and Information Technologies, University of Primorska, Koper, Slovenia. <sup>105</sup>Department of Psychology, Faculty of Psychology and Education, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran. <sup>106</sup>Department of Psychology, Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences, University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, the Netherlands. <sup>107</sup>Department of Psychology, Goethe University Frankfurt, Frankfurt, Germany. <sup>108</sup>Department of Psychology, Lancaster University, Lancaster, United Kingdom. <sup>109</sup>Department of Psychology, Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia. <sup>110</sup>Department of Psychology, Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia. <sup>111</sup>Department of Psychology, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, United Kingdom. <sup>112</sup>Department of Psychology, Mohammed V University in Rabat; LIP/PC2S, Université Grenoble Alpes, Rabat, Morocco. <sup>113</sup>Department of Psychology, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, United States. <sup>114</sup>Department of Psychology, Oakland University, Oakland County, United States. <sup>115</sup>Department of Psychology, Sapienza University, Rome, Italy. <sup>116</sup>Department of Psychology, Sapienza University, Rome, Italy. <sup>117</sup>Department of Psychology, Simon Fraser University; Department of Social Sciences & Liberal Arts, Institute of Business Administration, Burnaby, British Columbia. <sup>118</sup>Department of Psychology, Universidad de los Andes, Bogotá D.C., Colombia. <sup>119</sup>Department of Psychology, Universidad de los Andes, Bogotá D.C., Colombia. <sup>120</sup>Department of Psychology, Universidad de los Andes, Bogotá D.C., Colombia. <sup>121</sup>Department of Psychology, Universidad de los Andes, Bogotá D.C., Colombia. <sup>122</sup>Department of Psychology, Universidad de los Andes, Bogotá D.C., Colombia. <sup>123</sup>Department of Psychology, Universidad

de los Andes, Bogotá D.C., Colombia. <sup>124</sup>Department of Psychology, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, United Kingdom. <sup>125</sup>Department of Psychology, University of Crete, Rethymno, Greece. <sup>126</sup>Department of Psychology, University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, Hong Kong. <sup>127</sup>Department of Psychology, University of Magallanes, Punta Arenas, Chile. <sup>128</sup>Department of Psychology, University of Maribor, Maribor, Slovenia. <sup>129</sup>Department of Psychology, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, United States. <sup>130</sup>Department of Psychology, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, United States. <sup>131</sup>Department of Psychology, University of Mississippi, Oxford, United States. <sup>132</sup>Department of Psychology, University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway. <sup>133</sup>Department of Psychology, University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway. <sup>134</sup>Department of Psychology, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, United Kingdom. <sup>135</sup>Department of Psychology, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, United States. <sup>136</sup>Department of Psychology, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran. <sup>137</sup>Department of Psychology, Faculty of Arts, Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice, Košice, Slovakia. <sup>138</sup>Department of Psychology, Faculty of Arts, Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice, Košice, Slovakia. <sup>139</sup>Department of Psychology, Faculty of Arts, Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice, Košice, Slovakia. <sup>140</sup>Department of Social Psychology, Tilburg University, Bonn, Germany. <sup>141</sup>Department of Special Education and The Edmond J. Safra Brain Research Center for the Study of Learning Disabilities, University of Haifa, Tel Aviv, Israel. <sup>142</sup>Department of Sport Management, Faculty of Physical Education and Sport Science, Urmia University, Urmia, Iran. <sup>143</sup>Department of Translation Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia. <sup>144</sup>Developmental Behavioral Genetics Laboratory, Psychological Institute of the Russian Academy of Education, Moscow, Russia. <sup>145</sup>Discipline of Psychology, Faculty of Health, University of Canberra, Canberra, Australia. <sup>146</sup>Division of Psychology & Language Sciences, University College London, London, United Kingdom. <sup>147</sup>Psychology Department, Dominican University, River Forest, United States. <sup>148</sup>Psychology Department, Dominican University, River Forest, United States. <sup>149</sup>Dynamic and Clinical Psychology, Sapienza University of Rome, Rome, Italy. <sup>150</sup>Department of Industrial Engineering and Innovation Sciences, Eindhoven University of Technology, Eindhoven, the Netherlands. <sup>151</sup>Environment Center, Charles University, Prague, Czechia. <sup>152</sup>Facultad de Psicología, Universidad del Desarrollo; Clínica Alemana de Santiago; Sociedad Chilena de Desarrollo Emocional, Concepción, Chile. <sup>153</sup>Faculty of Arts, University of Presov, Prešov, Slovakia. <sup>154</sup>Faculty of Legal and Business Studies Dr Lazar Vrkatic, Department of Psychology, Novi Sad, Serbia, Union University, Novi Sad, Serbia. <sup>155</sup>Faculty of Legal and Business Studies Dr Lazar Vrkatic, Department of Psychology, Novi Sad, Serbia, Union University, Novi Sad, Serbia. <sup>156</sup>Faculty of Management, University of Warsaw, Warsaw, Poland. <sup>157</sup>Faculty of Media and Communication, Singidunum University, Belgrade, Serbia. <sup>158</sup>Faculty of Medicine FMUC, Institute of Nuclear Sciences Applied to Health ICNAS, Coimbra Institute for Biomedical Imaging and Translational Research CIBIT, University of Coimbra, Coimbra, Portugal. <sup>159</sup>Faculty of Medicine FMUC, Institute of Nuclear Sciences Applied to Health ICNAS, Coimbra Institute for Biomedical Imaging and Translational Research CIBIT, University of Coimbra, Coimbra, Portugal. <sup>160</sup>Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, Belgrade, Serbia. <sup>161</sup>Faculty of Psychology, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand. <sup>162</sup>Faculty of Psychology, Fundación Universitaria Konrad Lorenz, Bogotá D.C., Colombia. <sup>163</sup>Department of Psychology, Federal University of Mato Grosso, Cuiabá, Brazil. <sup>164</sup>Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Mashhad, Iran. <sup>165</sup>Center for Children and Families, Department of Psychology, Florida International University, Miami, United States. <sup>166</sup>Center for Translational Behavioral Science, Florida State University, Tallahassee, United States. <sup>167</sup>Department of Psychology, Fo

Guang University, Yilan County, Taiwan. <sup>168</sup>FOM University of Applied Sciences, Hildesheim, Germany. <sup>169</sup>FOM University of Applied Sciences; Leibniz-Institut für Wissensmedien; LEAD Research Network, Eberhard Karls University, Hildesheim, Germany. <sup>170</sup>Fox School of Business, Temple University, Philadelphia, United States. <sup>171</sup>Department of Psychology, Franklin and Marshall College, Lancaster, United States. <sup>172</sup>Unaffiliated, Florence, Italy. <sup>173</sup>Unaffiliated, Samarkand, Uzbekistan. <sup>174</sup>Friedrich Schiller University Jena, Jena, Germany. <sup>175</sup>Fundación Universitaria Konrad Lorenz, Bogotá D.C., Colombia. <sup>176</sup>GC University, Lahore, Pakistan. <sup>177</sup>Department of Psychology, Georgia State University, Atlanta, United States. <sup>178</sup>Department of Experimental Psychology, Ghent University, Ghent, Belgium. <sup>179</sup>Department of Experimental Psychology, Ghent University, Ghent, Belgium. <sup>180</sup>Grenoble Ecole de Management, Grenoble, France. <sup>181</sup>Department of Anesthesiology and Reanimation, Hacettepe University, Ankara, Turkey. <sup>182</sup>Higher College of Education & Training, Ibn Tofail University, Kenitra, Morocco. <sup>183</sup>National Research University Higher School of Economics, Moscow, Russia. <sup>184</sup>Universidad del Desarrollo, Santiago, Chile. <sup>185</sup>Humboldt State University, Arcata, United States. <sup>186</sup>Department of Surgery and Cancer, Imperial College London, London, United Kingdom. <sup>187</sup>Unaffiliated, Puebla, Mexico. <sup>188</sup>Charles University, Prague, Czechia. <sup>189</sup>Unaffiliated, Ankara, Turkey. <sup>190</sup>Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Indiana, United States. <sup>191</sup>Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Indiana, United States. <sup>192</sup>Department of Psychology, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Saint Michael, United States. <sup>193</sup>Department of Psychology, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Indiana, United States. <sup>194</sup>Indiana University Pennsylvania, Indiana, United States. <sup>195</sup>INSEAD, Singapore, Singapore. <sup>196</sup>Institute for Linguistic Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences, Saint Petersburg, Russia. <sup>197</sup>Institute of Advanced Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences, Beijing Normal University at Zhuhai, Guangzhou, China. <sup>198</sup>Institute of Applied Psychology, Jagiellonian University, Kraków, Poland. <sup>199</sup>Institute of Cognitive and Evolutionary Anthropology, University of Oxford; Calleva Research Centre for Evolution and Human Sciences, Magdalen College, Oxford, United Kingdom. <sup>200</sup>Institute of European Studies and International Relations, Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences, Comenius University in Bratislava, Bratislava, Slovakia. <sup>201</sup>Institute of Nuclear Sciences Applied to Health ICNAS, Coimbra Institute for Biomedical Imaging and Translational Research CIBIT, University of Coimbra, Coimbra, Portugal. <sup>202</sup>Institute of Psychology, ELTE Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary. <sup>203</sup>Institute of Psychology, ELTE Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary. <sup>204</sup>Institute of Psychology, Jagiellonian University, Krakow, Poland. <sup>205</sup>Institute of Psychology, Jagiellonian University, Krakow, Poland. <sup>206</sup>Institute of Psychology, Leibniz University Hannover, Hannover, Germany. <sup>207</sup>Institute of Psychology, University of Hildesheim, Hildesheim, Germany. <sup>208</sup>Institute of Psychology, University of Pécs, Pécs, Hungary. <sup>209</sup>Institute of Psychology, University of Silesia in Katowice, Katowice, Poland. <sup>210</sup>Institute of Psychology, University of Wrocław, Wrocław, Poland. <sup>211</sup>Institute of Psychology, University of Wrocław, Wrocław, Poland. <sup>212</sup>Institute of Psychology, University of Wrocław, Wrocław, Poland. <sup>213</sup>Institute of Psychology, University of Wrocław; School of Anthropology & Museum Ethnography, University of Oxford, Wrocław, Poland. <sup>214</sup>Instituto de Investigaciones Psicológicas (IIPsi), Universidad Nacional de Córdoba - Conicet, Córdoba, Argentina. <sup>215</sup>Instituto de Investigaciones Psicológicas (IIPsi), Universidad Nacional de Córdoba - Conicet; Facultad de Psicología, Universidad Nacional de Córdoba., Córdoba, Argentina. <sup>216</sup>Instituto de Investigaciones Psicológicas (IIPsi), Universidad Nacional de Córdoba - Conicet, Córdoba, Argentina. <sup>217</sup>Instituto de Investigaciones Psicológicas (IIPsi), Universidad Nacional de Córdoba - Conicet, Córdoba, Argentina. <sup>218</sup>Instituto Tecnológico de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey,

Hermosillo, Mexico. <sup>219</sup>CIS-IUL, Iscte-Instituto Universitário de Lisboa, Lisboa, Portugal. <sup>220</sup>CIS-IUL, Iscte-Instituto Universitário de Lisboa, Lisboa, Portugal. <sup>221</sup>CIS-IUL, Iscte-University Institute of Lisbon; Intelligent Agents and Synthetic Characters Group (GAIPS), INESC-ID, Lisboa, Portugal. <sup>222</sup>Ithaca College, Ithaca, United States. <sup>223</sup>Jagiellonian University, Kraków, Poland. <sup>224</sup>Department of Philosophy, Institute of Psychology, Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Kraków, Poland. <sup>225</sup>Institute of Psychology, Jagiellonian University, Kraków, Poland. <sup>226</sup>Institute of Psychology, Jagiellonian University, Czestochowa, Poland. <sup>227</sup>Department of Psychology, Jose Rizal University, Pasig City, Philippines. <sup>228</sup>Department of Psychology, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Osijek, Croatia. <sup>229</sup>Department of Psychology and Psychodynamics, Karl Landsteiner University of Health Sciences, Krems an der Donau, Austria. <sup>230</sup>Department of Clinical Neuroscience, Karolinska Institutet; Department of Psychology, Stockholm University, Stockholm, Sweden. <sup>231</sup>Department of Psychological Sciences, Kent State University, Kent, United States. <sup>232</sup>Department of Psychological Sciences, Kent State University, Kent, United States. <sup>233</sup>Kingston University; Institute for Globally Distributed Open Research and Education (IGDORE), London, United Kingdom. <sup>234</sup>Centre for Economic Psychology and Decision Sciences, Kozminski University, Warsaw, Poland. <sup>235</sup>Admission Center, Kyushu University, Fukuoka, Japan. <sup>236</sup>Faculty of Arts and Science, Kyushu University, Fukuoka, Japan. <sup>237</sup>La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia. <sup>238</sup>Lazaridis School of Business and Economics, Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Ontario. <sup>239</sup>Carnegie School of Sport, Leeds Beckett University, London, United Kingdom. <sup>240</sup>Leiden University, Utrecht, Netherlands. <sup>241</sup>Leipzig University, Institute of Psychology, Heidelberg, Germany. <sup>242</sup>Linguistics Department, Stockholm University, Stockholm, Sweden. <sup>243</sup>LIP/PC2S, Université Grenoble Alpes; Department of Psychology, Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Grenoble, France. <sup>244</sup>Institute of Asian and African Studies, Lomonosov Moscow State University, Moscow, Russia. <sup>245</sup>London School of Economics and Political Science, London, England. <sup>246</sup>Department of Management, London School of Economics and Political Science, London, England. <sup>247</sup>Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Skopje, North Macedonia. <sup>248</sup>Macquarie University; University of Bristol, Sydney, Australia. <sup>249</sup>Department of Psychology, Manchester Metropolitan University, Newcastle-under-Lyme, United Kingdom. <sup>250</sup>Mannheim Centre for European Social Research, University of Mannheim, Mannheim, Germany. <sup>251</sup>Department of Psychology, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan. <sup>252</sup>Department of Psychology, Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey. <sup>253</sup>Department of Psychology, Middlebury College; Vermont Psychological Services, University of Vermont, Middlebury, United States. <sup>254</sup>Mohammed V University in Rabat, Rabat, Morocco. <sup>255</sup>Mohammed V University in Rabat, Rabat, Morocco. <sup>256</sup>Mohammed V University in Rabat, Rabat, Morocco. <sup>257</sup>Mohammed V University in Rabat, Rabat, Morocco. <sup>258</sup>Sampurna Montfort College, Bangalore, India. <sup>259</sup>Sampurna Montfort College, Bangalore, India. <sup>260</sup>Department of Psychological Counseling and Guidance, Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University, Muğla, Turkey. <sup>261</sup>Department of Psychological Counseling and Guidance, Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University, Muğla, Turkey. <sup>262</sup>Multimodal Imaging and Cognitive Control Lab, Department of Psychology, University of Oslo; Cognitive and Translational Neuroscience Cluster, Department of Psychology, University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway. <sup>263</sup>College of Science, Health, Engineering & Education, Murdoch University, Lesmurdie, Australia. <sup>264</sup>National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Athens, Greece. <sup>265</sup>Faculty of Higher Studies "Iztacala", National Autonomous University of Mexico, Mexico City, Mexico. <sup>266</sup>National Research University Higher School of Economics, Moscow, Russia. <sup>267</sup>National Research University Higher School of Economics,



Moscow, Russia. <sup>268</sup>National Research University Higher School of Economics, Moscow, Russia. <sup>269</sup>National Research University Higher School of Economics, Moscow, Russia. <sup>270</sup>National Research University Higher School of Economics, Moscow, Russia. <sup>271</sup>National Research University Higher School of Economics, Moscow, Russia. <sup>272</sup>National Research University Higher School of Economics, Moscow, Russia. <sup>273</sup>National Research University Higher School of Economics, Moscow, Russia. <sup>274</sup>Department of Cognitive Science and Psychology, New Bulgarian University, Sofia, Bulgaria. <sup>275</sup>Department of Cognitive Science and Psychology, New Bulgarian University, Sofia, Bulgaria. <sup>276</sup>Department of Applied Psychology, New York University, New York City, United States. <sup>277</sup>NHH Norwegian School of Economics, Department of Strategy and Management, Bergen, Norway. <sup>278</sup>NHH Norwegian School of Economics, Department of Strategy and Management, Bergen, Norway. <sup>279</sup>Nic Waals Institute, Lovisenberg Diaconal Hospital, Oslo, Norway. <sup>280</sup>Universidad de los Andes, Bogotá D.C., Colombia. <sup>281</sup>Norvel - Psychological Centre for Counselling and Research, Osijek, Croatia. <sup>282</sup>Department of Cognitive Science, Occidental College, Los Angeles, United States. <sup>283</sup>Oxford Internet Institute, University of Oxford, Oxford, England. <sup>284</sup>Paul Valery Montpellier University, Montpellier, France. <sup>285</sup>Prague University of Economics and Business, Prague, Czechia. <sup>286</sup>PSA Psihesko, Skopje, North Macedonia. <sup>287</sup>PSA Psihesko, Skopje, North Macedonia. <sup>288</sup>PSA Psihesko, Skopje, North Macedonia. <sup>289</sup>PSA Psihesko, Skopje, North Macedonia. <sup>290</sup>Psychology Department, DRC, University of Delhi, Delhi, India. <sup>291</sup>Psychology Department, Swansea University, Swansea, United Kingdom. <sup>292</sup>Purdue University, West Lafayette, United States. <sup>293</sup>Behavioural Science Institute, Radboud University, Nijmegen, Netherlands. <sup>294</sup>Behavioural Science Institute, Faculty of Social Sciences, Radboud University, Nijmegen, Netherlands. <sup>295</sup>Department of Psychology, Samsun University, Samsun; Department of Psychology, Dokuz Eylül University, Samsun, Turkey. <sup>296</sup>Research Methods, Assessment, and iScience, Department of Psychology, University of Konstanz, Kreuzlingen, Switzerland. <sup>297</sup>Saint Joseph's University, Philadelphia, United States. <sup>298</sup>School of Communication and Culture, Aarhus University; Department of Nordic Studies and Linguistics, University of Copenhagen, Aarhus, Denmark. <sup>299</sup>School of Creative Arts Therapies, University of Haifa; Emili Sagol creative arts therapies research center, University of Haifa, Haifa, Israel. <sup>300</sup>School of Health and Behavioural Sciences, University of the Sunshine Coast, Brisbane, Australia. <sup>301</sup>School of Psychology and Centre for Brain Research, The University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand. <sup>302</sup>School of Psychology, King's College, University of Aberdeen; School of Psychological Science, University of Western Australia, Aberdeen, United Kingdom. <sup>303</sup>School of Psychology, Nanjing Normal University, Nanjing, China. <sup>304</sup>School of Psychology, National University of Ireland, Galway, Galway, Ireland. <sup>305</sup>School of Psychology, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, United States. <sup>306</sup>School of Psychology, University of Nottingham Malaysia, Leicester, United Kingdom. <sup>307</sup>School of Psychology, University of Nottingham Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. <sup>308</sup>School of Psychology, University of Surrey, Guildford, England. <sup>309</sup>School of Social Sciences, Singapore Management University, Singapore, Singapore. <sup>310</sup>Department of Psychology, Senshu University, Tokyo, Japan. <sup>311</sup>Sewanee: The University of the South, Sewanee, United States. <sup>312</sup>Department of Psychology, Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan, Israel. <sup>313</sup>School of Social Sciences, Singapore Management University, Singapore, Singapore. <sup>314</sup>Department of Psychology, Faculty of Media and Communications, Singidunum University, Belgrade, Serbia. <sup>315</sup>Social, Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience Unit, Department of Cognition, Emotion, and Methods in Psychology, Faculty of Psychology, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria. <sup>316</sup>Social, Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience Unit, Department of Cognition, Emotion, and Methods in

Psychology, Faculty of Psychology, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria. <sup>317</sup>Department of General, Experimental, Developmental, and Health Psychology, Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski, Sofia, Bulgaria. <sup>318</sup>Department of General, Experimental, Developmental, and Health Psychology, Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski, Sofia, Bulgaria. <sup>319</sup>Department of General, Experimental, Developmental, and Health Psychology, Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski, Sofia, Bulgaria. <sup>320</sup>Department of General, Experimental, Developmental, and Health Psychology, Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski, Sofia, Bulgaria. <sup>321</sup>Department of General, Experimental, Developmental, and Health Psychology, Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski, Sofia, Bulgaria. <sup>322</sup>School of Psychological and Behavioral Sciences, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, United States. <sup>323</sup>School of Business, Stevens Institute of Technology, Hoboken, United States. <sup>324</sup>Department of Linguistics, Stockholm University, Stockholm, Sweden. <sup>325</sup>Department of Psychology, Stockholm University, Stockholm, Sweden. <sup>326</sup>Department of Psychology, Stockholm University, Stockholm, Sweden. <sup>327</sup>SWPS University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Warsaw, Poland. <sup>328</sup>SWPS University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Gdansk, Poland. <sup>329</sup>T A Pai Management Institute, Manipal, India. <sup>330</sup>Department of Art Studies, Tarbiat Modares University, Tehran, Iran. <sup>331</sup>Department of Psychology, The Education University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, Hong Kong. <sup>332</sup>The Faculty of Arts, Psychology and Theology, Åbo Akademi University, Turku, Finland. <sup>333</sup>The Institute of Psychology; Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Osijek, Dublin, Ireland. <sup>334</sup>Department of Psychology, The Pennsylvania State University, State College, United States. <sup>335</sup>Department of Psychology, The Pennsylvania State University, State College, United States. <sup>336</sup>The University of Adelaide, Adelaide, Australia. <sup>337</sup>Department of Psychology, The University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, United States. <sup>338</sup>Laboratory for Experimental Psychology, Institute of Philosophy, Department of Psychology, Faculty of Philosophy, The University of Belgrade, Beograd-Stari Grad, Serbia. <sup>339</sup>The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, Hong Kong. <sup>340</sup>Faculty of Humanities and Social Science, The University of Osijek, Osijek, Croatia. <sup>341</sup>Tilburg University, Tilburg, Netherlands. <sup>342</sup>Tilburg University, Tilburg, Netherlands. <sup>343</sup>Department of Social Psychology, Tilburg University, Tilburg, Netherlands. <sup>344</sup>Department of Psychology, UiT The Arctic University of Norway, Tromsø, Norway. <sup>345</sup>Department of Psychology, UiT The Arctic University of Norway, Tromsø, Norway. <sup>346</sup>Universidad de Sonora, Hermosillo, Mexico. <sup>347</sup>Universidad de Sonora, Hermosillo, Mexico. <sup>348</sup>Department of Psychology, Universidad de Sonora, Hermosillo, Mexico. <sup>349</sup>Universidad del Desarrollo, Santiago, Chile. <sup>350</sup>Centro de Apego y Regulación Emocional, Facultad de Psicología, Universidad Del Desarrollo, Santiago, Chile. <sup>351</sup>Programa de Psicología, Universidad del Rosario, Bogotá D.C., Colombia. <sup>352</sup>Universidad Latina de Costa Rica, San Jose, Costa Rica. <sup>353</sup>Grupo de investigación en Biogeografía y Ecología Espacial (BioGeoE<sup>2</sup>), Universidad Regional Amazónica Ikiam, Tena, Ecuador. <sup>354</sup>Universidade Cruzeiro do Sul, São Paulo Brazil. <sup>355</sup>Université de Lorraine; CNRS, BETA, Université de Strasbourg, Nancy, France. <sup>356</sup>Université de Lorraine; CNRS, BETA, Université de Strasbourg, Nancy, France. <sup>357</sup>Université de Paris, Paris, France. <sup>358</sup>Université de Paris, Paris, France. <sup>359</sup>Université de Paris, Strasbourg, France. <sup>360</sup>Université Grenoble Alpes, Grenoble, France. <sup>361</sup>Université Paul Valéry Montpellier, Granada, Spain. <sup>362</sup>University College Cork, Cork, Ireland. <sup>363</sup>Department of Experimental Psychology, University College London, London, United Kingdom. <sup>364</sup>University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, United States. <sup>365</sup>Department of Psychology, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, United States. <sup>366</sup>University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, the Netherlands. <sup>367</sup>University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, the Netherlands. <sup>368</sup>Department of Psychology, University of Amsterdam,

Amsterdam, the Netherlands. <sup>369</sup>Department of Psychology, Institute of Social Sciences, University of Bařkent, Ankara, Turkey. <sup>370</sup>Department of Psychology, Institute of Social Sciences, University of Bařkent, Āankaya, Turkey. <sup>371</sup>Laboratory for Research of Individual Differences, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, San Jose, United States. <sup>372</sup>Department of Biological and Medical Psychology, Faculty of Psychology, University of Bergen, Bergen, Norway. <sup>373</sup>University of Birmingham, Birmingham, United Kingdom. <sup>374</sup>Department of Social and Work Psychology., University of Brasılia, Brasılia, Brazil. <sup>375</sup>Institute of Psychology, University of Brasılia, Uberaba, Brazil. <sup>376</sup>Department of Molecular and Cell Biology, University of California Berkeley, Berkeley, United States. <sup>377</sup>University of Cyprus, Nicosia, Cyprus. <sup>378</sup>Department of Psychology, University of Cyprus, Nicosia, Cyprus. <sup>379</sup>Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences, University of Delaware, Newark, United States. <sup>380</sup>Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences, University of Delaware, Newark, United States. <sup>381</sup>Department of Psychology, University of Denver, Denver, Colorado. <sup>382</sup>Department of Clinical Psychology, University of Dhaka, Dhaka, Bangladesh. <sup>383</sup>University of Economics and Human Sciences in Warsaw, Warsaw, Poland. <sup>384</sup>University of Essex, Colchester, United Kingdom. <sup>385</sup>University of Essex, Colchester, United Kingdom. <sup>386</sup>University of Essex, Colchester, United Kingdom. <sup>387</sup>University of Essex, Colchester, United Kingdom. <sup>388</sup>Department of Language and Linguistics, University of Essex, Colchester, United Kingdom. <sup>389</sup>Department of Psychology, University of Essex, Colchester, United Kingdom. <sup>390</sup>Department of Psychology, University of Florida, Gainesville, United States. <sup>391</sup>Department of Psychology, University of Florida, New York City, United States. <sup>392</sup>Department of Psychology, University of Florida, Gainesville, United States. <sup>393</sup>Institute of Psychology, University of Graz, Graz, Austria. <sup>394</sup>Institute of Psychology, University of Graz, Graz, Austria. <sup>395</sup>LIP/PC2S, Universit  Grenoble Alpes, Grenoble, France. <sup>396</sup>LIP/PC2S, Universit  Grenoble Alpes, Grenoble, France. <sup>397</sup>University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, Hong Kong. <sup>398</sup>University of Kent; Department of Law and Criminology, Royal Holloway, University of London, Canterbury, United Kingdom. <sup>399</sup>Department of Psychology, Global MINDS, University of Limerick, Dhaka, Bangladesh. <sup>400</sup>University of Louisiana at Lafayette, Lafayette, Louisiana. <sup>401</sup>University of Milan-Bicocca, Milan, Italy. <sup>402</sup>Department of Psychology, University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, Saint Paul, United States. <sup>403</sup>University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, Minneapolis, United States. <sup>404</sup>Department of Psychology, University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, Minneapolis, United States. <sup>405</sup>Department of Psychology, University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, Minneapolis, United States. <sup>406</sup>Institute of Psychology, University of Opole, Opole, Poland. <sup>407</sup>Institute of Psychology, University of Opole, Opole, Poland. <sup>408</sup>University of Oxford, Oxford, United Kingdom. <sup>409</sup>Department of Philosophy, Sociology, Education and Applied Psychology, University of Padova, Zovencedo, Italy. <sup>410</sup>Institute of Psychology, University of P cs, P cs, Hungary. <sup>411</sup>Center for Psychology, University of Porto, Porto, Portugal. <sup>412</sup>Center for Psychology, University of Porto, Amarante, Portugal. <sup>413</sup>Institute of Psychology, Faculty of Arts, University of Presov, Preřov, Slovakia. <sup>414</sup>Institute of Psychology, University of Presov, Preřov, Slovakia. <sup>415</sup>School of Languages and Cultures, University of Queensland; Centro de Estudios Orientales, Pontificia Universidad Cat lica del Per , Lima, Peru. <sup>416</sup>Department of Experimental Psychology, Institute of Psychology, University of S o Paulo, S o Paulo, Brazil. <sup>417</sup>School of Architecture, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, United Kingdom. <sup>418</sup>University of Southern Indiana, Greenwood, United States. <sup>419</sup>School of Psychology and Neuroscience, University of St Andrews, Roskilde, Denmark. <sup>420</sup>University of Tabriz, Tabriz, Iran. <sup>421</sup>Department of Psychology, University of the Fraser Valley, Surrey, Canada. <sup>422</sup>University of the Philippines

Diliman, Quezon City, Philippines. <sup>423</sup>Department of Psychology, University of the Philippines Diliman, Metro Manila, Philippines. <sup>424</sup>Department of Cognition, Emotion, and Methods in Psychology, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria. <sup>425</sup>Department of Cognition, Emotion, and Methods in Psychology, School of Psychology, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria. <sup>426</sup>University of Warwick, Coventry, United Kingdom. <sup>427</sup>University of Warwick, Coventry, United Kingdom. <sup>428</sup>Department of Psychology; University of Wisconsin-Stout, White Bear Township, United States. <sup>429</sup>Institute of Psychology, University of Wrocław, Wrocław, Poland. <sup>430</sup>Institute of Psychology, University of Wrocław; Social and Legal Psychology, Johannes Gutenberg University, Wrocław, Poland. <sup>431</sup>Department of Psychology, University of Wuppertal, Witten, Germany. <sup>432</sup>Department of Psychology, University of Zadar, Zadar, Croatia. <sup>433</sup>Department of Organization and Human Resources, School of Management, Université du Québec à Montréal, Montreal, Canada. <sup>434</sup>Department of Psychology, Üsküdar University, Istanbul, Turkey. <sup>435</sup>Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, United States. <sup>436</sup>Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, United States. <sup>437</sup>Faculty of Science and Engineering, Waseda University, Tokyo, Japan. <sup>438</sup>Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, United States. <sup>439</sup>Department of Psychology and Psychotherapy, Witten/Herdecke University, Witten, Germany. <sup>440</sup>Department of Psychology and Psychotherapy, Witten/Herdecke University, Witten, Germany. <sup>441</sup>Department of Psychology, Wittenberg University, Springfield, United States. <sup>442</sup>School of Applied Psychology, ZHAW Zurich University of Applied Sciences, Winterthur, Switzerland. <sup>443</sup>Athens University of Economic and Business, Athens, Greece. <sup>444</sup>Harvard Kennedy School, Harvard University, Cambridge, United States. <sup>445</sup>University of Virginia, Denver, United States. <sup>446</sup>Department of Psychology, Ashland University, Ashland, United States. <sup>447</sup>Department of Psychology, Ashland University, Medina, United States. <sup>448</sup>Department of Psychology, Tufts University, Medford, United States. <sup>449</sup>Harrisburg University of Science and Technology, Bethlehem, United States. <sup>450</sup>Harvard Kennedy School, Harvard University, Palo Alto, United States. <sup>451</sup>Behavioural Science Institute, Radboud University, Nijmegen, Netherlands. <sup>452</sup>United States International University - Africa, Nairobi, Kenya. <sup>453</sup>Université Grenoble Alpes; Institut Universitaire de France, Grenoble, France. <sup>454</sup>LIP/PC2S, Université Grenoble Alpes, Grenoble, France. <sup>455</sup>Department of Psychology, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Madison, United States.

**Abstract**

The COVID-19 pandemic has increased negative emotions and decreased positive emotions globally. Left unchecked, these emotional changes might have a wide array of adverse impacts. To reduce negative emotions and increase positive emotions, we tested the effectiveness of reappraisal, an emotion regulation strategy which modifies how one thinks about a situation. Participants from 87 countries/regions ( $n = 21,644$ ) were randomly assigned to one of two brief reappraisal interventions (reconstrual or repurposing) or one of two control conditions (active or passive). Results revealed that both reappraisal interventions (vs. both control conditions) consistently reduced negative emotions and increased positive emotions across different measures. Reconstrual and repurposing had similar effects. Importantly, planned exploratory analyses indicated that reappraisal interventions did not reduce intentions to practice preventive health behaviours. The findings demonstrate the viability of creating scalable, low-cost interventions for use around the world to build resilience during the pandemic and beyond.

## **A multi-country test of brief reappraisal interventions on emotions during the COVID-19 pandemic**

The COVID-19 pandemic is increasing negative emotions and decreasing positive emotions around the globe<sup>1-10</sup>. Concurrently, individuals are reporting that COVID-19 is having a negative impact on their psychological functioning and mental health<sup>4, 11, 12</sup>. For example, individuals report sleeping less, consuming more alcohol or other drugs/substances, having trouble concentrating because their mind is occupied by COVID-19, and having more fights with their partner or loved ones, some escalating to domestic violence<sup>1, 9, 13</sup>.

These disturbing trends are partly caused by heightened levels of negative emotion and diminished levels of positive emotion, which have been found to contribute to a number of negative psychological, behavioural, and health consequences. These include increased risk for anxiety and depressive disorders, as well as other forms of psychopathology<sup>14</sup>; impaired social connections<sup>15</sup>; increased substance use<sup>16, 17, 18</sup>; compromised immune system functioning<sup>19, 20, 21</sup>; disturbed sleep<sup>22</sup>; increased maladaptive eating<sup>23, 24</sup>; increased aggressive behaviour<sup>25, 26</sup>; impaired learning<sup>27</sup>; worse job performance<sup>28, 29</sup>; and impaired economic decision-making<sup>30, 31</sup>.

As the COVID-19 pandemic unfolds around the world, we believe it is crucial to mitigate expected adverse outcomes by reducing negative emotions and increasing positive emotions. Such a change in emotions is central to increasing psychological resilience, a multifaceted concept that involves adaptive emotional responses in the face of adversity<sup>32, 33, 34</sup>. Reappraisal, an emotion regulation strategy that involves changing how one thinks about a situation with the goal of influencing one's emotional response<sup>35</sup>, is a promising candidate as an intervention to increase psychological resilience, due to its adaptability, simplicity, and efficiency<sup>34, 36, 37, 38</sup>. In contrast to less effective emotion regulation strategies such as suppression, reappraisal generally leads to more successful regulation ( $d = 0.45$ , 95% Confidence Interval (CI) = [0.35, 0.56] in changing emotion experience in a meta-analysis<sup>39</sup>; see caveats about interpreting effect sizes in past research in the "Sampling plan" section below). In particular, over the short term, reappraisal leads to decreased reports of negative emotion and increased reports of positive emotion<sup>40, 41, 42</sup>, as well as corresponding changes both in peripheral physiological responses<sup>43, 44, 45</sup> and central physiological responses<sup>46-53</sup>. Over the longer term, reappraisal is associated with stronger social connections<sup>54</sup>; higher academic achievement<sup>55, 56</sup>; enhanced psychological well-being<sup>57</sup>; fewer psychopathological symptoms<sup>58, 59</sup>; better cardiovascular health<sup>60, 61</sup>, and greater resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>62</sup>.

Despite these shorter-term and longer-term benefits, most people do not reappraise consistently<sup>63, 64</sup>, which has motivated efforts to teach people to use reappraisal (see reviews<sup>65, 66</sup>). For example, in the context of anxiety, reappraisal training led to reduced intrusive memories<sup>67</sup> and increased emotion regulation self-efficacy<sup>68, 69</sup>. Reappraisal training also led to long-lasting changes in the neural representation of unpleasant events<sup>70</sup>.

Although demand characteristics are always a concern when examining the effects of reappraisal (given that one is teaching people to change their thinking in order to change how they're feeling, and then asking them how they feel)<sup>71</sup>, the wide array of self-report and non-self-report outcomes<sup>39-53</sup> that show reappraisal effects across studies increases confidence that these

effects are real. It is also encouraging to note that reappraisal generally out-performs other types of emotion regulation such as suppression, even though demand characteristics appear comparable across regulation conditions<sup>39</sup>. In addition, evidence indicates that reappraisal interventions can influence emotional outcomes even in intensely challenging contexts in which people are often unmotivated to regulate their emotions<sup>72</sup>. For example, a brief reappraisal training conducted in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and replicated in the context of the Colombian conflict<sup>73</sup>, has been found to contribute to reduced intergroup anger and increased support for conciliatory political policies<sup>74</sup>.

As part of the Psychological Science Accelerator's (PSA) attempt to address pressing questions related to the psychological impact of COVID-19, the current study aimed to use reappraisal interventions to enhance psychological resilience in response to the pandemic. To maximize the impact of these interventions, this project had a global reach of large, diverse samples via the PSA's network<sup>75</sup>, and employed highly scalable methods that were translated for use around the world. In order to make stronger and clearer inferences, our design included two reappraisal interventions that were compared to two control conditions, an active control and a passive control.

For our reappraisal interventions, we examined two theoretically defined forms of reappraisal<sup>76</sup> – namely reconstrual and repurposing. Reconstrual involves changing how a situation was construed or mentally represented in a way that changes the emotional responses related to the situation. Examples of reconstrual in response to COVID-19 include: “Washing hands, avoiding touching my face, keeping a safe distance... There are simple and effective things I can do to protect myself and my loved ones from getting sick and to stop the spread of the virus” and “I know from world history that keeping calm and carrying on gets us through tough times.” Repurposing involves focusing on a potentially positive outcome that could come from the current situation in a way that changes the emotional response to it. Examples of repurposing in response to COVID-19 include: “This situation is helping us realize the importance of meaningful social connections, and helping us understand who the most important people in our lives are” and “Medical systems are now learning to deal with amazing challenges, which will make them much more resilient in the future.” For our active control condition, we asked participants to reflect on their thoughts and feelings as they unfolded. Meta-analyses have revealed that reflecting on one's thoughts and feelings produces small but reliable salutary effects ( $d = 0.07$ , 95% CI = [0.05, 0.17] in improving psychological health that includes emotional responses<sup>77, 78</sup>). Examples of reflecting in response to COVID-19 are: “I really wish we could find a vaccine soon” and “This situation is changing so fast, and I don't know how the future will develop.” By asking participants in this condition to actively use a strategy that is likely to have a positive effect, we sought to match expectancy and demand across reappraisal and active control conditions. For our passive control condition, we asked participants to respond as they naturally do, which is a commonly used passive control condition in prior research on emotion regulation (for a meta-analysis, see<sup>39</sup>).

In comparing conditions, we chose to distinguish between negative and positive emotional responses, as previous evidence suggests that the two are clearly separable<sup>79, 80</sup>. Specifically, we hypothesized that our reappraisal interventions would lead to reduced negative emotional responses (hypothesis 1) and increased positive emotional responses (hypothesis 2) compared to both control conditions combined. While both reconstrual and repurposing

strategies involve changing thinking, we hypothesised that reconstrual would lead to greater decreases in negative emotional responses than repurposing (hypothesis 3) and that repurposing would lead to greater increases in positive emotional responses than reconstrual (hypothesis 4). We theorized that reconstruing one’s situation should primarily decrease negative emotions because it typically focuses on ameliorating the problem at hand. Reconstrual is most similar to a previously studied subtype of reappraisal called reappraising emotional stimulus, which has been mainly investigated on negative emotions and has a  $d = 0.38$ , 95% CI = [0.21, 0.55] in changing emotion experience<sup>39</sup>. Repurposing one’s situation, by contrast, should primarily increase positive emotions because it usually calls to mind positive experiences. Repurposing is similar to a few previously examined types of reappraisals such as benefit finding and positive reappraisal, both of which are primarily associated with positive outcomes<sup>81, 82</sup> (the “Sampling plan” section below provides further detail).

In testing these hypotheses, we planned to employ orthogonal contrasts that make two primary comparisons, while keeping all other comparisons exploratory (Table 1 provides further detail). The first comparison contrasted both the reappraisal conditions combined with both the active control condition and the passive control condition combined for negative (hypothesis 1) and positive (hypothesis 2) emotions. The second comparison contrasted the reconstrual and repurposing interventions for negative (hypothesis 3) and positive (hypothesis 4) emotions. One attractive feature of comparisons between reappraisal conditions is that there is no reason to assume that demand or expectancies would differ across these reappraisal conditions.

**Table 1** | Contrast structure of testing hypotheses 1 - 4 (with unit-weighting)

	Active Control	Passive Control	Reconstrual	Repurposing
Contrast 1 ( <i>Hypotheses 1-2</i> )	1/2	1/2	-1/2	-1/2
Contrast 2 ( <i>Hypotheses 3-4</i> )	0	0	1/2	-1/2

One potential concern about the current design was that the emotion regulation interventions might reduce preventive health behaviours (e.g., keeping social distance and washing hands) that could potentially be motivated by negative emotions. Some research on the connection between emotions and health behaviour suggests that increased negative emotions such as fear do not seem to be a strong motivator to change one’s health behaviour<sup>83</sup>. Furthermore, positive emotions augmented by the reappraisal interventions may contribute to a greater tendency to undertake health behaviours<sup>84, 85</sup>. For example, positive emotions can lead to higher medication adherence<sup>86</sup>. To ensure that our interventions would not adversely impact any relevant health behaviours, we took two steps. First, during the instructions, we clarified that, in some cases, negative emotions such as fear and sadness may be helpful, and that it is up to each person to determine when an emotion is unhelpful or not and to downregulate only those emotions that are unhelpful. Second, in order to assess whether our training would lead to reduced vigilance, we specifically measured and examined intentions to follow stay-at-home orders and wash hands in exploratory analyses.

In addition, we conducted other exploratory analyses. Among other things, these analyses tested the impact of our reappraisal interventions on negative and positive anticipated emotions and intentions to enact potentially harmful versus beneficial behaviours associated with these



emotions (details described in the measure section below), and assessed whether the effects of our reappraisal interventions, if any, were moderated by motivation to use the given strategy<sup>71</sup>, belief in the effectiveness of the given strategy<sup>87</sup>, or demographics (gender<sup>39</sup>; socioeconomic status<sup>88, 89</sup>; or country/region<sup>90</sup> [particularly in light of the differing levels of impact of COVID-19 in any given country/region at any given point in time]).

## Results

**Final sample size and demographics.** We collected 27,989 responses from May 2020 to October 2020. After implementing preregistered exclusions (see details at <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.c.4878591.v1>) and an additional exclusion of nine duplicate IDs, our final sample included 21,644 participants from 87 countries/regions (63.41% female, 35.34% male, 0.45% other genders, 0.56% preferred not to say, and 0.24% missing responses to the gender question;  $M$  age = 31.91,  $SD$  age = 14.52; see Supplementary Table 1 for sample size per country/region and Supplementary Table 2 for sample size per month). Of the 87 countries/regions represented, 37 had over 200 participants, surpassing our 95% power criterion based on simulations in our power analysis (see the “Power analysis” section below).

We preregistered two exclusion criteria. First, as planned, we excluded participants who answered both multiple choice manipulation check questions incorrectly, and found that conditions had similar proportions of such participants (0.55%), Holm’s adjusted  $P$ s > 0.999. Second, as planned, we excluded participants who completed fewer than 50% of the questions in the study, and found that the passive control condition had fewer such participants (16.17%) than the other three conditions (23.86% in the active control condition, 24.41% in the reconstrual condition, and 23.90% in the repurposing condition), Holm’s adjusted  $P$ s < 0.001. One possible explanation for this difference is that the instructions given to participants in the passive control condition were shorter than those given in the other conditions, requiring less cognitive effort to read and less time to complete the study. Applying both exclusion criteria, the overall exclusion rate was significantly lower in the passive control condition (16.71%) than in the other three conditions (24.47% in the active control condition, 24.99% in the reconstrual condition, and 24.37% in the repurposing condition), Holm’s adjusted  $P$ s < 0.001. To rule out concerns related to differences in exclusion rates, we repeated all preregistered analyses on the full sample. Reassuringly, all patterns, statistical significance, and conclusions remained unchanged when analyses were repeated on the full sample (see Supplementary Table 3 for details).

**Preregistered analyses.** We included all 87 countries/regions in all analyses regardless of their sample sizes, except for Fig. 1, Supplementary Fig. 1, and Supplementary Fig. 2 where the 37 countries/regions with  $n \geq 200$  were analyzed separately by country/region. Effect sizes, frequentist statistics, and Bayes factors for each of our hypotheses are presented in Table 2. Raw means and standard deviations for each relevant measure are provided in Table 3. Details of analytical models are described in the Methods section.

**Table 2** | Effect sizes, frequentist statistics, and Bayes factors for each preregistered hypothesis

Row number	Hypothesis	<i>B</i> ( <i>SE</i> )	by-country/region <i>SD</i> of <i>B</i>	<i>t</i> statistic ( <i>df</i> )	Holm's adjusted <i>P</i> value	Cohen's <i>d</i> [95% CI]	$\log(BF_{10})$ [under robustness check]	verbal interpretation of $\log(BF_{10})$ <sup>133</sup>
2	Reappraisal interventions (vs. control) would reduce negative emotions in response to the photos ( <b>hypothesis 1a</b> ).	0.513 (0.021)	0.129	23.973 (52.36)	< 0.001	0.392 [0.360, 0.425]	29.41 [29.47]	
3	Reappraisal interventions (vs. control) would reduce negative state emotions ( <b>hypothesis 1b</b> ).	0.185 (0.013)	0.064	14.401 (36.39)	< 0.001	0.313 [0.270, 0.357]	15.61 [15.15]	$\log(BF) > 2.0$ represents "extreme evidence in favour of $H_A$ "
4	Reappraisal interventions (vs. control) would reduce negative emotions about the COVID-19 situation ( <b>hypothesis 1c</b> ).	0.241 (0.019)	0.082	12.570 (30.67)	< 0.001	0.239 [0.201, 0.277]	13.26 [12.92]	$2.0 > \log(BF) > 1.5$ represents "very strong evidence in favour of $H_A$ "
5	Reappraisal interventions (vs. control) would increase positive emotions in response to the photos ( <b>hypothesis 2a</b> ).	0.711 (0.025)	0.166	28.301 (59.18)	< 0.001	0.590 [0.549, 0.631]	34.65 [34.80]	$1.5 > \log(BF) > 1.0$ represents "strong evidence in favour of $H_A$ "
6	Reappraisal interventions (vs. control) would increase positive state emotions ( <b>hypothesis 2b</b> ).	0.178 (0.012)	0.064	14.263 (42.69)	< 0.001	0.326 [0.281, 0.372]	15.90 [15.42]	$1.0 > \log(BF) > 0.5$ represents "moderate evidence in favour of $H_A$ "
7	Reappraisal interventions (vs. control) would increase positive emotions about the COVID-19 situation ( <b>hypothesis 2c</b> ).	0.263 (0.018)	0.07	14.809 (31.21)	< 0.001	0.266 [0.230, 0.301]	15.48 [15.23]	$0.5 > \log(BF) > -0.5$ represents "inconclusive evidence"
8	Reconstrual would lead to greater decreases in negative emotional responses in response to the photos than repurposing ( <b>hypothesis 3a</b> ).	-0.056 (0.023)	0.107	-2.438 (33.48)	0.041	-0.043 [-0.078, -0.008]	0.25 [-0.47]	$-0.5 > \log(BF) > -1.0$ represents "moderate evidence in favour of $H_0$ "
9	Reconstrual would lead to greater decreases in negative state emotions than repurposing ( <b>hypothesis 3b</b> ).	-0.005 (0.016)	0.069	-0.321 (29.67)	0.751	-0.008 [-0.063, 0.046]	-1.09 [-1.87]	$-1.0 > \log(BF) > -1.5$ represents "strong evidence in favour of $H_0$ "
10	Reconstrual would lead to greater decreases in negative emotions about the COVID-19 situation than repurposing ( <b>hypothesis 3c</b> ).	0.068 (0.022)	0.045	3.139 (30.61)	0.011	0.067 [0.024, 0.112]	1.02 [0.32]	$-1.5 > \log(BF) > -2.0$ represents "very strong evidence in favour of $H_0$ "
11	Repurposing would lead to greater increases in positive emotions in response to the photos than reconstrual ( <b>hypothesis 4a</b> ).	0.137 (0.022)	0.113	6.176 (46.79)	< 0.001	0.114 [0.077, 0.151]	5.37 [4.84]	$-2.0 > \log(BF)$ represents "extreme evidence in favour of $H_0$ "
12	Repurposing would lead to greater increases in positive state emotions than reconstrual ( <b>hypothesis 4b</b> ).	-0.006 (0.011)	Random slopes by country/region were not included for convergence	-0.526 (20,340)	0.599	-0.011 [-0.049, 0.028]	-1.39 [-2.00]	
13	Repurposing would lead to greater increases in positive emotions about the COVID-19 situation than reconstrual ( <b>hypothesis 4c</b> ).	-0.047 (0.026)	0.109	-1.781 (37.46)	0.166	-0.047 [-0.100, 0.005]	-0.41 [-0.93]	

*Note:* We included all 87 countries/regions in the preregistered analyses regardless of their sample sizes. The signs of *B*, *t* statistic, and Cohen's *d* are adjusted such that positive (negative) values indicate being consistent (inconsistent) with the direction specified in a hypothesis. For hypotheses 1-2, *B* reflects the difference on the original 5-point scales between the average of the means of the two control conditions and the average of the means of the two reappraisal intervention conditions. For hypotheses 3-4, *B* reflects the difference on the original 5-point scales between the mean of the reconstrual condition and the mean of the repurposing condition. Degrees of freedom vary due to random slopes<sup>116</sup>. Cohen's *d* is calculated as the raw mean difference divided by the square root of the pooled variance of all the random components.

**Table 3** | Raw means and standard deviations (in parentheses) for outcomes

		<b>Reappraisal interventions</b>		<b>Control conditions</b>	
		<i>Reconstrual</i>	<i>Repurposing</i>	<i>Active control</i>	<i>Passive control</i>
		(n = 5,078)	(n = 5,421)	(n = 5,349)	(n = 5,796)
<b>Primary Outcomes</b>	Negative emotions in response to the photos	2.77 <sup>a</sup> (0.80)	2.71 <sup>b</sup> (0.77)	3.29 <sup>c</sup> (0.83)	3.19 <sup>d</sup> (0.84)
	Positive emotions in response to the photos	2.47 <sup>a</sup> (0.81)	2.62 <sup>b</sup> (0.79)	1.86 <sup>c</sup> (0.72)	1.84 <sup>d</sup> (0.73)
	Negative state emotions	2.32 <sup>a</sup> (0.90)	2.31 <sup>a</sup> (0.90)	2.52 <sup>b</sup> (0.95)	2.48 <sup>b</sup> (0.95)
	Positive state emotions	3.17 <sup>a</sup> (0.88)	3.18 <sup>a</sup> (0.87)	2.99 <sup>b</sup> (0.88)	2.98 <sup>b</sup> (0.90)
	Negative emotions about the COVID-19 situation	2.71 <sup>a</sup> (1.08)	2.77 <sup>b</sup> (1.07)	2.99 <sup>c</sup> (1.10)	2.97 <sup>c</sup> (1.10)
	Positive emotions about the COVID-19 situation	2.91 <sup>a</sup> (1.05)	2.88 <sup>a</sup> (1.04)	2.65 <sup>b</sup> (1.06)	2.59 <sup>c</sup> (1.06)
<b>Exploratory Outcomes</b>	Intention to follow stay-at-home orders stringently	5.42 <sup>a</sup> (1.79)	5.44 <sup>a</sup> (1.77)	5.41 <sup>a</sup> (1.80)	5.45 <sup>a</sup> (1.77)
	Intention to wash hands regularly for at least 20 seconds	5.82 <sup>a</sup> (1.53)	5.82 <sup>ab</sup> (1.50)	5.82 <sup>ab</sup> (1.51)	5.76 <sup>b</sup> (1.56)
	Frequency of natural response	3.49 <sup>a</sup> (1.35)	3.53 <sup>b</sup> (1.35)	4.00 <sup>c</sup> (1.17)	4.56 <sup>d</sup> (0.79)
	Frequency of using reflecting	3.92 <sup>a</sup> (1.11)	3.90 <sup>a</sup> (1.14)	4.25 <sup>b</sup> (0.97)	3.91 <sup>a</sup> (1.20)
	Frequency of using reconstrual	3.80 <sup>a</sup> (1.09)	3.73 <sup>b</sup> (1.14)	3.06 <sup>c</sup> (1.27)	2.75 <sup>d</sup> (1.34)
	Frequency of using repurposing	3.89 <sup>a</sup> (1.13)	4.15 <sup>b</sup> (1.01)	3.21 <sup>c</sup> (1.31)	3.12 <sup>d</sup> (1.34)
	Motivation to use the given strategy	6.14 <sup>a</sup> (1.12)	6.17 <sup>a</sup> (1.12)	6.26 <sup>b</sup> (1.04)	6.43 <sup>c</sup> (1.00)
	Belief in the effectiveness of the given strategy	5.00 <sup>a</sup> (1.68)	5.03 <sup>a</sup> (1.69)	4.80 <sup>b</sup> (1.76)	4.44 <sup>c</sup> (1.90)
	Global change in negative feelings	2.82 <sup>a</sup> (0.94)	2.75 <sup>b</sup> (0.93)	3.19 <sup>c</sup> (0.92)	3.17 <sup>c</sup> (0.88)
	Global change in positive feelings	3.28 <sup>a</sup> (0.91)	3.33 <sup>a</sup> (0.91)	2.92 <sup>b</sup> (0.92)	2.92 <sup>b</sup> (0.89)
	Anticipated negative emotions	2.31 <sup>a</sup> (0.90)	2.30 <sup>a</sup> (0.89)	2.45 <sup>b</sup> (0.92)	2.44 <sup>b</sup> (0.94)
	Anticipated positive emotions	3.26 <sup>a</sup> (0.88)	3.26 <sup>a</sup> (0.87)	3.13 <sup>b</sup> (0.86)	3.11 <sup>b</sup> (0.89)

*Note:* Values are displayed as raw mean (standard deviation). Sample sizes (*n*) presented in the second row reflect the numbers of participants after preregistered exclusion. Sample sizes vary by outcome because we dropped incomplete cases on an analysis-by-analysis basis. All primary outcomes were assessed on 5-point scales. The following four exploratory outcomes were assessed on 7-point scales: intention to follow stay-at-home orders stringently, intention to wash hands regularly for at least 20 seconds, motivation to use the given strategy, and belief in the effectiveness of the given strategy. The rest of the exploratory outcomes were assessed on 5-point scales. Within each row, means that do not share a superscript differ at  $P < 0.05$ , two-tailed, Holm's method for adjustment. For instance, means both marked with <sup>a</sup> do not differ significantly, but means marked with <sup>a</sup> and <sup>b</sup> differ significantly from each other.

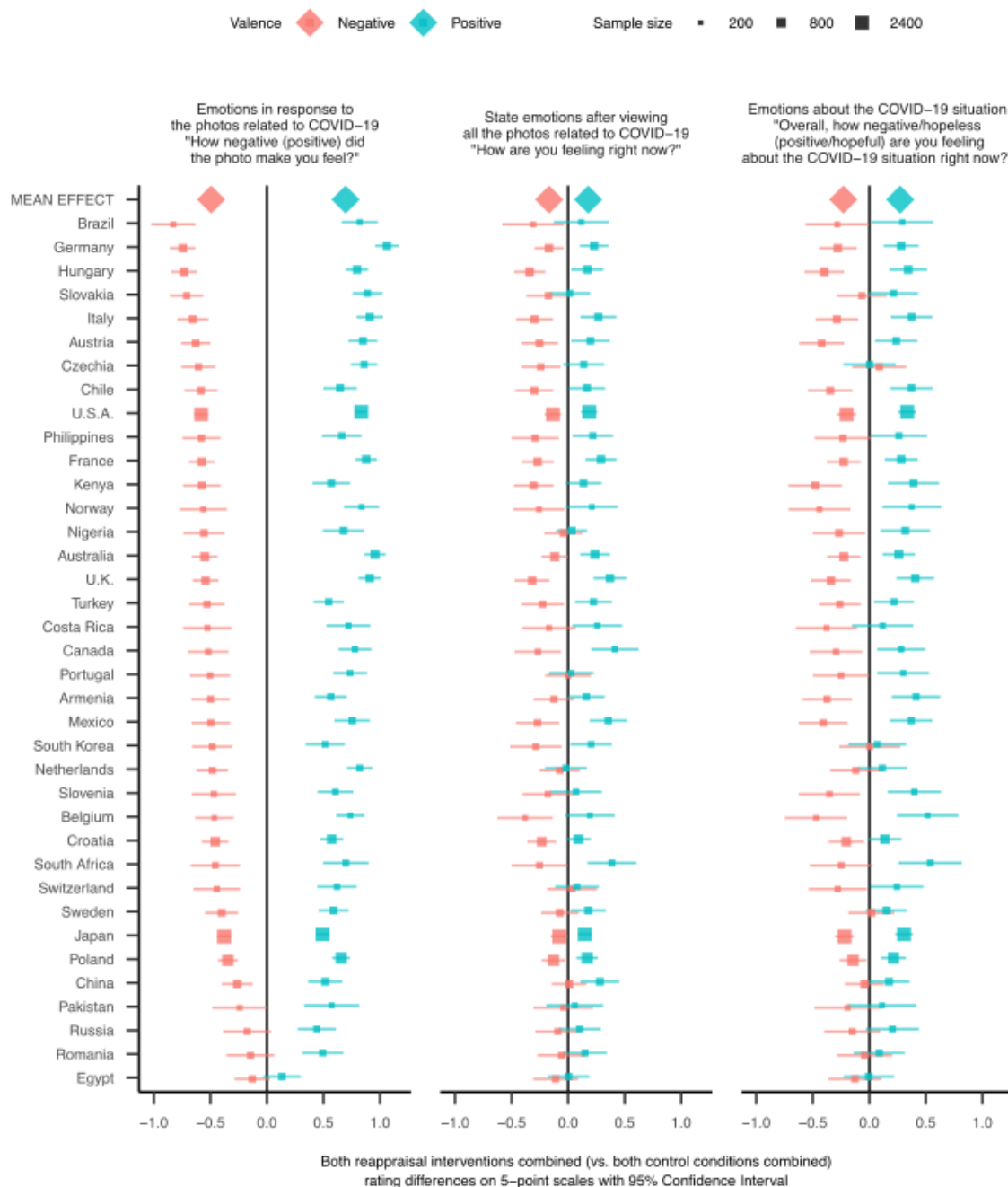
***Hypotheses regarding the shared effects of two brief reappraisal interventions.***

Consistent with the study's main hypotheses, both reappraisal interventions combined (vs. both control conditions combined) significantly decreased negative emotional responses (hypothesis 1) and significantly increased positive emotional responses (hypothesis 2) across all primary outcome measures (emotions in response to the photos, state emotions after viewing all the photos, and emotions about the COVID-19 situation; see Table 2, rows 2-7). As shown in Fig. 1, this finding was consistent across the 37 countries/regions where we had over 200 participants (although all 87 countries/regions were included in the analysis testing hypotheses regardless of their sample size, only the 37 countries/regions with  $n \geq 200$  were analyzed separately by country/region for Fig. 1). For example, in comparing participants' immediate negative emotional responses to the photos about the COVID-19 situation, data from 33 out of the 37 (89%) countries/regions showed significant effects of the reappraisal interventions in the hypothesised direction. None of the 37 countries/regions' data revealed a statistically significant result in the opposite direction.

***Hypotheses regarding the unique effects of the two reappraisal interventions.*** Results revealed little to no support for our hypotheses regarding the differences between reconstrual and repurposing, as neither was reliably better than the other at reducing negative emotions or increasing positive emotions across outcomes (see Table 2, rows 8-13; Supplementary Fig. 2). We hypothesised that reconstrual would produce greater decreases in negative emotional responses than repurposing (hypothesis 3), and data revealed supportive evidence for only one outcome (negative emotions about the COVID-19 situation; see Table 2, row 10) out of the three measures of negative emotions. The other two negative emotion outcome measures did not support that hypothesis. One outcome (negative emotions in response to the photos; see Table 2, row 8) revealed that repurposing had significantly stronger effects in decreasing negative emotional responses than reconstrual, whereas the Bayes factor indicated inconclusive evidence. Another outcome (negative state emotions; see Table 2, row 9) revealed no significant difference between types of reappraisal, and the Bayes factor indicated strong evidence in favour of the null hypothesis.

We also hypothesised that repurposing would produce greater increases in positive emotional responses than reconstrual (hypothesis 4), and data revealed supportive evidence for only one outcome (positive emotions in response to the photos; see Table 2, row 11) out of the three measures of positive emotions. The other two outcome measures of positive emotions revealed no significant differences between the two reappraisal conditions. The Bayes factors indicated strong evidence in favour of the null hypothesis for one outcome (positive state emotions; see Table 2, row 12) and inconclusive evidence for another outcome (positive emotions about the COVID-19 situation; see Table 2, row 13). Overall, there were no consistent differences across outcomes between reconstrual and repurposing in reducing negative emotions or increasing positive emotions in the current experimental context. We examined potential reasons for these findings in the exploratory analyses and in the discussion section.

**Fig. 1 | Effect sizes of both reappraisal interventions combined (vs. both control conditions combined) on primary outcomes by country/region.** In almost all of the 37 countries/regions where we had over 200 participants, both reappraisal interventions combined (vs. both control conditions combined) decreased negative emotional responses and increased positive emotional responses for primary outcome measures (emotions in response to the photos, state emotions after viewing all the photos, and emotions about the COVID-19 situation). Effect sizes are raw mean differences on 5-point scales without adjusting for covariates. Confidence intervals are based on the t distribution. Countries/regions are ordered by decreasing effect sizes of negative emotions in response to the photos, and larger dots reflect larger samples. (Supplementary Fig. 1 presents the countries/regions in alphabetical order.)



**Exploratory analyses.** In order to better understand the impact of the reappraisal interventions, we conducted four sets of exploratory analyses. First, we examined pairwise comparisons between conditions (each of the reappraisal conditions vs. each of the control conditions, and the active control condition vs. the passive control condition) for our primary outcomes (emotions in response to the photos, state emotions after viewing all the photos, and emotions about the COVID-19 situation). Second, we assessed the effect of reappraisal interventions on four exploratory outcomes (behavioural intentions to practice preventive health behaviours, participants' engagement with emotion regulation strategies, global change in emotions, and anticipated emotions). Third, we assessed four sets of potential moderators of reappraisal interventions' effects (motivation to use the given strategy<sup>71</sup>, belief in the effectiveness of the given strategy<sup>87</sup>, demographics<sup>39, 88, 89, 90</sup>, and lockdown status). Lastly, we contextualised reappraisal interventions' effect sizes on negative emotions by comparing them to effect sizes of lockdown status and self-isolation due to symptoms. Details of analytical models are reported in Supplementary Information (Supplementary Tables 4, 5).

**Pairwise comparisons of conditions on primary outcomes.** In the first set of exploratory analyses, we examined the extent to which each of the reappraisal conditions differed from each of the control conditions for our primary outcomes (emotions in response to the photos, state emotions after viewing all the photos, and emotions about the COVID-19 situation). Pairwise comparisons for all primary outcomes produced results consistent with the pattern of evidence for hypothesis 1 and hypothesis 2. Each of the repurposing and reconstrual conditions (vs. each of the control conditions) significantly decreased negative emotional responses and significantly increased positive emotional responses ( $P$ s < 0.001; see Table 3).

We also examined whether the active and passive control conditions differed from each other at the level of pairwise comparisons. Among the three primary outcome measures of negative emotional responses, one was significantly higher in the active control condition than in the passive control condition (negative emotions in response to the photos:  $B = 0.091$ ,  $SE = 0.015$ ,  $t(20,740) = 6.192$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ,  $d = 0.070$ , 95% CI = [0.048, 0.093]), while the other two showed no significant differences (negative state emotions:  $B = 0.022$ ,  $SE = 0.011$ ,  $t(20,400) = 1.933$ ,  $P = 0.053$ ,  $d = 0.037$ , 95% CI = [-0.001, 0.075]; negative emotions about the COVID-19 situation:  $B = 0.005$ ,  $SE = 0.022$ ,  $t(26.01) = 0.221$ ,  $P = 0.827$ ,  $d = 0.005$ , 95% CI = [-0.040, 0.047]). Among the three primary outcome measures of positive emotional responses, two were significantly higher in the active control condition than in the passive control condition (positive emotions in response to the photos:  $B = 0.039$ ,  $SE = 0.013$ ,  $t(20,740) = 2.918$ ,  $P = 0.004$ ,  $d = 0.033$ , 95% CI = [0.011, 0.054]; positive emotions about the COVID-19 situation:  $B = 0.053$ ,  $SE = 0.019$ ,  $t(233.7) = 2.805$ ,  $P = 0.005$ ,  $d = 0.053$ , 95% CI = [0.015, 0.091]), while one showed no significant differences (positive state emotions:  $B = 0.009$ ,  $SE = 0.010$ ,  $t(20,350) = 0.858$ ,  $P = 0.391$ ,  $d = 0.017$ , 95% CI = [-0.021, 0.054]). Thus, effects produced by the active control condition versus the passive control condition differed infrequently. When they did differ, differences were small in magnitude, inconsistent in direction, and slightly smaller in effect size than was suggested by previous meta-analyses ( $d = 0.07$ , 95% CI = [0.05, 0.17]<sup>77</sup>).

**Reappraisal interventions' effects on four exploratory outcomes.** Descriptive statistics and pairwise comparisons for exploratory outcomes can be found in Table 3. Below we focus on the contrast between the two reappraisal interventions combined and the two control conditions combined.

*Behavioural intentions to practice preventive health behaviours.* To address the concern that reappraisal interventions might reduce preventive health behaviours (by reducing negative emotions such as fear), we asked about participants' behavioural intentions to follow stay-at-home orders stringently and to wash their hands regularly for at least 20 seconds the following week. We found that reappraisal interventions (vs. both control conditions combined) did not significantly change intentions to follow stay-at-home orders ( $B = 0.009$ ,  $SE = 0.024$ ,  $t(15.04) = 0.38$ ,  $P = 0.709$ ,  $d = 0.005$ , 95% CI = [-0.023, 0.032]) or to wash hands ( $B = 0.034$ ,  $SE = 0.020$ ,  $t(20,740) = 1.69$ ,  $P = 0.091$ ,  $d = 0.022$ , 95% CI = [-0.004, 0.048]). Pairwise comparisons revealed that the only significant difference was that participants in the reconstrual condition reported higher intentions to wash their hands than those in the passive control condition ( $B = 0.077$ ,  $SE = 0.028$ ,  $t(20,740) = 2.714$ , Holm's adjusted  $P = 0.040$ ,  $d = 0.051$ , 95% CI = [0.014, 0.087]). These results thus provide preliminary evidence that reappraisal interventions did not significantly reduce intentions to practice preventive health behaviours.

*Participants' engagement with emotion regulation strategies.* To better understand participants' engagement with emotion regulation strategies when viewing the photos related to COVID-19, we examined participants' self-reported frequency of using different strategies when viewing the photos, motivation to use their given strategy, and belief in the effectiveness of their given strategy.

Providing confidence in the effectiveness of the manipulation, we found that participants in each of the four conditions reported using the strategy instructed in their condition more frequently than using the other strategies (see Table 3). It is noteworthy that participants in the two reappraisal conditions reported using both reconstrual and repurposing more frequently than those in either control conditions rather than primarily using only the form of reappraisal instructed in their condition. This finding may help explain the lack of differences between the two reappraisal conditions on our primary outcomes.

Next, we examined participants' motivation to follow the given instructions, as well as participants' belief that the given strategy could influence their emotions. We found that participants in the two reappraisal interventions (vs. both control conditions combined) reported being significantly less motivated to follow their given instructions while viewing the photos ( $B = -0.192$ ,  $SE = 0.016$ ,  $t(20.87) = -11.62$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ,  $d = -0.183$ , 95% CI = [-0.215, -0.152]), but reported significantly greater belief in the effectiveness of their given strategy ( $B = 0.420$ ,  $SE = 0.053$ ,  $t(52.05) = 7.97$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ,  $d = 0.233$ , 95% CI = [0.175, 0.290]). Thus, the reappraisal conditions were effective in changing emotions despite the fact that participants in reappraisal conditions reported being less motivated to follow the instructions than participants in the control conditions.

*Global change of emotions.* At the end of the study, we asked participants how they felt compared to the beginning of the study. We found that reappraisal interventions (vs. both control conditions combined) significantly reduced global negative feelings ( $B = -0.397$ ,  $SE = 0.026$ ,  $t(45.29) = 15.30$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ,  $d = -0.432$ , 95% CI = [-0.489, -0.377]) and significantly increased global positive feelings ( $B = 0.378$ ,  $SE = 0.023$ ,  $t(45.49) = 16.75$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ,  $d = 0.423$ , 95% CI = [0.373, 0.473]). These findings suggest that the effects are not specific to items in the immediate proximity of the manipulations.

*Anticipated emotions.* To gain insight into the potential longer-term effects of reappraisal interventions, we asked participants how they anticipated they would feel the following week. We found that reappraisal interventions (vs. both control conditions combined) significantly reduced negative anticipated emotions ( $B = -0.125$ ,  $SE = 0.012$ ,  $t(41.99) = -10.27$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ,  $d = -0.205$ , 95% CI = [-0.245, -0.166]) and significantly increased positive anticipated emotions ( $B = 0.125$ ,  $SE = 0.008$ ,  $t(13.07) = 15.58$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ,  $d = 0.227$ , 95% CI = [0.197, 0.256]). These findings suggest that participants anticipated that reappraisal strategies would be useful in improving their emotional well-being in the future.

*Exploratory moderators of intervention effects.* Prior research suggests that emotion regulation interventions lead to better results when the participants are: motivated to regulate their emotions<sup>71</sup>, led to believe in the effectiveness of regulation<sup>87</sup>, female (vs. male)<sup>39</sup>, from lower (vs. higher) socioeconomic status<sup>88, 89</sup>, and from Western (vs. Eastern) cultures<sup>90</sup>. We examined these as well as lockdown status (as a proxy for differing levels of impact of COVID-19) as potential moderators on our primary outcomes (emotions in response to the photos, state emotions after viewing all the photos, and emotions about the COVID-19 situation).

Controlling for baseline emotions, results of multilevel models revealed that two of the variables moderated intervention effects across all six primary outcomes. Specifically, the higher the scores on motivation to use the given strategy and on belief in the effectiveness of the given strategy were, the more effective the interventions were (Supplementary Fig. 3, 4, Supplementary Tables 6, 7). Two variables (gender and employment status) moderated intervention effects on four of the six primary outcomes: Females (versus males) and individuals who had no employment/no income (versus employment/with income or versus no employment/with income) showed stronger effects of the intervention (Supplementary Tables 9, 10). One variable moderated intervention effects on two of the six outcomes: the higher a country/region scored on Hofstede's<sup>91</sup> index of individualism, the more effective the intervention was in increasing positive emotions in response to the photos and increasing positive emotions about the COVID-19 situation among participants from that country/region (Supplementary Table 8). Subjective socioeconomic status, education level, and lockdown status significantly moderated no more than one of the six outcomes, which would unlikely hold after correction for multiple comparisons (Supplementary Tables 11-13). We report full, detailed results in Supplementary Information.

*Contextualising reappraisal interventions' effect sizes.* To facilitate interpretation of reappraisal effect sizes, it is helpful to compare them to effect sizes of other factors that may have also contributed to differences in participants' emotions. One such candidate for comparison is differences in emotional experience as a function of lockdown status and of self-isolation due to symptoms. Assuming that lockdown or self-isolation due to symptoms impacted participants' emotions, emotional changes caused by these factors could be compared to the ones caused by our interventions in order to get a sense of the impact of our intervention.

With negative state emotions as the outcome variable, we examined lockdown status and self-isolation due to symptoms, respectively, as a fixed variable in two separate multilevel models with random by-country slopes and random by-country intercepts to estimate the pure effect size of each variable (as lockdown status and self-isolation due to symptoms were correlated, entering both variables simultaneously in the same model may generate biased



estimates). We found that participants whose areas were in full lockdown reported more negative state emotions than participants whose areas were not in lockdown ( $B = 0.154$ ,  $SE = 0.040$ ,  $t(37.56) = 3.812$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ,  $d = 0.159$ , 95% CI = [0.075, 0.243]), and participants whose areas were in partial lockdown reported more negative state emotions than participants whose areas were not in lockdown ( $B = 0.094$ ,  $SE = 0.027$ ,  $t(27.25) = 3.531$ ,  $P = 0.001$ ,  $d = 0.097$ , 95% CI = [0.041, 0.155]). We also found that participants who were self-isolating due to flu-like or cold-like symptoms reported more negative state emotions than participants who were not self-isolating due to flu-like or cold-like symptoms ( $B = 0.175$ ,  $SE = 0.044$ ,  $t(25.83) = 3.981$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ,  $d = 0.183$ , 95% CI = [0.092, 0.283]). As shown in Table 2 for hypothesis 1b, participants who were in the two reappraisal conditions reported less negative state emotions than participants who were in the two control conditions ( $B = 0.185$ ,  $SE = 0.013$ ,  $t(36.39) = 14.401$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ,  $d = 0.313$ , 95% CI = [0.270, 0.357]). In addition, the amount of variance explained by fixed effects in a model with only lockdown status as a fixed variable is marginal  $R^2 = 0.003^{92}$ . The amount of variance explained by fixed effects in a model with only self-isolation due to symptoms as a fixed variable is marginal  $R^2 = 0.001^{92}$ . The amount of variance explained by fixed effects in a model with only the contrast between the two reappraisal conditions and the two control conditions as the fixed variable is marginal  $R^2 = 0.013^{92}$ . Across different measures of effect size, it is notable that the effects of reappraisal interventions on state negative emotions were of similar or even larger magnitude than the effects of lockdown status or self-isolation due to symptoms. This comparison suggests that reappraisal interventions could help to alleviate the emotional toll caused by lockdown and self-isolation. Thus, we believe that the effects of reappraisal interventions are not only statistically significant but also practically meaningful.

## Discussion

The current study had two main goals. The first was to examine the shared effects of two brief reappraisal interventions (vs. both passive and active control conditions) on negative and positive emotions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and to determine whether these effects were similar or different across countries/regions and COVID-19 situations. The second goal was to examine the potentially unique effects of the two reappraisal interventions—reconstrual and repurposing—on negative and positive emotions.

Regarding the first goal, we predicted and found that both reappraisal interventions (vs. both control conditions combined) consistently decreased negative emotional responses (hypothesis 1) and consistently increased positive emotional responses (hypothesis 2) across all primary outcome measures: immediate emotions in response to each photo about the COVID-19 situation, state emotions after viewing all the photos about the COVID-19 situation, and overall emotions about the COVID-19 situation. Exploratory analyses suggested that both reappraisal interventions also improved participants' reported emotions compared to the beginning of the study and the emotions they anticipated feeling in the future.

Further exploratory analyses suggested that despite substantial local variations in how severe the pandemic was at the time data were collected and cultural differences in how people understand and respond to emotions<sup>90, 93</sup>, the intervention effects appeared in almost all of the countries/regions we studied. For example, in comparing participants' immediate negative emotional responses to the photos about the COVID-19 situation, 33 out of the 37 (89%) countries/regions with high statistical power (over 200 participants) showed statistically

significant effects of reappraisal interventions. Although reappraisal interventions tended to have larger effects among females (versus males), and among unemployed individuals without income, the effects were largely unqualified by education level, subjective socioeconomic status, and whether a participant's country/region was under lockdown.

Regarding the second goal, we predicted that reconstrual would be more effective at reducing negative emotions than repurposing (hypothesis 3), but repurposing would be more effective at increasing positive emotions than reconstrual (hypothesis 4). We found little to no support for these hypotheses, as neither was reliably better than the other at reducing negative emotions or increasing positive emotions across outcomes. The finding that the two forms of reappraisal were similarly effective at regulating emotions in the context of COVID-19 is consistent with the idea that the pandemic offers a wide array of affordances both for construing emotional situations in different ways, thus enabling reconstrual, and for evaluating these situations in light of different goals, thus enabling repurposing<sup>76</sup>. This implies that it may be beneficial to combine both strategies, a hypothesis that future studies can be designed to test. It also remains to be investigated whether reconstrual and repurposing offer similarly comparable benefits in other contexts.

The comparable effectiveness of reconstrual and repurposing in this context raises interesting questions about these two forms of reappraisal. We found that even though participants learned only one form of reappraisal, they reported using both strategies more often than in either control condition. This overlap might have stemmed from insufficient differentiation between the reappraisal instructions used in this study. It may also mean that the distinction between repurposing and reconstrual, although useful theoretically, is not readily accessible to lay people. Alternatively, this overlap may have stemmed from reconstrual and repurposing being mutually associated to a degree that being instructed to use one strategy primes the other strategy. Future research is needed to more directly investigate these possibilities.

After assessing results related to the primary goals, an important question was whether reducing negative emotions and increasing positive emotions in response to the pandemic might inadvertently come at the cost of decreasing intentions to engage in preventive health behaviour (for review, see<sup>94</sup>). Reassuringly, the reappraisal interventions improved emotions without significantly reducing intentions to practice preventive health behaviours. This is consistent with recent findings that there are many paths to motivate preventive health behaviours during the COVID-19 pandemic without inducing negative emotions<sup>95-98</sup>.

Our results highlight the benefits of applying reappraisal interventions at scale to increase psychological resilience and to mitigate the adverse impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic—benefits that could potentially be applied in other contexts that elicit negative emotions. Importantly, the effects of the intervention were not meager: The extent to which emotions were changed by our reappraisal interventions was comparable in magnitude to the extent to which emotions differed between people who faced extreme hardships (lockdowns or symptom-induced isolations) and people who experienced neither of these hardships. Thus, contextualising the effect sizes of reappraisal interventions in this manner suggests that the interventions are practically meaningful. This practical meaning matters in light of findings that people on average do not appear to fully recover their emotional well-being even after six months into the COVID-

19 pandemic<sup>99</sup>, that stress and depression can impair vaccine efficacy<sup>100</sup>, and that negative emotions predispose morbidity and mortality via increases in substance use and other risky behaviours<sup>101</sup>. Essential workers, nurses and doctors, students, patients, and many other populations whose work and life are highly affected by the pandemic could potentially benefit from reappraisal interventions, although more research is needed to establish the effectiveness of reappraisal for groups facing distinct challenges. Because these interventions are inexpensive, brief, and scalable, they could be implemented through a variety of media and communication mechanisms, such as advertising campaigns<sup>102</sup>, speeches, courses, apps, and mobile games<sup>103</sup>.

Our results also have important implications for the science of emotion (for review, see<sup>104</sup>) and for emotion regulation (for review, see<sup>35,39</sup>), in particular. Despite the fact that reappraisal is one of the most researched topics in psychology<sup>35</sup>, this study is the largest cross-cultural investigation of reappraisal that has been conducted to date, drawing diverse samples from well beyond the Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic (WEIRD) societies<sup>105</sup> that have been heavily represented to date in social science. Thus, the findings reveal the generalizability of reappraisal effects across many countries/regions even in the context of significant, protracted stressors. The present study also extends understanding of how contextual moderators influence reappraisal processes (e.g., individualism, lockdown status, and demographics) while deepening understanding of distinct forms of reappraisal (i.e., comparing them vis-à-vis multiple outcomes). Finally, our study provides a rich dataset for examining many other questions related to emotions, emotion regulation, and cultural differences. We look forward to seeing what other insights can be generated from this dataset.

Despite the encouraging findings, several limitations should be noted. One limitation is the use of convenience sampling and a limited set of photos. Our sample was not nationally representative within each country/region, and it appeared to over-represent females, younger people, and people with internet access. The photos used in the study, although carefully chosen, might not represent local situations for different groups of participants. Future research is needed to assess generalizability using nationally representative samples and more personally emotionally evocative stimuli. A second limitation is that we cannot fully rule out the influence of demand characteristics and expectancies. Although we attempted to match demand characteristics and expectancies in the reappraisal conditions using our active control condition, we did not quantify the extent to which they were comparable, and we measured perceived strategy effectiveness after participants had used the strategies, which is different from expectancies formed upon reading the instructions but before using the strategies. Future research should assess the influence of demand characteristics and expectancies. A third limitation relates to the fact that the current study examined only the immediate and proximal effects of the interventions. Future research employing longitudinal designs is needed to examine whether the effects persist over time and at what intervals individuals might optimally engage in reappraisal. A fourth limitation is that the current study examined only a limited number of outcomes via self-report measures. More comprehensive evaluations, including assessments of actual behaviours (rather than intentions) and health outcomes, are necessary to determine whether there are any additional benefits or unintended consequences of the interventions. Lastly, before implementing reappraisal interventions for practice, more research is needed to better evaluate the intervention (e.g., via formal cost-benefit analysis and/or using the Reach, Efficacy, Adoption, Implementation, and Maintenance framework<sup>106,107</sup>).

In conclusion, our findings demonstrated that two brief reappraisal interventions had robust and generalizable effects in reducing negative emotions and increasing positive emotions during the COVID-19 pandemic across countries/regions, without reducing intentions to practice preventive health behaviours. We hope this study will inform efforts to create scalable interventions for use around the world to build resilience during the pandemic and beyond.

## Methods

### Ethics information and participants

This study is one of three studies in the PSA COVID-19 Rapid Project. The other two studies investigated the effects of loss and gain message framing and self-determination theory-guided message framing, respectively. The other two studies are reported elsewhere. The study was conducted online, and participants clicked a single data collection link that led to either the current study or the other two studies in the COVID-19 Rapid Project. A comprehensive summary of the PSA COVID-19 Rapid Project—including descriptions of the study selection procedure, the other selected studies, the internal peer review process, and implementation plans—can be found at <https://psyarxiv.com/x976j/>.

Participants were recruited by the PSA network. The PSA recruited 186 member labs from 55 countries/regions speaking 42 languages. Of the 27,989 participants recruited to complete the current study (not counting participants for the other two studies in the PSA COVID-19 Rapid Project), 4,050 of them were recruited through semi-representative paneling (based on sex, age, and sometimes ethnicity) from the following countries/regions: Egypt, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Mexico, United States, Austria, Romania, Russia, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, China, Japan, and South Korea (270 participants per country/region). The remaining participants were recruited through the research groups by convenience sampling. Each research group obtained approval from their local Ethics Committee or IRB to conduct the study, explicitly indicated that their institution did not require approval for the researchers to conduct this type of task, or explicitly indicated that the current study was covered by a pre-existing approval. Although the specifics of the consent procedure differed across research groups, all participants provided informed consent. The style and the amount of compensation varied with local conventions (a common practice in PSA). More information regarding participant compensation and sample size can be found at <https://psyarxiv.com/x976j/>.

### Procedure

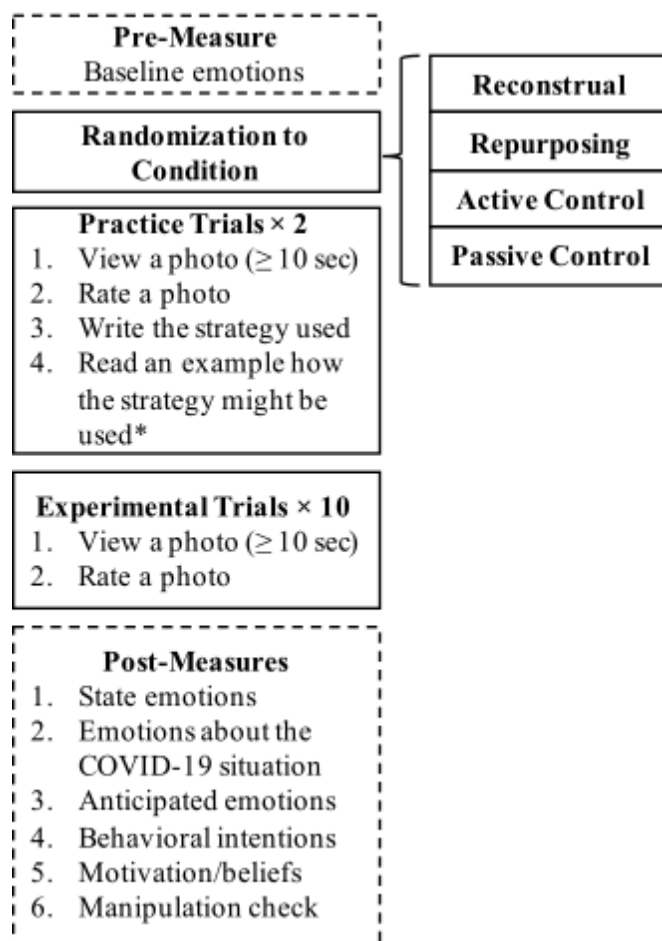
An overview of the experiment is depicted in Fig. 2.

***Pre-measure.*** Before reading the instructions, participants reported emotions they felt in the moment (details for all study measures are described in the next section). These ratings constituted a baseline emotional measure.

***Randomization to condition.*** Following the pre-measure, participants were randomly assigned to one of four between-subjects experimental conditions: two reappraisal intervention conditions (reconstrual and repurposing), one active control condition, and one passive control condition. Because the study was conducted online, data collection was performed blind to the conditions of the participants. The content of the instructions in each condition differed, but the

lengths were matched except for the passive control condition, which had a shorter set of instructions.

**Fig. 2 | Overview of the experiment.** \*Participants in the passive control condition did not have the fourth step in the practice trials.



Participants in the two reappraisal intervention conditions (reconstrual and repurposing) and the active control condition received the following instructions: “In this study, we will show you photographs related to COVID-19 from various news sources. Our goal is to better understand how people respond to such photos, which may include feelings of fear, anger, and sadness. Sometimes emotions like these are helpful. At other times, however, these emotions can be unhelpful to us. Researchers have found that when people think their emotions are unhelpful, they can take steps to influence their emotions.”

In the reconstrual condition, participants were told that (emphasis in original) “One strategy that some people find helpful for influencing their emotions is *rethinking*. This strategy involves changing one’s thinking in order to change one’s emotions. This strategy is based on the insight that **different ways of interpreting or thinking about any situation can lead to different emotions**. This means that finding new ways of thinking about a situation can change how you feel about the situation. For example, consider someone who stays at home under

lockdown due to COVID-19 and is feeling anxious, sad, or angry. In this case, *rethinking* might involve realizing that the situation is only temporary because dedicated people across the world are working hard to find a vaccine.” Participants were then given four examples of how rethinking might be employed for the COVID-19 situation (Example 1: “I know from world history that keeping calm and carrying on gets us through tough times.” Example 2: “Scientists across the world are working hard to find treatment and vaccines. Throughout history, humans have been resourceful in finding solutions to new challenges.” Example 3: “Washing hands, avoiding touching my face, keeping a safe distance... There are simple and effective things I can do to protect myself and my loved ones from getting sick and to stop the spread of the virus.” Example 4: “In the past, people have overcome many challenges that seemed overwhelming at the time, and we will overcome COVID-19 related challenges too.”).

In the repurposing condition, participants were told that (emphasis in original) “One strategy that some people find helpful for influencing their emotions is *refocusing*. This strategy involves changing one’s thinking in order to change one’s emotions. This strategy is based on the insight that **finding something good in even the most challenging situations can lead to different emotional responses**. This means that refocusing on whatever good aspects may be found in a situation can change how you feel about the situation. For example, consider someone who stays at home under lockdown due to COVID-19 and is feeling anxious, sad, or angry. In this case, *refocusing* might involve realizing that staying at home gives them time to do things that they may not have been able to do before, like reading, painting, and spending time with family.” Participants were then given four examples of how refocusing might be employed for the COVID-19 situation (Example 1: “This situation is helping us realize the importance of meaningful social connections, and helping us understand who the most important people in our lives are.” Example 2: “Medical systems are now learning to deal with amazing challenges, which will make them much more resilient in the future.” Example 3: “Even though we are physically apart, we are finding creative ways to stay connected and our hearts are more connected than ever.” Example 4: “I have been inspired by the way that frontline health care workers have responded with resilience, generosity, determination, and deep commitment.”).

In the active control condition, participants were asked to reflect on their emotions as they unfold. This condition is inspired by the literature on expressive writing and experimental disclosure, which shows that asking people to reflect about their very deepest thoughts and feelings can improve psychological health<sup>77, 78</sup>. By having an active control condition, which was likely to lead to some benefit to participants, we can make stronger inferences regarding the impact of reappraisal interventions relative to a potentially useful strategy designed to equate demand characteristics and expectancies. In the instructions, participants were told that (emphasis in original) “One strategy that some people find helpful for influencing their emotions is *reflecting*. This strategy involves allowing oneself to freely experience and reflect on one’s thoughts and feelings. This strategy is based on the insight that **reflecting on your thoughts and feelings about any situation can lead to different emotional responses**. This means that exploring your thoughts and emotions can change how you feel about the situation. For example, consider someone who stays at home under lockdown due to COVID-19 and is feeling anxious, sad, or angry. In this case, *reflecting* might involve allowing oneself to experience these feelings and be fully immersed in the lockdown experience, reflecting on the meaning this situation has for the person and their loved ones.” Participants were then given four examples of how reflecting might be employed for the COVID-19 situation (Example 1: “This situation is

changing so fast, and I don't know how the future will develop." Example 2: "People are struggling to cope with these unprecedented and overwhelming challenges." Example 3: "Someone I love might get sick and there might not even be ventilators to help them." Example 4: "I really wish we could find a vaccine soon.").

To reinforce what they had learned, participants in the two reappraisal conditions and the active control condition were then asked to summarize, in 1-2 sentences, the strategy they had just learned. This text response was collected only for exploratory purposes and was not used in confirmatory analysis.

In the passive control condition, participants received the following instructions: "In this study, we will show you photographs related to COVID-19 from various news sources. Our goal is to better understand how people respond to such photos, which may include feelings of fear, anger, and sadness. As you view these photographs, please respond as you naturally would." Having a passive control condition allowed us to have clear interpretations in the case that we found no significant difference in our contrast between both the reappraisal conditions combined and both the control conditions combined. If this was the case, we would have compared each reappraisal condition against the passive control condition and compared the active control condition against the passive control condition in the exploratory analysis to determine whether each strategy had a non-zero impact relative to individuals' natural responses.

**Practice trials.** After receiving instructions by condition, participants were asked to practice the strategy in two trials designed to facilitate their understanding of the strategy. The practice trials included providing ratings and written responses to two photographs (per prior research<sup>108</sup>). The photographs in this study were selected by our research team from major media news sources (CNN, New York Times, The Guardian, and Reuters) and present situations in Asia, Europe, and North America. They were rated by our team to evoke either sadness or anxiety above the midpoint on a 7-point scale ranging from "not at all" to "very" and to score close to or above the midpoint on a 7-point scale ranging from "not at all" to "very" on the question "How much do you recommend using this picture?" (photographs available at <https://osf.io/8bjnz/>). In each practice trial, participants saw a negative photo related to the COVID-19 situation (e.g., an exhausted doctor, medical workers in hazmat suits) and a reminder above the photo to use the strategy that was presented to them. In the reconstruction condition, the reminder was "As you view the photo, draw on the examples we gave you earlier in order to **interpret the situation in a new way.**" In the repurposing condition, the reminder was "As you view the photo, draw on the examples we gave you earlier in order to **focus on any good you can find in the situation.**" In the active control condition, the reminder was "As you view the photo, draw on the examples we gave you earlier in order to **reflect on your thoughts and feelings.**" In the passive control condition, the reminder was "As you view the photo, **respond as you naturally would.**" After ten seconds, participants were asked to rate their emotions in response to the photo using two corresponding unipolar 5-point Likert scales, one for negative emotion and one for positive emotion. These ratings were designed to familiarize participants with the task, and were not used in the confirmatory analyses. After each photo, participants in the two reappraisal conditions and the active control condition were asked to write (in text) how they applied the strategy while observing the photo. Participants in the passive control condition were asked to write (in text) anything that comes naturally to their mind about the photo. The text response was also collected only for exploratory purposes and was not used in the

confirmatory analysis. Participants in the two reappraisal conditions and the active control condition were then given one example of how the photo might be viewed (examples varied by condition). Note that the two reappraisal conditions and the active control condition were designed to be matched for demand characteristics and expectancy.

**Experimental trials.** Following the two practice trials, participants viewed additional photos related to the COVID-19 situation in ten experimental trials. Participants in the two reappraisal conditions and the active control condition were asked to use the strategy that they practiced, and participants in the passive control condition were asked to respond naturally. All participants saw exactly the same ten photos, but the order of the presentation was randomized across the ten experimental trials. Each photo was presented to participants with the same reminder used in the practice trials. After observing each photo for ten seconds, participants were asked to rate both their negative and positive emotions in response to the photo using the same 5-point Likert scales from the practice trials.

**Post-measures.** In the final section of the study, participants completed several measures, including (1) negative and positive state emotions, (2) negative and positive emotions about the COVID-19 situation, (3) negative and positive anticipated emotions, (4) behavioural intentions, (5) motivation/beliefs, and (6) manipulation check.

## Measures

**Demographics.** At the beginning of the study, participants completed a general survey that included demographic questions and some questions related to COVID-19 shared by all three studies in the PSA COVID-19 Rapid Project. Details about the general survey can be found at <https://osf.io/7axc4/>. While we originally planned for the general survey to appear at the end of the study, it was necessary for recruitment purposes (selecting representative panels) that it appear at the beginning of the study.

**Baseline emotions.** To assess baseline emotion, we asked participants how they were feeling right now at the beginning of the session on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (extremely) (All response options were labelled and numbers were not displayed to participants for clarity). For negative baseline emotions, we measured five items on fear, anger, sadness, distrust, and stress from the modified Differential Emotions Scale<sup>109</sup>. For positive baseline emotions, we measured five items on hope, gratitude, love, inspiration, and serenity from the modified Differential Emotions Scale<sup>109</sup> (details for all scoring rules described in the Analysis Plan section). We also measured three items on loneliness<sup>110</sup> and three items on social connectedness<sup>111</sup>. These six items also were included in the assessment of post-photo state emotions and in the assessment of anticipated emotions (at each assessment point, these six items were used in exploratory analyses).

**Negative emotional responses.** In order to capture descriptively rich, nuanced data, we measured negative emotional responses in four ways. The first way is to measure negative emotions in response to the photos. For each photo, we asked participants how negative the photo made them feel using a unipolar scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (extremely). The second way is to measure negative state emotions after viewing all ten photos. We asked participants “how you are feeling right now” with the same set of items used to measure baseline



emotions, which included five negative state emotions of fear, anger, sadness, distrust, and stress. The third way is to measure negative emotions about the COVID-19 situation. We asked participants how negative/hopeless they were feeling about the COVID-19 situation right now on a unipolar scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (extremely). The fourth way is to measure negative anticipated emotions, which were an exploratory outcome. We asked participants “In the next week, to what extent, if at all, do you think you will feel each of the following?” with the same set of items used to measure baseline emotions, which included five negative anticipated emotions of fear, anger, sadness, distrust, and stress.

***Positive emotional responses.*** Following a parallel procedure, we measured positive emotional responses in four ways. The first way is to measure positive emotions in response to the photos. For each photo, we asked participants how positive the photo made them feel using a unipolar scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (extremely). The second way is to measure positive state emotions after viewing all ten photos. We asked participants “how you are feeling right now” with the same set of items used to measure baseline emotions, which included five positive state emotions of hope, gratitude, love, inspiration, and serenity. The third way is to measure positive emotions about the COVID-19 situation. We asked participants how positive/hopeful they were feeling about the COVID-19 situation right now on a unipolar scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (extremely). The fourth way is to measure positive anticipated emotions, which were an exploratory outcome. We asked participants “In the next week, to what extent, if at all, do you think you will feel each of the following?” with the same set of items used to measure baseline emotions, which included five positive anticipated emotions of hope, gratitude, love, inspiration, and serenity.

***Behavioural intentions.*** In addition to the emotional responses that are central to our four confirmatory hypotheses in this study, we also examined exploratory outcomes concerning behavioural intentions. Such intentions matter because they have been shown to predict actual behaviours<sup>112,113</sup>. Following protocols from Fishbein and Ajzen<sup>114</sup>, we asked participants to indicate on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (extremely unlikely) to 7 (extremely likely) their intentions to engage in each of 10 different behaviours within the next week. Five of the items concern potentially harmful behaviour, which we chose based on documented links between negative emotions and substance use, aggressive behaviour, and excessive information seeking<sup>17, 25, 115</sup>. Items included: drinking too much alcohol, using too much tobacco (e.g., smoking/vaping) or other recreational drugs, yelling at someone, taking anger out online, and spending too much time on media. The other five items concerned beneficial behaviour, which we chose based on evidence that positive emotions contribute to more health behaviours<sup>84, 85</sup>. Items include: eating healthy food, getting enough physical activity, practicing healthy sleep habits (*for example, going to bed and waking at regular hours*), washing hands regularly for at least 20 seconds, and following a stay-at-home order stringently (*if there isn't an order in your region now, assume that one is imposed*).

***Motivation/beliefs.*** We measured both the motivation to use the emotion regulatory strategy and the belief in the effectiveness of the emotion regulatory strategy as exploratory moderators<sup>71, 87</sup>. We asked “Recall the instructions we gave you for viewing the photos. To what extent, if at all, do you agree or disagree with the following statements?” Motivation to use the emotion regulatory strategy was measured with the item: “I tried my hardest to follow the instructions I was given while viewing the photos.” Belief in the effectiveness of the emotion

regulatory strategy employed by participants was measured with the item “I believed that following the instructions would influence my emotions.” Participants rated their answers using a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

**Manipulation check.** We planned to evaluate participants’ attention to our instructions and photos using two multiple-choice questions. The first question asked participants to choose the instructions they had at the beginning of the survey from among four options. The second question asked participants to choose the photo that was not shown to them in the survey from among three options.

For exploratory purposes, we also asked how often participants actually used each approach when viewing the photographs and their global change of emotions compared to the beginning of the study. Participants were asked, “When viewing the ten photographs related to COVID-19 earlier, how often did you use each of the following approaches?” and rated four approaches: “responding as I naturally would,” “reflecting on my thoughts and feelings,” “interpreting the situation in a new way,” and “focusing on any good I could find in the situation.” Participants rated their answers using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always). To measure global change of emotion, participants were asked, “Overall, compared to the beginning of this study, how negative do you feel right now?” using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (much more negative) to 5 (much less negative) and “Overall, compared to the beginning of this study, how positive do you feel right now?” using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (much more positive) to 5 (much less positive).

**Order of items.** For measures above, items belonging to the negative category (i.e., negative emotional responses and intentions for harmful behaviour) and to the positive category (i.e., positive emotional responses and intentions for beneficial behaviour) were presented in a counterbalanced order within each measure across participants. In other words, half of the participants always rated an item from the negative category first and then an item from the positive category, whereas the other half always rated an item from the positive category first and then an item from the negative category. For measures that have multiple items, items belonging to the negative category were randomized within the negative category, and items belonging to the positive category were randomized within the positive category. When the same set of items used to measure baseline emotions was repeated, the set had the same order for every given participant.

## Analysis plan

### *Pre-processing*

**Exclusion.** We planned to exclude (1) participants who answered both multiple choice manipulation check questions incorrectly, and (2) participants who completed fewer than 50% of the questions in the study.

**Reliability of measures.** For items from the modified Differential Emotions Scale<sup>109</sup>, we planned to create overall negative emotion scores at each time point by averaging the five negative emotions (fear, anger, sadness, distrust, and stress) and overall positive emotion scores at each time point by averaging the five positive emotions (hope, gratitude, love, inspiration, and

serenity) if the average inter-item correlation was above .40 for negative emotions and for positive emotions, respectively. If the average inter-item correlation was below .40, we would conduct an exploratory factor analysis with oblique rotation and maintain factors with an eigenvalue above 1.00. If no factors had an eigenvalue above 1, we would report results by item rather than as a composite. The actual average inter-item correlation was .50 for negative baseline emotions and .48 for positive baseline emotions, respectively. Therefore, we created overall negative emotion scores at each time point by averaging the five negative emotions and overall positive emotion scores at each time point by averaging the five positive emotions.

**Missing data.** We dropped incomplete cases on an analysis-by-analysis basis. Given our sampling plan described below, we should have power of 0.95 or above.

**Outliers.** In order to be maximally conservative, we did not define or identify outliers.

### *Analytic plan for hypotheses*

Since negative emotional responses and positive emotional responses are separable<sup>79, 80</sup>, we examined negative emotional responses and positive emotional responses separately. To control family-wise error rates in multiple comparisons, we used the Holm-Bonferroni method within each of the four hypotheses separately. For all analyses testing negative emotional responses (hypothesis 1 and hypothesis 3), we planned to control for the participants' negative baseline emotions. As originally intended by the scale<sup>109</sup>, we planned to create an overall negative baseline emotion score by averaging the five negative emotions (fear, anger, sadness, distrust, and stress). For all analyses testing positive emotional responses (hypothesis 2 and hypothesis 4), we planned to control for the participants' positive baseline emotions. As originally intended by the scale<sup>109</sup>, we planned to create an overall positive baseline emotion score by averaging the five positive emotions (hope, gratitude, love, inspiration, and serenity). To account for the nested structure in our data (e.g., participant nested by country/region), we fitted multilevel models with the condition using the contrast in Table 1, random by-country/region slopes, and random by-country/region intercepts. If a model failed to converge, we planned to explore other reasonable models<sup>113</sup> and report results of all explored models in an appendix. We visually assessed assumptions of heteroscedasticity and normality of residuals and found no severe deviations. All tests were two-tailed.

Although we used the frequentist approach for confirmatory analyses, we also reported Bayes factors (BF) for every result to gain information about the strength of evidence provided by the data comparing the null and alternative hypotheses<sup>117</sup>. If we got non-significant results from the frequentist approach, we used BF to help us interpret non-significant results and differentiate between insensitive results and those that reveal good enough evidence supporting the null-hypothesis. We set these evidence thresholds to  $BF_{10}$  to  $> 10$  for  $H_1$  and  $< 1/10$  for  $H_0$ . If BFs did not cross the evidence thresholds, we think our sample size is sufficiently large that inconclusive results at this sample size would be an important message for the field. We used informed priors for the alternative model: a one-tailed Cauchy distribution with a mode of zero and a scale  $r = 0.18$  (hypotheses 1 and 2),  $r = 0.17$  (hypothesis 3), and  $r = 0.25$  (hypothesis 4) on the standardized effect size. These priors were based on the lowest available estimates of effect sizes in past research (See the "Sampling plan" section for more information). At Stage 1, we wrote the code for the Bayesian part of our analysis plan using the BayesFactor package<sup>118</sup> in R.

We also planned to investigate the sensitivity of our conclusions to priors using Robustness Regions<sup>119</sup>, which involves calculating a Bayes factor under a large number of different priors to see how the Bayes factor changes. After we collected our data, we made the following adjustments to our plans for our Bayesian analysis. First, to estimate the Bayesian models, we switched from the BayesFactor package to the brms package<sup>120</sup> because of the brms package's superior handling of random effects. Our brms models used four chains, each with 1,000 warmup samples, 10,000 post-warmup samples, and a thinning rate of 1. To calculate Bayes factors, we used bridge sampling, as implemented in the bayestestR<sup>121</sup> and bridgesampling<sup>122</sup> packages, to compare the marginal likelihoods of the full model versus a null model that does not contain one of our two focal contrasts. Second, we discovered that the Bayesian versions of our models involving emotional responses to the photos had high computational requirements due to the inclusion of two sources of random effect (country/region and participant) rather than one. To make these models more computationally manageable we simplified the dataset by computing the average emotional response to each photo for each participant and using this as the outcome variable. This allowed us to omit the by-participant random effect in these models and drastically reduce the resource requirements and compute time. Although these simplified models do not separate participant-specific variance from error variance, our analysis plan had no plans to interpret these sources of variation separately, so we reasoned this simplification was a fair way to obtain the same mathematical results as required by our analysis plan at a lower computational cost. Finally, we simplified the robustness analyses by only investigating how the Bayes factors change with one very large prior ( $r = 1.0$ ) rather than computing full robustness regions. We made this last change to once again reduce the compute time to manageable levels. If the Bayes factors under the large prior are in line with those generated by the pre-registered priors (which are already very small), the results should be robust to other reasonable priors.

### ***Tests for hypotheses 1 and 3***

Overall, we expected that reappraisal interventions (vs. control) would reduce negative emotional responses (hypothesis 1), and that reconstrual would lead to greater decreases in negative emotional responses than repurposing (hypothesis 3). We tested hypothesis 1 and hypothesis 3 using two orthogonal contrasts (Table 1). The first contrast is between both reappraisal conditions combined and both control conditions combined for hypothesis 1. The second contrast is between the reconstrual condition and the repurposing condition for hypothesis 3. Negative emotional responses were measured in four ways (negative emotions in response to the photos, negative state emotions after viewing the photos, negative emotions about the COVID-19 situation, and negative anticipated emotions). We had confirmatory hypotheses regarding the first three outcomes and examined negative anticipated emotions in the exploratory analysis. Therefore, hypothesis 1 can be subdivided into hypotheses 1a to 1c, and hypothesis 3 can be subdivided into hypotheses 3a to 3c. We planned to consider a hypothesis to be supported if at least 1 of the 3 sub-hypotheses is significant after Holm-Bonferroni correction (controlling for 3 comparisons within each hypothesis). If we found non-significant results for any sub-hypothesis, we compared each reappraisal condition against the passive control condition and compared the active control condition against the passive control condition in the exploratory analysis to determine whether each strategy had a non-zero impact relative to individuals' natural responses.

*Testing effects on negative emotions in response to the photos:* We expected that reappraisal interventions (vs. control) would reduce negative emotions in response to the photos (hypothesis 1a), and reconstrual would lead to greater decreases in negative emotional responses in response to the photos than repurposing (hypothesis 3a). We modeled ratings of negativity in response to each photo in the experimental trials as a function of the fixed effects of condition using our contrast. We included by-participant random intercepts, by-country/region random intercepts, as well as by-country/region random slopes for each contrast.

*Testing effects on negative state emotions:* We expected that reappraisal interventions (vs. control) would reduce negative state emotions (hypothesis 1b), and reconstrual would lead to greater decreases in negative state emotions than repurposing (hypothesis 3b). Similar to creating the overall negative baseline emotion score, we planned to create an overall negative state emotion score by averaging the five negative emotions (fear, anger, sadness, distrust, and stress). We modeled the overall negative state emotion score as a function of the fixed effects of condition using our contrast. We included by-country/region random intercepts, as well as by-country/region random slopes for each contrast.

*Testing effects on negative emotions about the COVID-19 situation:* We expected that reappraisal interventions (vs. control) would reduce negative emotions about the COVID-19 situation (hypothesis 1c), and reconstrual would lead to greater decreases in negative emotions about the COVID-19 situation than repurposing (hypothesis 3c). We modeled negative emotions about the COVID-19 situation as a function of the fixed effects of condition using our contrast. We included by-country/region random intercepts, as well as by-country/region random slopes for each contrast.

### ***Tests for hypotheses 2 and 4***

Overall, we expected that reappraisal interventions (vs. control) would increase positive emotional responses (hypothesis 2), and repurposing would lead to greater increases in positive emotional responses than reconstrual (hypothesis 4). We tested hypothesis 2 and hypothesis 4 using two orthogonal contrasts (Table 1). The first contrast is between both reappraisal conditions combined and both control conditions combined for hypothesis 2. The second contrast is between the reconstrual condition and the repurposing condition for hypothesis 4. Positive emotional responses were measured in four ways (positive emotions in response to the photos, positive state emotions after viewing the photos, positive emotions about the COVID-19 situation, and positive anticipated emotions). We had confirmatory hypotheses regarding the first three outcomes and examined positive anticipated emotions in an exploratory analysis. Therefore, hypothesis 2 can be subdivided into hypotheses 2a to 2c, and hypothesis 4 can be subdivided into hypotheses 4a to 4c. We planned to consider a hypothesis to be supported if at least 1 of the 3 sub-hypotheses is significant after Holm-Bonferroni correction (controlling for 3 comparisons within each hypothesis). If we found non-significant results for any sub-hypothesis, we would compare each reappraisal condition against the passive control condition and compare the active control condition against the passive control condition in the exploratory analysis to determine whether each strategy had a non-zero impact relative to individuals' natural responses.

*Testing effects on positive emotions in response to the photos:* We expected that reappraisal interventions (vs. control) would increase positive emotions in response to the photos

(hypothesis 2a), and repurposing would lead to greater increases in positive emotions in response to the photos than reconstrual (hypothesis 4a). We modeled ratings of positivity in response to each photo in the experimental trials as a function of the fixed effects of condition using our contrast. We included by-participant random intercepts, by-country/region random intercepts, as well as by-country/region random slopes for each contrast.

*Testing effects on positive state emotions:* We expected that reappraisal interventions (vs. control) would increase positive state emotions (hypothesis 2b), and repurposing would lead to greater increases in positive state emotions in response to the photos than reconstrual (hypothesis 4b). Similar to creating the overall positive baseline emotion score, we planned to create an overall positive state emotion score by averaging the five positive emotions (hope, gratitude, love, inspiration, and serenity). We modeled the overall positive state emotion score as a function of the fixed effects of condition using our contrast. We planned to include by-country/region random intercepts, as well as by-country/region random slopes for each contrast. However, the model could not converge when we included by-country/region random slopes for contrast 2. To make the model converge, we did not include by-country/region random slopes for contrast 2.

*Testing effects on positive emotions about the COVID-19 situation:* We expected that reappraisal interventions (vs. control) would increase positive emotions about the COVID-19 situation (hypothesis 2c), and repurposing would lead to greater increases in positive emotions about the COVID-19 situation than reconstrual (hypothesis 4c). We modeled positive emotions about the COVID-19 situation as a function of the fixed effects of condition using our contrast. We included by-country/region random intercepts, as well as by-country/region random slopes for each contrast.

### ***Exploratory analyses***

We conducted a series of exploratory analyses to address supplemental questions regarding our hypotheses, including, but not limited to: (1) Were there any differences in other pairwise comparisons in testing hypotheses 1 - 2? (2) Were there emotion-specific effects of reappraisal<sup>123</sup>? (3) Were the effects on emotions subjectively detectable by participants<sup>124</sup>? Did the effects of strategy use vary by (4) motivation to use the strategy<sup>71</sup>; (5) beliefs in the strategy's effectiveness<sup>87</sup>; or (6) the participant's country of residence<sup>90</sup>?

We investigated the impacts of strategy use on other outcomes, including, but not limited to: (1) positive and negative anticipated emotions; (2) intentions to enact potentially harmful versus beneficial behaviours (see results in Supplementary Table 14); and (3) loneliness and social connectedness (see results in Supplementary Table 15).

### **Sampling plan**

***Expected effect sizes.*** In order to compare effect sizes across studies, below we report Cohen's *ds*, which in some cases were transformed or calculated from the results reported in the original studies (see Supplementary Table 16 for details). Several caveats are in order regarding the effect sizes that follow. First, meta-analyses tend to overestimate effect sizes, although the size of overestimation varies considerably across studies and sometimes shows no

overestimation<sup>125</sup>. Second, most prior studies were conducted in the lab, whereas the current study was conducted online. Third, the current crisis is likely to lead to strong emotional responses, especially for participants who are facing financial or health-related setbacks, although strong negative emotions also motivate people to regulate emotions more<sup>64</sup>. These caveats suggest uncertainty in effect sizes.

In general, reappraisal has an average effect size of  $d = 0.45$ , 95% CI = [0.35, 0.56] in changing emotion experience relative to passive control conditions (i.e., no instruction, instructions to experience naturally, instructions to not regulate in a certain manner, or instructions to enhance or maintain the focal emotion) (meta-analysis<sup>39</sup>; it finds no evidence of publication bias). Experimental disclosure and expressive writing, which inspired the instruction in the active control condition, have an average effect size of  $d = 0.07$ , 95% CI = [0.05, 0.17] in improving psychological health (including emotional responses), relative to engaging in non-treatment neutral activities (e.g., describing what they have done in the past 24 hours) or no activities (meta-analysis<sup>77</sup>; it finds evidence of publication bias). These works suggest the lowest available estimate of the effect size to be  $d = 0.18$  (subtracting the upper bound of 95% CI  $d = 0.17$  for experimental disclosure and expressive writing from the lower bound of 95% CI of  $d = 0.35$  for the reappraisal interventions) between our reappraisal interventions and the control conditions for hypothesis 1 and hypothesis 2.

In relation to the comparison between reconstrual and repurposing, although prior research has not used the same theoretical framework<sup>76</sup> to empirically contrast reconstrual and repurposing as we did in the current study, research on closely related constructs can provide estimates of effect sizes. Reconstrual is most similar to a previously studied subtype of reappraisal called “reappraising emotional stimulus” in Webb, Miles, & Sheeran’s meta-analysis<sup>39</sup>, which has a  $d = 0.38$ , 95% CI = [0.21, 0.55] in changing emotion experience (this effect size is primarily for negative emotions, as all but one study examined negative emotions). Repurposing is similar to the construct “benefit finding” (perceiving positive consequences that resulted from a traumatic event), which is associated with positive well-being,  $d = 0.45$ , 95% CI = [0.37, 0.52], but not global distress,  $d = 0.00$ , 95% CI = [-0.04, 0.04] (meta-analysis<sup>81</sup>). Repurposing is also similar to the subtype of reappraisal called “positive reappraisal,” which is more effective in increasing positive thoughts than other types of reappraisals,  $d = 0.49$ , 95% CI = [0.25, 0.72] relative to detached reappraisal<sup>126</sup>. These works suggest the lowest available estimate of the effect size to be  $d = 0.17$  (subtracting the upper bound of 95% CI  $d = 0.04$  for the association between benefit finding and global distress from the lower bound of 95% CI of  $d = 0.21$  for “reappraising emotional stimulus” in Webb, Miles, & Sheeran<sup>39</sup>) between reconstrual and repurposing in changing negative emotions for hypothesis 3, and  $d = 0.25$  (the lower bound of 95% CI of positive reappraisal in increasing positive thoughts than detached reappraisal in Shiota & Levenson<sup>126</sup>) between reconstrual and repurposing in changing positive emotions for hypothesis 4.

**Sample size.** For practical reasons, sample size was primarily decided based on the availability of resources among members of the PSA.

**Adjusted alpha levels.** The tests of each hypothesis involved three comparisons, with  $\alpha$  for the smallest  $p$ -value = 0.017 (0.05/3),  $\alpha$  for the second-smallest  $p$ -value = 0.025 (0.05/2), and  $\alpha$  for the largest  $p$ -value = 0.05 (Holm-Bonferroni corrections).

**Power analysis.** We conducted a simulation study to estimate power for a variety of potential effect sizes ( $|d| = 0.05$  to  $0.29$ , separated by increments of  $0.02$ ), number of countries/regions ( $N_{\text{country/region}} = 30, 35, 40, 45, 50, 55, 60$ ), within-country/region sample sizes ( $N = 200, 400, 600, 800$ ), by-country/region intercept variances ( $\sigma^2_{\text{intercept}} = 0.05, 0.30, 0.55, 0.80$ ), and by-country/region slope variances ( $\sigma^2_{\text{slope}} = 0.0, 0.02, 0.03, 0.04$ ) at  $\alpha = .017$ . The lowest level of intercept variances in our simulation was chosen on the basis of an ongoing multi-country/region project tracking rates of depression ( $\sigma^2_{\text{intercept}} = 0.04$ ) and worries about the COVID-19 ( $\sigma^2_{\text{intercept}} = 0.06$ ) across countries/regions during the COVID-19 outbreak<sup>124</sup> (See Supplementary Table 16 for details). The lowest level of slope variances in our simulation was chosen on the basis of the average slope variance ( $\sigma^2_{\text{slope}} < 0.01$ ) in a large multi-site, multi-country/region project involving 28 psychological manipulations<sup>125</sup>. The slope variances capture the variability of the effect of psychological manipulations, and there is no apparent reason to expect that the effect of reappraisal interventions on emotions is more variable than most other psychological manipulations in Klein et al.<sup>128</sup>. In fact, appraisal theories of emotion argue that the relationship between appraisals and emotions is culturally universal<sup>129</sup>, suggesting low variability. As one example to show that similar appraisals associate with similar emotional experiences, we found the associations varied little across countries/regions between perceived insufficient government response and depression ( $\sigma^2_{\text{slope}} = 0.003$ ) and between perceived insufficient government response and worries ( $\sigma^2_{\text{slope}} = 0.003$ ) during the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>124</sup> (See Supplementary Table 16 for details), consistent with the observation of low slope variances ( $\sigma^2_{\text{slope}} < 0.01$ ) in Klein et al.<sup>128</sup>. Despite expecting low variability from empirical findings and theories, we tested a variety of intercept variances and slope variances in our power simulation, some of which were much higher than those in the Klein et al.<sup>128</sup> and Fetzer et al.<sup>127</sup> to be maximally conservative. We conducted 1000 simulations for each set of simulation parameters using the *simr* package<sup>130</sup> using computing power harnessed through the Open Science Grid<sup>131, 132</sup>.

We show comprehensive results for our simulation study at <https://osf.io/mf5z4/>. In our final sample after pre-registered exclusion, 37 countries/regions had over 200 participants, surpassing the 95% power criterion based on simulations.



### **Protocol registration**

The stage 1 protocol for this Registered Report was accepted in principle on 12 May 2020. The protocol, as accepted by the journal, can be found at

<https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.c.4878591.v1>

### **Data availability**

The full materials for the Psychological Science Accelerator’s Rapid-Response COVID-19 Projects (including the materials for the current project) are at <https://osf.io/s4hj2/> and all data are at <https://osf.io/gvw56/>. The analytical datasets for the current project is at

<https://osf.io/jeu73/>.

### **Code availability**

All analysis codes (completed in R) are available at <https://osf.io/jeu73/>.

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### **Competing Interests**

The authors declare no competing interests.

### **Author Contributions**

*Conceptualization:* K. Wang, A. Goldenberg, C.A. Dorison, J.S. Lerner, J. Gross

*Data curation:* E.M. Buchanan, P.S. Forscher

*Formal analysis:* K. Wang, P.S. Forscher, B. Palfi

*Funding Acquisition:* C. Chartier, E.M. Buchanan, P.S. Forscher, H. IJzerman

*Investigation:* J.K. Miller, L. Eudave, D. Hausman Ozery, E.A. Jackson, E. Luis Garcia, J. Wilson, K. Desai, E. Kushnir, M. Pantazi, N. Pilecka, G. Marcu, E. Agadullina, M. Adamkovič, M. Roczniewska, C. Reyna, A.P. Kassianos, M. Westerlund, L. Ahlgren, S. Pöntinen, A. Arinze, N. Arinze, C. Ogbonnaya, I.L. Ndukaihe, I. Dalgat, P. Macapagal, F. Foroni, M. Willis, A.C. Santos, A. Mokady, N. Reggev, M.R. Vasilev, N. Nock, M. Parzuchowski, M.F. Espinoza Barria, M. Vranka, M. Braun Kohlová, I. Ropovik, M. Harutyunyan, E. Yao, M. Becker, E. Manunta, G. Kaminski, D. Marko, K. Evans, D. Lewis, A. Findor, K. Papachristopoulos, A. Thibault Landry, J. Aruta, M.S. Ortiz, Z. Vally, E. Pronizius, M. Voracek, C. Lamm, M. Grinberg, J.V. Valentova, G. Mioni, N. Cellini, S. Chen, J. Zickfeld, K. Moon, N. Levy, A. Karababa, L. Boucher, W. Collins, J. Bavolar, R.M. Ross, I.D. Stephen, T.J. Hostler, S. Azouaghe, R. McCarthy, C. Grano, C. Singh Solorzano, G. Anjum, W. JIMENEZ-LEAL, M. Bradford, L. Calderón Pérez, J.E. Cruz Vásquez, J. Vargas-Nieto, A. Arvanitis, Q. Xiao, R. Cárcamo, S. Zorjan, Z. Tajchman, I. Vilares, J.M. Pavlacic, J.R. Kunst, M. Atari, M. Hricova, P. Kačmár, J. Schrötter, R. Rahal, S. FatahModares, I. Zakharov, M.A. Koehn, C. Esteban-Serna, R.J. Calin-Jageman, A.J. Krafnick, E. Štrukelj, J. Urban, J.R. Silva, M. Martončík, S. Batić Očovaj, D. Šakan, A.O. Kuzminska, J. Milosevic Djordjevic, I.A. Almeida, A. Ferreira, L.B. Lazarevic, H. Manley, D. Zambrano Ricaurte, R.P. Monteiro, E. Musser, W. Chou, H. Godbersen, S. Ruiz-Fernández, C. Reeck, C. Batres, D. Serrato Alvarez, M.M. Butt, Z. Chen, F.

Verbruggen, I. Ziano, M. Tümer, A.C. CHARYATE, D. Dubrov, M.C. Tejada Rivera, C. Aberson, A. Sacakli, C.D. Ceary, K.L. Richard, G. Singer, J.T. Perillo, T. Ballantyne, H. Du, M. Hruška, D. Sousa, K. Barzykowski, A.N. Zsido, M. Paruzel-Czachura, M. Bialek, M. Kowal, A. Sorokowska, M. Misiak, D. Mola, M. Ortiz, P.S. Correa, A. Belaus, P. Arriaga, R. Oliveira, L. Vaughn, P. Szwed, M. Kossowska, J. Kiełńska, B. Antazo, G. Nilsonne, N. Simonovic, J. Taber, A. Gourdon-Kanhukamwe, A. Domurat, K. Ihaya, A. Urooj, T. Gill, A. Adetula, N. Albayrak-Aydemir, H.B. Kappes, B. Gjoneska, T. House, M.V. Jones, J. Berkessel, W.J. Chopik, S. Çoksan, M. Seehuus, A. Khaoudi, A. Bokkour, K. Ait El Arabi, I. Djamai, A. Iyer, N. Parashar, A. Adiguzel, H. Kocalar, C. Bundt, J.O. Norton, M. Papadatou-Pastou, A. De la Rosa-Gomez, V. Ankushev, N. Bogatyreva, D. Grigoryev, A. Ivanov, I. Prusova, M. Romanova, I. Sarieva, M. Terskova, E. Hristova, A. Janak, V. Schei, T.E. Sverdrup, A. Askelund, N. ouherrou, N. Say, K. Meetu, A. Thomas, F.Y. Kung, G. Bijlstra, F. Mosannenzadeh, B. B. Balci, U. Reips, E. Baskin, J. Czamanski-Cohen, B.J. Dixson, D. Moreau, C.A. Sutherland, C. Noone, H. Flowe, M. Anne, S.M. Janssen, C.H. Fu, N.M. Majeed, Y. Kunisato, K. Yu, s. daches, A. Hartanto, M. Vdovic, P.A. Forbes, J. Kamburidis, E. Marinova, M. Nedelcheva-Datsova, N.R. Rachev, A. Stoyanova, K. Schmidt, M. Koptjevskaja-Tamm, T. Jernsäter, J.K. Olofsson, O. Bialobrzaska, M. Marszalek, S. Tatachari, R. Afhami, W. Law, J. Antfolk, N. Van Doren, J.A. Soto, R. Searston, J. Miranda, K. Damnjanović, S. Yeung, B. Jaeger, D. Ren, G. Pfuhl, K. Klevjer, N.S. Corral-Frías, M. Frias-Armenta, M.Y. Lucas, A. Olaya Torres, M. Toro, L. Javela Delgado, D. Vega, S. Álvarez Solas, R. Vilar, S. Massoni, T. Frizzo, A. Bran, D.C. Vaidis, L. Vieira, G. Lins de Holanda Coelho, A. Greenburgh, C.M. Whitt, A.M. Tullett, L. Volz, C. Karaarslan, E. Sarıoğuz, T. Bulut Allred, M.F. Colloff, T.J. Lima, M.F. Ribeiro, M. Karekla, C. Karashiali, N. Sunami, L.M. Jaremka, D. Storage, W. Hassan, A. Studzinska, P. Hanel, D. Holford, M. Sirota, K. Wolfe, F. Chiu, A. Theodoropoulou, E. Ahn, Y. Lin, E.C. Westgate, H. Brohmer, G. Hofer, O. Dujols, K. Vezirian, G. Feldman, G. Travaglino, A. Ahmed, M. Li, N. Torunsky, H. Bai, M. Manavalan, X. SONG, R.B. Walczak, P. Zdybek, A. Dalla Rosa, L. Kozma, P. Babinčák, G. Banik, M.A. Varella, J. Uttley, B. Behzadnia, S.N. Geniole, J.K. Vilsmeier, U.S. Tran, M.C. Mensink, P. Sorokowski, A. Groyecka-Bernard, T. Radtke, J. Carpentier, A.A. Özdoğru, J.A. Joy-Gaba, M.V. Hedgebeth, T. Ishii, A.L. Wichman, J. Röer, T. Ostermann, W.E. Davis, H. Urry, E.M. Buchanan, M.A. Primbs, H. IJzerman, P.S. Forscher

*Methodology:* K. Wang, A. Goldenberg, C.A. Dorison, J.S. Lerner, J. Gross, I. Ropovik, F. Azevedo, B., Aczel, P. Arriaga, A. Thomas, M.A. Silan, M.C. Mensink, H. Urry, D.M. Basnight-Brown, P.S. Forscher

*Project Administration:* J.K. Miller, S. Meir Drexler, M. Oosterlinck, A. Szabelska, G. Marcu, A.P. Kassianos, I. Dalgas, S. Lewis, N. Reggev, M.R. Vasilev, M. Vranka, M. Becker, G. Kaminski, E. Pronizius, N. Cellini, H. Azab, J.L. Beaudry, A. Todsén, V. Križanić, M. Sharifian, E. Štrukelj, M. Martončik, D. Dunleavy, K. Kirgizova, F. Azevedo, B. Palfi, M. Alarcón Maldonado, I.L. Pit, B. Aczel, P. Arriaga, A. Gourdon-Kanhukamwe, Y. Yamada, A. Urooj, L. Bylinina, A. Adetula, B. Gjoneska, A. Askelund, C.A. Levitan, B. Ishkhanyan, H. Chuan-Peng, J.W. Suchow, J. Antfolk, B. Paris, L. Volz, T. Bulut Allred, P. Hanel, F. Chiu, A. Ahmed, L. Kozma, J.E. Beshears, K. Thommesen, M.A. Silan, S. Morales Izquierdo, C.R. Ebersole, C. Chartier, P.R. Mallik, H. Urry, E.M. Buchanan, N.A. Coles, M.A. Primbs, D.M. Basnight-Brown, H. IJzerman, P.S. Forscher, H. Moshontz

*Resources:* B.B. Agesin, M. Bernardo, O. Campos, K. Grzech, S. Meir Drexler, A. Penić Jurković, K. Rana, M. Antoniadi, Z. Gialitaki, E. Kushnir, K. Nadif, O. Niño Bravo, M. Oosterlinck, M. Pantazi, N. Pilecka, A. Szabelska, I. van Steenkiste, K. Filip, A. Bozdoc, G. Marcu, M. Adamković, M. Roczniowska, A.P. Kassianos, M. Westerlund, L. Ahlgren, S. Pöntinen, G.A. Adetula, P. Dursun, I. Dalgat, H. Akkas, S. Lewis, I. Metin-Orta, A.C. Santos, A. Mokady, N. Reggev, M. A. Kurfali, M.R. Vasilev, M. Parzuchowski, M. Vranka, I. Ropovik, M. Harutyunyan, C. Wang, E. Yao, M. Becker, E. Manunta, G. Kaminski, D. Marko, A. Findor, A. Thibault Landry, J. Aruta, E. Pronizius, R. Li, G. Mioni, N. Cellini, S. Chen, J. Zickfeld, H. Azab, A. Karababa, J.L. Beaudry, A. Todsén, K. van Schie, J. Vintr, J. Bavolar, L. Kaliska, V. Križanić, L. Samojlenko, R. Pourafshari, S.J. Geiger, J. Beitner, L. Warmelink, S. Azouaghe, A. Szala, C. Grano, C. Singh Solorzano, O.J. Galindo-Caballero, J. Vargas-Nieto, O. Kácha, J.R. Kunst, C. Tamnes, C.C. von Bastian, M. Sharifian, P. Kačmár, J. Schrötter, N. Cohen, M. Zrimsek, I. Zakharov, E. Štrukelj, D. Šakan, J. Milosevic Djordjevic, D. Zambrano Ricaurte, R.P. Monteiro, D. Dunleavy, S. Ruiz-Fernández, K. Kirgizova, A. Muminov, F. Azevedo, D. Serrato Alvarez, J. Lee, Z. Chen, M. Tümer, D. Dubrov, M. Alarcón Maldonado, B. Hubena, A. Sacakli, W. Cyrus-Lai, M. Fedotov, M. Wielgus, I.L. Pit, M. Hruška, B. Aczel, B. Szaszi, S. Adamus, K. Barzykowski, L. Micheli, N. Schmidt, A.N. Zsido, M. Paruzel-Czachura, M. Bialek, M. Kowal, F. Muchembled, R.R. Ribeiro, P. Arriaga, R. Oliveira, M. Kossowska, G. Czarnek, J. Kiełńska, B. Antazo, R. Betlehem, S. Stieger, G. Nilsonne, A. Gourdon-Kanhukamwe, A. Domurat, K. Ihaya, Y. Yamada, M. Čadek, J. Messerschmidt, M. Kurfalı, A. Adetula, E. Baklanova, B. Gjonaska, J. Berkessel, S. Çoksán, A. Khaoudi, A. Bokkour, K. Ait El Arabi, I. Djamaï, A. Adiguzel, H. Kocalar, N. Bogatyreva, E. Hristova, V.H. Kadreva, V. Schei, T.E. Sverdrup, A. Askelund, L. Sanabria Pineda, D. Krupić, C.A. Levitan, N. Johannes, N. Say, S. Sinkolova, K. Janjić, M. Stojanovska, D. Stojanovska, F. Mosannenzadeh, U. Reips, B. Ishkhanyan, J. Czamanski-Cohen, H. Chuan-Peng, M. Topor, Y. Kunisato, M. Vdovic, L. Anton-Boicuk, J. Kamburidis, E. Marinova, M. Nedelcheva-Datsova, N.R. Rachev, A. Stoyanova, M. Koptjevskaja-Tamm, T. Jernsäther, O. Bialobrzeska, M. Marszalek, W. Law, J. Antfolk, B. Žuro, D. Krupić, K. Hoyer, K. Klevjer, D. Vega, R. Vilar, S. Massoni, A. Bran, L. Vieira, B. Paris, M. Capizzi, G. Lins de Holanda Coelho, X. Du, L. Volz, M.J. Bosma, C. Karaarslan, E. Sarioğuz, T. Bulut Allred, M. Korbmacher, J.P. Verharen, N. Sunami, S. Habib, A. Studzinska, P. Hanel, F. Chiu, O. Dujols, K. Vezirian, G. Travaglino, A. Ahmed, J. Bosch, M. Friedemann, A. Dalla Rosa, L. Kozma, S.G. Alves, R.C. Correia, G. Banik, L. Rojas-Berscia, J.E. Beshears, K. Thommesen, M.A. Silan, P.G. Maturan, S. Morales Izquierdo, A. Groyecka-Bernard, V. Cubela Adoric, T. Ishii, L. Suter, M. Bernardo, E.M. Buchanan

*Supervision:* J.K. Miller, A. Todsén, M. Sharifian, J.W. Suchow, K. Thommesen, C.R. Ebersole, C. Chartier, P.R. Mallik, H. Urry, E.M. Buchanan, N.A. Coles, M.A. Primbs, D.M. Basnight-Brown, H. IJzerman, P.S. Forscher, H. Moshontz

*Visualization:* K. Wang, A. Uusberg

*Writing - original draft:* K. Wang

*Writing - review and editing:* K. Wang, A. Goldenberg, C.A. Dorison, J.S. Lerner, J. Gross, A. Uusberg, J.K. Miller, B.B. Agesin, M. Bernardo, O. Campos, L. Eudave, K. Grzech, D. Hausman Ozery, E.A. Jackson, E. Luis Garcia, S. Meir Drexler, A. Penić Jurković, K. Rana, J. Wilson, M.

Antoniadi, K. Desai, Z. Gialitaki, E. Kushnir, K. Nadif, O. Niño Bravo, M. Oosterlinck, M. Pantazi, N. Pilecka, A. Szabelska, I. van Steenkiste, K. Filip, A. Bozdoc, G. Marcu, E. Agadullina, M. Adamkovič, M. Roczniowska, C. Reyna, A.P. Kassianos, M. Westerlund, L. Ahlgren, S. Pöntinen, G.A. Adetula, P. Dursun, A. Arinze, N. Arinze, C. Ogbonnaya, I.L. Ndukaihe, I. Dalgat, H. Akkas, P. Macapagal, S. Lewis, I. Metin-Orta, F. Foroni, M. Willis, A.C. Santos, A. Mokady, N. Reggev, M. A. Kurfali, M.R. Vasilev, N. Nock, M. Parzuchowski, M.F. Espinoza Barría, M. Vranka, M. Braun Kohlová, I. Ropovik, M. Harutyunyan, C. Wang, E. Yao, M. Becker, E. Manunta, G. Kaminski, D. Marko, K. Evans, D. Lewis, A. Findor, K. Papachristopoulos, A. Thibault Landry, J. Aruta, M.S. Ortiz, Z. Vally, E. Pronizius, M. Voracek, C. Lamm, M. Grinberg, R. Li, J.V. Valentova, G. Mioni, N. Cellini, S. Chen, J. Zickfeld, K. Moon, H. Azab, N. Levy, A. Karababa, J.L. Beaudry, L. Boucher, W. Collins, A. Todsen, K. van Schie, J. VINTR, J. Bavolar, L. Kaliska, V. Križanić, L. Samojlenko, R. Pourafshari, S.J. Geiger, J. Beitner, L. Warmelink, R.M. Ross, I.D. Stephen, T.J. Hostler, S. Azouaghe, R. McCarthy, A. Szala, C. Grano, C. Singh Solorzano, G. Anjum, W. Jimenez-Leal, M. Bradford, L. Calderón Pérez, J.E. Cruz Vásquez, O.J. Galindo-Caballero, J. Vargas-Nieto, O. Kácha, A. Arvanitis, Q. Xiao, R. Cárcamo, S. Zorjan, Z. Tajchman, I. Vilares, J.M. Pavlacic, J.R. Kunst, C. Tamnes, C.C. von Bastian, M. Atari, M. Sharifian, M. Hricova, P. Kačmár, J. Schrötter, R. Rahal, N. Cohen, S. FatahModares, M. Zrimsek, I. Zakharov, M.A. Koehn, C. Esteban-Serna, R.J. Calin-Jageman, A.J. Krafnick, E. Štrukelj, P.M. Isager, J. Urban, J.R. Silva, M. Martončík, S. Batić Očovaj, D. Šakan, A.O. Kuzminska, J. Milosevic Djordjevic, I.A. Almeida, A. Ferreira, L.B. Lazarevic, H. Manley, D. Zambrano Ricaurte, R.P. Monteiro, E. Musser, D. Dunleavy, W. Chou, H. Godbersen, S. Ruiz-Fernández, C. Reeck, C. Batres, K. Kirgizova, A. Muminov, F. Azevedo, D. Serrato Alvarez, M.M. Butt, J. Lee, Z. Chen, F. Verbruggen, I. Ziano, M. Tümer, A.C. CHARYATE, D. Dubrov, M.C. Tejada Rivera, C. Aberson, B. Palfi, M. Alarcón Maldonado, B. Hubena, A. Sacakli, C.D. Ceary, K.L. Richard, G. Singer, J.T. Perillo, T. Ballantyne, W. Cyrus-Lai, M. Fedotov, H. Du, M. Wielgus, I.L. Pit, M. Hruška, D. Sousa, B. Aczel, B. Szaszi, S. Adamus, K. Barzykowski, L. Micheli, N. Schmidt, A.N. Zsido, M. Paruzel-Czachura, M. Bialek, M. Kowal, A. Sorokowska, M. Misiak, D. Mola, M. Ortiz, P.S. Correa, A. Belaus, F. Muchembled, R.R. Ribeiro, P. Arriaga, R. Oliveira, L. Vaughn, P. Szwed, M. Kossowska, G. Czarnek, J. Kielińska, B. Antazo, R. Betlehem, S. Stieger, G. Nilsonne, N. Simonovic, J. Taber, A. Gourdon-Kanhukamwe, A. Domurat, K. Ihaya, Y. Yamada, A. Urooj, T. Gill, M. Čadek, L. Bylinina, J. Messerschmidt, M. Kurfali, A. Adetula, E. Baklanova, N. Albayrak-Aydemir, H.B. Kappes, B. Gjoneska, T. House, M.V. Jones, J. Berkessel, W.J. Chopik, S. Çoksan, M. Seehuus, A. Khaoudi, A. Bokkour, K. Ait El Arabi, I. Djamai, A. Iyer, N. Parashar, A. Adiguzel, H. Kocalar, C. Bundt, J.O. Norton, M. Papadatou-Pastou, A. De la Rosa-Gomez, V. Ankushev, N. Bogatyreva, D. Grigoryev, A. Ivanov, I. Prusova, M. Romanova, I. Sarieva, M. Terskova, E. Hristova, V.H. Kadreva, A. Janak, V. Schei, T.E. Sverdrup, A. Askelund, L. Sanabria Pineda, D. Krupić, C.A. Levitan, N. Johannes, N. ouherrou, N. Say, S. Sinkolova, K. Janjić, M. Stojanovska, D. Stojanovska, K. Meetu, A. Thomas, F.Y. Kung, G. Bijlstra, F. Mosannenzadeh, B. B. Balci, U. Reips, E. Baskin, B. Ishkhanyan, J. Czamanski-Cohen, B.J. Dixson, D. Moreau, C.A. Sutherland, H. Chuan-Peng, C. Noone, H. Flowe, M. Anne, S.M. Janssen, M. Topor, C.H. Fu, N.M. Majeed, Y. Kunisato, K. Yu, s. daches, A. Hartanto, M. Vdovic, L. Anton-Boicuk, P.A. Forbes, J. Kamburidis, E. Marinova, M. Nedelcheva-Datsova, N.R. Rachev, A. Stoyanova, K. Schmidt, J.W. Suchow, M. Koptjevskaja-Tamm, T. Jernsäther, J.K. Olofsson, O. Bialobrzeska, M. Marszalek, S. Tatachari, R. Afhami, W. Law, J. Antfolk, B. Žuro, N. Van Doren, J.A. Soto, R. Searston, J. Miranda, K. Damnjanović, S. Yeung, D. Krupić, K. Hoyer, B. Jaeger, D. Ren, G.

Pfuhl, K. Klevjer, N.S. Corral-Frías, M. Frias-Armenta, M.Y. Lucas, A. Olaya Torres, M. Toro, L. Javela Delgado, D. Vega, S. Álvarez Solas, R. Vilar, S. Massoni, T. Frizzo, A. Bran, D.C. Vaidis, L. Vieira, B. Paris, M. Capizzi, G. Lins de Holanda Coelho, A. Greenburgh, C.M. Whitt, A.M. Tullett, X. Du, L. Volz, M.J. Bosma, C. Karaarslan, E. Sarioğuz, T. Bulut Allred, M. Korbmacher, M.F. Colloff, T.J. Lima, M.F. Ribeiro, J.P. Verharen, M. Karekla, C. Karashiali, N. Sunami, L.M. Jaremka, D. Storage, S. Habib, W. Hassan, A. Studzinska, P. Hanel, D. Holford, M. Sirota, K. Wolfe, F. Chiu, A. Theodoropoulou, E. Ahn, Y. Lin, E.C. Westgate, H. Brohmer, G. Hofer, O. Dujols, K. Vezirian, G. Feldman, G. Travaglino, A. Ahmed, M. Li, J. Bosch, N. Torunsky, H. Bai, M. Manavalan, X. SONG, R.B. Walczak, P. Zdybek, M. Friedemann, A. Dalla Rosa, L. Kozma, S.G. Alves, R.C. Correia, P. Babinčák, G. Banik, L. Rojas-Berscia, M.A. Varella, J. Uttley, J.E. Beshears, K. Thommesen, B. Behzadnia, S.N. Geniole, M.A. Silan, P.G. Maturan, J.K. Vilsmeier, U.S. Tran, S. Morales Izquierdo, M.C. Mensink, P. Sorokowski, A. Groyecka-Bernard, T. Radtke, V. Cubela Adoric, J. Carpentier, A.A. Özdoğru, J.A. Joy-Gaba, M.V. Hedgebeth, T. Ishii, A.L. Wichman, J. Röer, T. Ostermann, W.E. Davis, L. Suter, M. Bernardo, C.R. Ebersole, C. Chartier, P.R. Mallik, H. Urry, E.M. Buchanan, N.A. Coles, M.A. Primbs, D.M. Basnight-Brown, H. IJzerman, P.S. Forscher, H. Moshontz

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