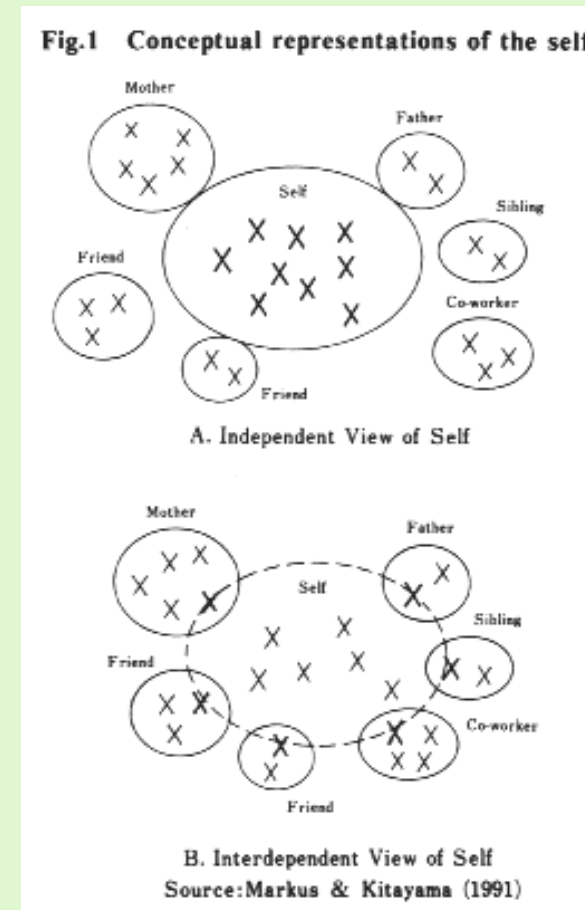
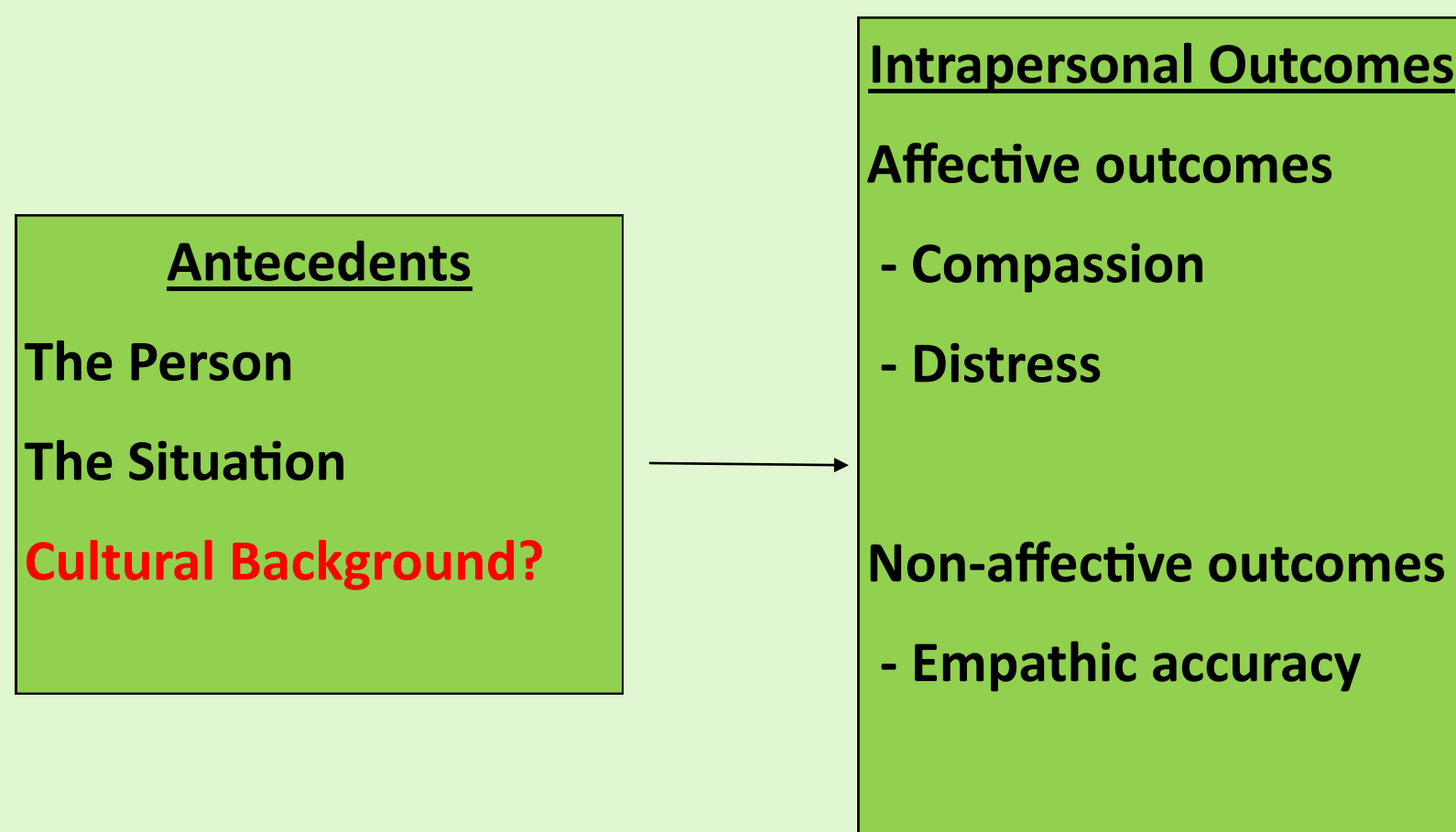


Culture Shapes Empathy in Response to Physically and Socially Painful Events

Introduction

Why would cultural background shape empathy?



Cultural differences in emotional display rules and emotional regulation?

East Asians: more interdependent?
Western Europeans: more independent?



Past Research on Culture and Empathy

- Empathic Concern (IRI): Westerners > East Asian
- Personal Distress (IRI): Westerners < East Asian
- Empathic accuracy for strangers: Westerners > East Asian
- Empathic accuracy for close friends: East Asian > Westerners

Current Research

To examine cross-cultural differences in affective and non-affective responses while observing painful situations, and to explore emotional expressivity as a potential moderator.

STUDY 1: Empathic responses to physical pain

Introduction

We examined cultural differences in affect and perceived pain in response to observing someone undergoing **physical pain**.

Method

Participants: 38 White British, 33 East Asian

Conditions: Physical pain videos and control conditions



DVs: 1. Continuous affective response

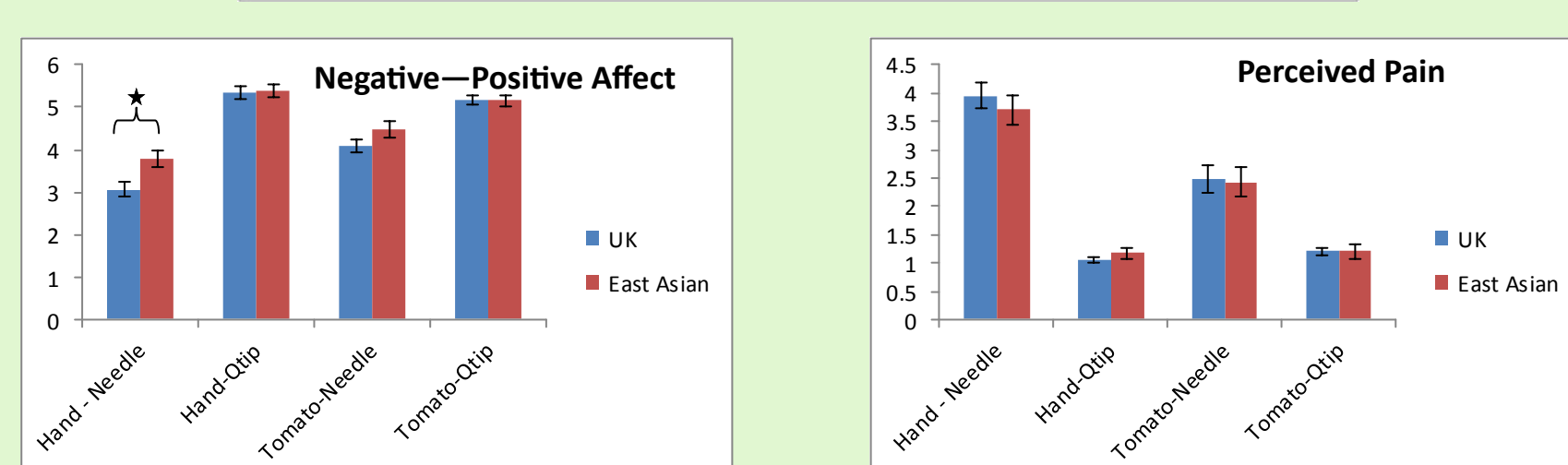
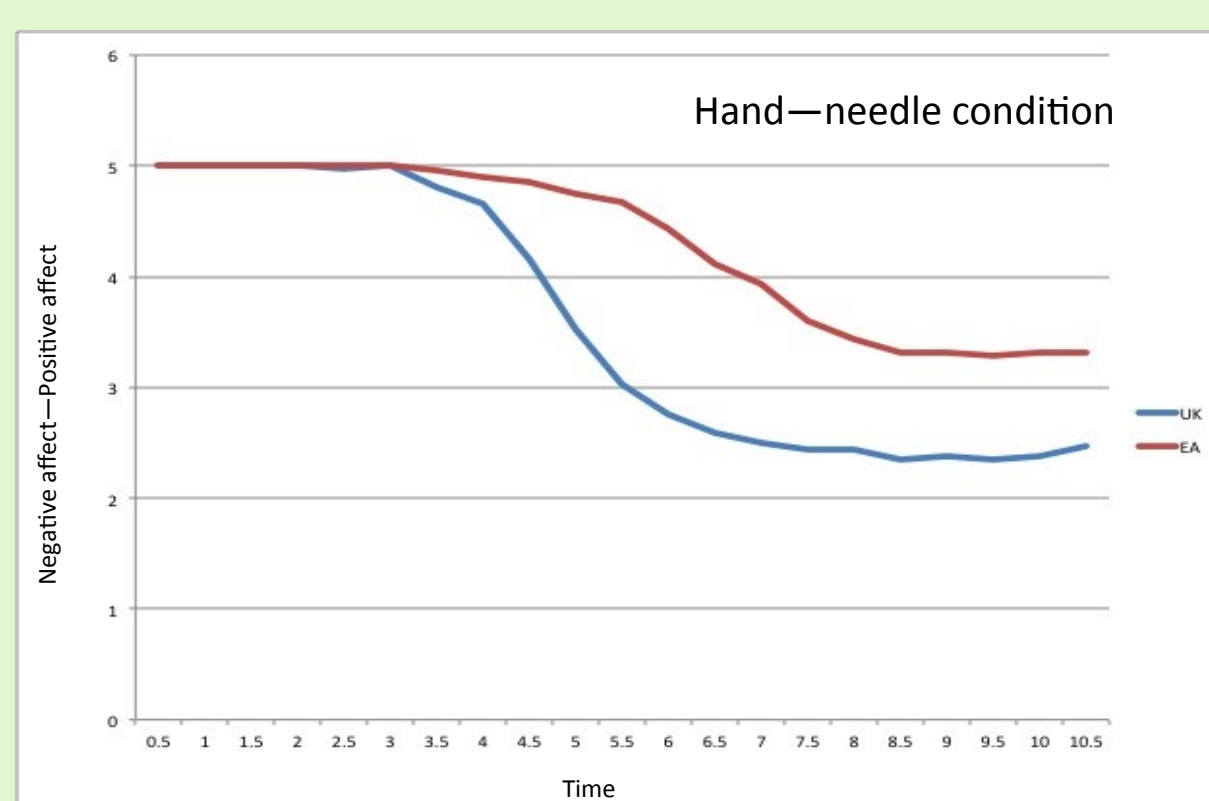
(1 = Extremely negative; 9 = Extremely positive)



2. Perceived pain (Wong-Baker FACES pain rating scale)



Results



Negative Affect: British > East Asian

Perceived Pain: No group difference

Discussion

- Does the effect hold for other pain types (e.g. social pain)?
- Other indices of empathy to examine?

STUDY 2: Empathic responses to social pain

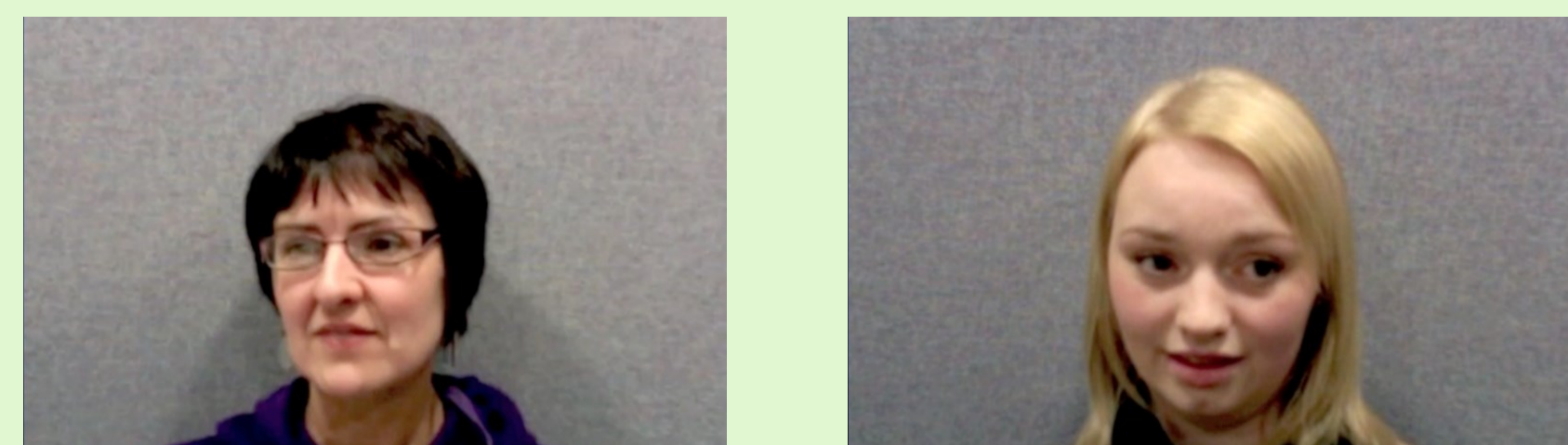
Introduction

We examined cultural differences in affect, perceived pain, compassion and empathic accuracy in response to observing someone undergoing **social pain**.

Method

Participants: 45 White British, 41 East Asian

Conditions: Negative social experience video



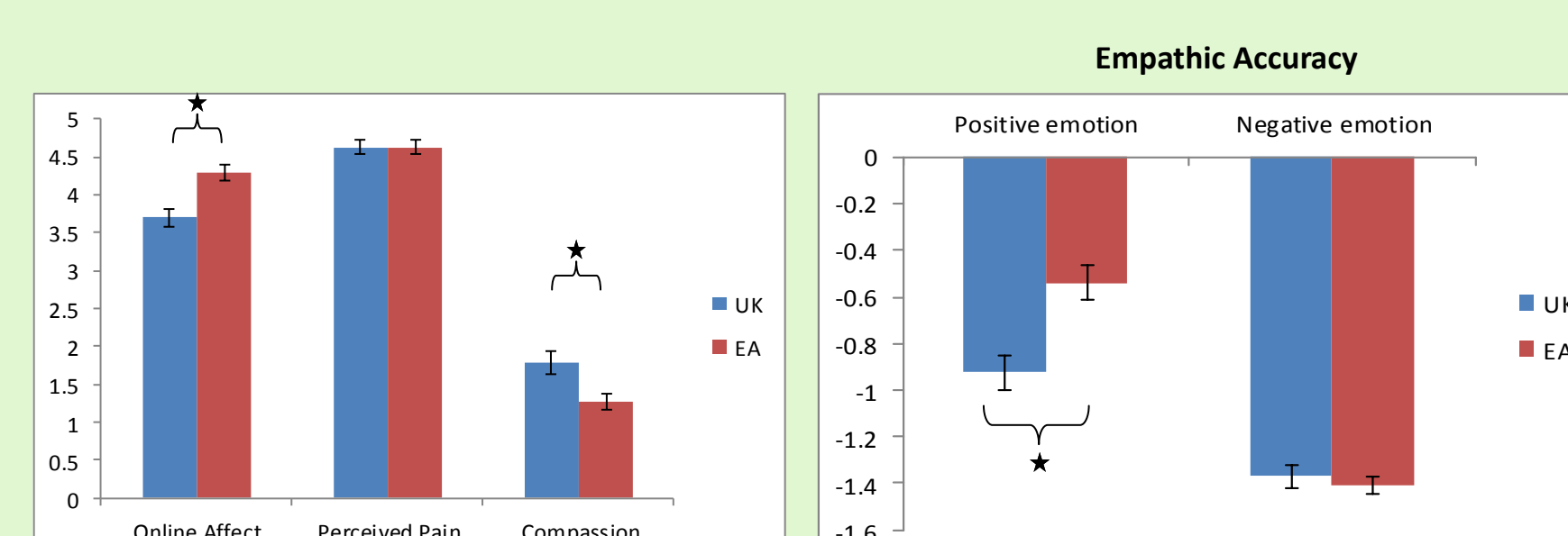
DVs: 1. Continuous affective response

2. Perceived pain (Wong-Baker FACES pain rating scale)

3. Compassion

4. Empathic accuracy (difference between perceived actor pain and actor reported pain across positive and negatively charged words)

Results



Negative Affect: British > East Asian

Perceived Pain: No group difference

Compassion: British > East Asian

Empathic Accuracy (+ emotion): East Asian > British

Empathic Accuracy (- emotion): No group difference

Discussion

- Language proficiency confound?
- No explanatory moderators (e.g. emotional expressivity).

STUDY 3: Empathic responses to social pain: The role of expressivity

Introduction

The protocol for this study was identical to Study 2 except that we included subtitles for all videos so non-native speakers could follow the content of the videos. We also included individual difference measures of emotional expressivity as a possible moderator.

Method

Participants: 49 White British, 48 East Asian

Conditions: Negative experience

DVs: 1. Continuous affective response

2. Perceived pain

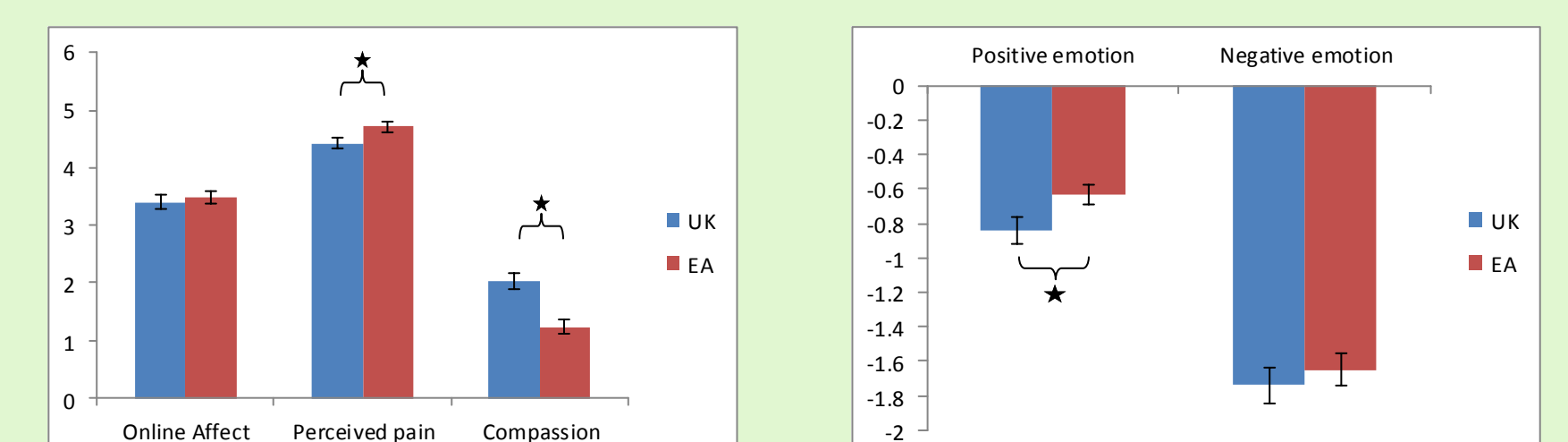
3. Compassion

4. Empathic accuracy

5. Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire (BEQ)

e.g. "People often do not know what I am feeling" (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree)

Results



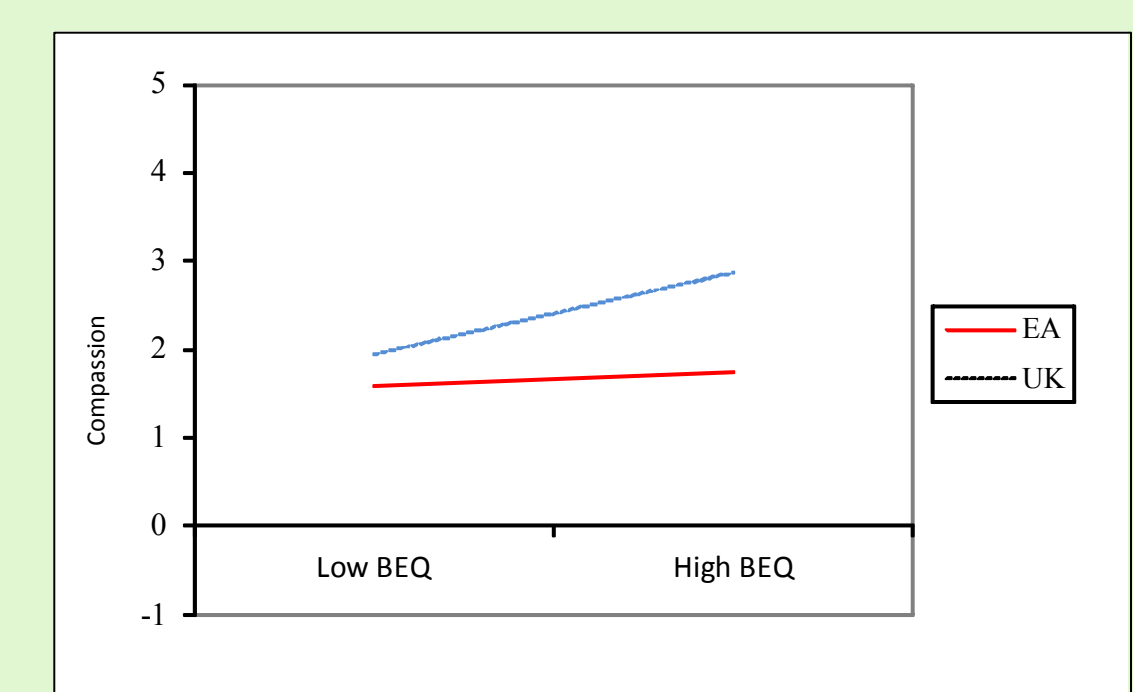
Negative Affect: No group difference

Perceived Pain: East Asian > British

Compassion: British > East Asian

Empathic Accuracy (+ emotion): East Asian > British

Empathic Accuracy (- emotion): No group difference



Expressivity moderates the relationship between culture and compassion, in that British high expressors report greater compassion compared to low expressors, where as this is not evident in East Asians.

Summary

Findings & General Discussion

- British report greater negative affect in Studies 1 and 2
- British report greater compassion in Studies 2 and 3
- East Asians are more empathically accurate for positive emotions in Studies 2 and 3.
- Compassion is moderated by emotional expressivity in Study 3

Cultural differences in trait levels of empathic concern as demonstrated by Cassels et al. (2010) align with emotional responses of compassion. Although, emotional responses of negative affect do not align with personal distress. Arguably, negative affect encompasses a wider array of emotions than trait levels of personal distress. In addition, emotional responses were contextualized.

In general, empathic accuracy for positive emotions align with previous research.

Perhaps cultural norms of emotional expressivity could help explain the moderating effect demonstrated in Study 3. East Asians express emotions less than North American counterparts (Safdar et al. 2009), and can explain the emotional responses we have found. Across all Studies In addition, it could be that individual differences of emotional expressivity do not activate for East Asians, regardless if they are high or low expressors as there are tighter cultural rules for emotional expression in the East. However, individual differences of emotional expressivity activate for British whom have more relaxed cultural norms of emotional expressivity.

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