



Original Article

Investigating the impact of emotional display rules on the positive/negative affect

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Abstract

Introduction: Emotional display rule are factors dependent on the cultural background of each person and they have a determinant role in expressing emotion. According to these rules, whatever emotion a person expresses is related to sub-threshold factors determined by personal culture. We aimed to investigate affect experience, which is important in psychological wellbeing and identified as a major determinant of quality of life.

Materials and Methods: The participants in this study were 560 Iranian individuals who live in various cities of Iran (Tehran, Abadan, Ahwaz, Shiraz, Isfahan, and Mashhad) in 2014-2015, and were selected through multistage clustering sampling method. Each one has their own specific emotional display rule. Hypotheses were investigated in light of emotional display rule and positive/negative affect. Questionnaires used in this study were Display Rule Assessment Inventory (DRAI) and Positive/ Negative affect (PANAS). Multiple regressions were used to test the study hypothesis and data were statistically evaluated by SPSS 19.

Results: Results showed that happiness and disgust are expressed more, and anger and sadness are expressed less.

Conclusion: Affect experiences are dependent on the rules which are determined by the culture. If expressing emotion is validated by the culture, the person would experience positive affects; and if not, he would experience negative affects.

Keywords: Affect, Culture, Emotion

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Introduction

As a main emotional component, emotional expression refers to the external display of emotions regardless of the value (positive or negative) or style (facial, verbal or behavioral) (1). Halberstadt believes that emotional expression includes a combination of emotional states, the knowledge of display rules, motivation and the ability to control individual emotional display (2). One of the determinants of emotional expression behavior is the display rules. In every culture, children learn rules or techniques to understand what emotions to show where and to whom. When children change their external expression of emotions, they often attempt to adjust their emotional behaviors to the subcultures or ideas about what is socially appropriate or

desirable under special circumstances. The idea is the social appropriateness of desirability of emotional expression in relation to the display rules; in fact, it refers to the social agreement on the type of expression (3).

The hypothesis of emotional display rules was first stated by Ekman et al. (4). They introduced it as a theoretical construct when it was a general concept in the study of emotion and culture, and it was used to describe the differences observed in the comparison between American and Japanese students. Emotional display rules can be regarded as the important components of each culture. They can actually be defined as the prescribed cultural rules which are quickly learnt through socialization in life. Depending on the characteristics of a specific culture including acceptable or unacceptable expressions of emotions, these rules influence the emotional expressions of people from each culture. Such culturally-shared norms dictate how, when and to

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whom the individuals should express their affects (5).

These constructs are not used as simple dimensions. They are regarded as representational factors of many social-psychological phenomena (including social norms, values, beliefs, personalities and behavioral traits which are evaluated with respect to the environmental-personal relationship) (6).

Emotional display rules are divided into six general groups: 1- direct expression, 2- amplified expression, 3- deamplified expression, 4- neutralization of expression, 5- masque expression, and 6- indirect expression. In this classification, the first and second groups are considered the openly emotional display, whereas the others are regarded as the repressively emotional display (7).

On the other hand, affects are directly influenced by the expression of an individual's behaviors (8). Positive affects indicate how much an individual is interested in life and how much he or she feels active and conscious. However, negative affects show a general aspect of internal discomfort and unpleasant preoccupation including anger, disgust, hatred, guilt, fear and nervousness (9,10). In fact, the positive affect includes positive feelings and emotions such as joy, hilarity, pleasure and pride, whereas the negative affect includes negative feelings and emotions such as guilt, shame, sorrow, anxiety, worry, anger and tension (11). It appears that individuals experiencing so much positive affect should have little negative affect. However, there is much evidence that the positive affect is not related to the negative affect. The reason is that pleasant incidents and experiences result in the positive affect, whereas unpleasant incidents and experiences cause the negative affect (12).

According to the definitions of emotional display rules and the positive/negative affect, there is apparently a correlational relationship between these two variables. The regression method can be used to predict these relationships.

Materials and Methods

The statistical population of this correlational-descriptive study included all the Iranian citizens aged between 16 and 54. Out of them, 560 individuals were selected from Tehran, Mashhad, Ahvaz, Shiraz, Isfahan and Abadan in 2014-2015. After informing them about study design, they were given consent form they have reassured that their data would be confidential; they were asked to fill out the research questionnaires. Sample size of this study was determined based on a study which is

about multiple regression used for prediction (13). According to this study, if predictor variable were 6 (six display rules), the best sample size for study will be 550 participants (13). So we selected 560 participants to participate for our study design. Our sampling method was multistage clustered which is conducted at first clustered by our sample size and that we selected six cities based on their extension and diversion of population, and then within each city according to the number of community mental health, we have chosen centers in that city and finally in each center using simple random sampling, we have selected our population study. There were 320 men (57%) and 240 women (43%) in this study. The demographic data were tried to be collected from different workplaces in different cities having diverse cultures.

The inclusion criteria were the age of 18 years old or above and the ability to read/write. The exclusion criteria were the lack of certain clinical disorders. The subjects were supposed to have at least a high school diploma to participate in this study. In the first step, the study was conducted on a sample including 560 subjects. The size of the sample is one of the important issues in the factory analysis.

Research instruments

- *The Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS)*: The Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) (9) was used to evaluate the positive affect. PANAS includes 20 items indicating 20 feelings (10 positive feelings and 10 negative feelings). It was codified in words. The views of respondents on these feelings are evaluated with respect to the present, past and future in five general scales (14). The positive and negative affect scales are self-evaluation tools. If the instructions are changed, both the state and characteristic portions of these scales can be measured. In this study, the temporal framework referred to the current week; therefore, the state portion of affect was considered. The scores of each subscale ranged from 10 to 50 (14). The internal consistency coefficients (alpha) of the positive affect and the negative affect were 0.88 and 0.87, respectively (14). Abolghasemi reported that the internal correlation coefficients of the components and the total scale ranged between 0.74 and 0.94, all of which were significant, a fact which confirmed the validity of this construct (9).

- *Display Rule Assessment Inventory (DRAI)*: Emotional display rules are learnt in the childhood. They help an individual control and moderate emotional expression based on the social conditions (4). Matsumoto's questionnaire (1999) was used in this study to investigate the emotional display rules.

The participants responded to a list of four social relationships, fourteen emotions and seven behavioral responses. According to the scores, the respondents were classified into different groups. The respondents were scored in two areas including social valuations and self-reporting behaviors. The validity and reliability of this questionnaire were reported around 0.78, and they will be calculated in the general sample of Iranian society. In this tool, the subjects are asked to select a self-expression management strategy which they should use for each distinct emotion (anger, disgust, humiliation, fear, joy and sorrow). These strategies are used in different situations. The respondents should choose these strategies in their lonely times publically and privately. The expression management strategies of each scenario are as follows: direct expression, amplified expression, deamplified expression, neutralization to a situation, masque expression and situation-related expression (5).

The Display Rule Assessment Inventory showed an appropriate internal reliability in previous studies (Cronbach's alpha ranged from 0.87 to 0.95 in the six expression strategies) (5). In this study, the Cronbach's alphas of direct expression, amplified expression, deamplified expression, neutralization to a situation, masque expression and situation-related expression were 0.7, 0.8, 0.82, 0.62, 0.55 and 0.72, respectively.

The correlation tests and stepwise regression analysis were used to investigate the research hypotheses.

Results

Descriptive data about participants in this study are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic data in participants

Variable		Frequency	Percentage
Social anxiety severity	16-26	112	0.2
	26-36	185	0.33
	36-46	89	0.15
	46-56	174	0.31
Education	Diploma	272	0.48
	Bachelor	189	0.33
	Master	99	0.17
Occupation	Homeworker	195	0.34
	Free	301	0.53
	Employee	65	0.11

Stepwise regression analysis was employed to understand the relationships between emotional display rules and the positive/negative affect better. In this analysis, the emotional display rules of 7 different emotions were investigated to predict the

positive/negative affect scores based on the results of 560 participants. Tables 2 and 3 show the results.

According to Table 1, joy and disgust are positively and significantly correlated with the factors of the openly emotional display rules. Moreover, anger, sorrow and joy are positively and significantly correlated with the factors of the repressively emotional display rules.

The findings of Table 2 indicate the separate roles of the significant factors of emotion. Joy and disgust can both predict 0.24 of the variance of the openly emotional display rules. In other word, 24% of the variance of this factor can be explained by joy and disgust in the research population ($F=16.25$; $P<0.05$). According to Table 3 showing the separate roles of the significant factors of emotion, anger and sorrow can both predict 0.18 of the variance of the repressively emotional display rules. Put another way, 18% of the variance of this factor can be explained by anger and sorrow in the research population ($F=5.27$; $P<0.05$).

Discussion

Since the beginning of research works by Ekman et al. (4), the concept of emotional display rules had found a good place among the notions of contemporary psychology. They are the learned rules which dictate emotional display management to people based on social circumstances. The presence of such rules in cultures from 30 years ago was proved in a study, comparing American and Japanese cultures, in which the participants watched stressful films alone and then watched them again with an examiner (16). When the subjects were alone, and there was no need for the emotional display rules, both American and Japanese participants showed similar emotional displays of anger, fear, disgust and sorrow. These emotions were known as global emotions in previous studies. However, the story was different when an examiner was present. Many of the Japanese subjects hid their negative feelings with a smile in the presence of an examiner. However, Americans still showed their negative feelings. The reason was that the emotional display rules were based on the concealment of negative feelings in Japanese culture.

Based on findings resulted from statistical analysis, we could deduce that happiness and disgust used overtly display rules and sadness, anger and happiness (in its small amount) used covertly display rules. Thus those emotions which are acceptable in society and culture dedicated overtly emotional display rules whereas those which are not

acceptable dedicated to covertly emotional display rules.

The abovementioned study indicated very well that how much the emotional display rules depended on the conditions and cultures. Given the environmental variables, these subjective rules change, and people express their emotions in different ways. As it was indicated in this study, joy and disgust were very popular in the culture of 560 Iranians who provided themselves with the opportunity to express their emotions directly in the environment. On the other hand, emotions like anger and sorrow, having negative feelings and result in negative affect, are related to the repressively emotional expression (15,17). Depending on the conditions which an emotion allocates the display rules in culture, it attributes the positive/negative

affect to an individual. In other words, regardless of the physiological tensions allocating an emotion like anger, they result in affect based on whether emotional display rules are open or repressive (18,19). For instance, the emotions which include the repressively emotional display rules bring negative affect to an individual here. Therefore, this study results in the subthreshold rules which exist in Iranian culture beyond the biological experience brought to an individual by an emotion.

Conclusion

Finally, the approval of the expression type in a culture can result in the positive or negative affect for an individual of a culture with specific emotional display rules.

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