Duyguları Sergileme Kuralları ve Bağlamsal Belirleyicileri: Türkiye’de Üniversite Öğrencileri ile Yapılan Bir Araştırma (Emotional Display Rules and Their Contextual Determinants: An Investigation with University Students in Turkey)

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Summary

Emotional Display Rules and Their Contextual Determinants: An Investigation with University Students in Turkey

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As part of a larger cross-cultural study of emotional display rules in 32 countries (Matsumoto, Yoo, Fontaine et al., 2008, 2009), the present study aimed to investigate the display rules operative in Turkish society and to identify some of their social situational determinants. Emotional display rules may be defined as the set of rules used by members of a society to adjust the expression of their emotions in response to social situations. Societies may differ in overall expressiveness, and likewise they may differ in the rules governing particular emotions or particular types of social situations. In this study, the situations included interaction in private or public settings; interaction with persons of higher, lower, or similar social status as the self; interaction with close friends or acquaintances; and interactions with same-sex or opposite-sex persons.

Cross-culturally, the most important determinant of expressiveness is neither culture nor social situation, but rather which emotion is being experienced (Matsumoto et al., 2009). The reason for this may be sought in the functions of the different emotions. Each emotion is aroused by a different set of stimuli, leads to different action tendencies, and communicates a different message to others. The communication function of emotional expression brings in its wake attempts to control the message and its intensity to fit the individual’s needs in the social situation (for example, to avoid losing status, to maintain closeness, to maintain one’s reputation, etc.). Thus, aspects of the relationship between interactants, particularly hierarchy, closeness, and gender, along with the public or private nature of the setting, can be expected to influence emotional display rules, and the nature of the emotion being expressed may be expected to interact with these social factors to produce different rules for different emotions.

Specifically, some emotions, such as anger, contempt, and disgust (identified as emotions that threaten social relationships (Sunar, Bolak-Boratav & Ataca, 2005), may have a negative impact on the closeness of a relationship, and that negative impact may be intensified if the display occurs in a public setting. Expression of the same emotions may have greater negative potential if directed to someone with higher status. On the other hand, fear may reduce one’s status in the eyes of those with lower status. These four emotions may be classified as “dangerous” in the interpersonal arena, and accordingly their expression is expected to be more closely regulated in close and/or hierarchical relationships, and in public. The other three emotions (happiness, sadness, and surprise) pose less
danger to closeness or status, and thus freer expression of them is expected to be endorsed. The impact of gender is expected to depend mainly on whether interactants are of the same sex or opposite sexes.

Method

Participants. Participants in the study were 235 university students, including 151 women and 84 men (mean age = 20.3, s.d. = 1.4).

Instrument. Emotional display rules were measured using the Display Rules Assessment Inventory (DRAI) (Matsumoto, et al., 1998). This inventory asks the respondent to select the alternative that best fits how a person should express a specified emotion in a specified situation. The expressive alternatives are “show more than you feel”, “show the emotion as you feel it”, “show less than you feel”, “show no emotion”, “show the emotion while smiling”, “show a different emotion”. (For analysis, these alternatives were assigned weights according to their degree of expressiveness, as described in Matsumoto, et al., 2008). The situations are private (alone with the target person) or public (with the target person in a place where others could easily see and hear them). The 20 target persons include family members (parents and siblings), close friends of both sexes, acquaintances of both sexes and various ages, and university professors of both sexes and two age groups. The emotions consist of the seven “basic” or universal emotions (Ekman, 1992): anger, contempt, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness, and surprise.

Procedure. Students filled out the questionnaires in a classroom setting and received experimental credit in exchange for their participation. No identifying information was asked.

Results

As expected, the highest overall approval for expression was accorded to happiness, surprise, and sadness, in that order. These were followed by, respectively, anger, fear, contempt and disgust. All differences were significant except for that between contempt and disgust ($F_{(1,219)} = 406.79, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.65$).

Public or private setting also had a large influence on the acceptability of emotional expression, with greater expressiveness being approved in private settings. The overall difference between public and private settings, across emotions, was highly significant ($F_{(7,189)} = 56.358, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.68$), and the differences for each emotion were also highly significant.

Status, as defined by age and position of authority in relation to the respondent (higher status, same status, lower status) likewise influenced the acceptability of emotional expression across the seven emotions ($F_{(14,182)} = 11.815, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.48$). The differences for each emotion were also highly significant. As expected, expression of anger, contempt and disgust toward higher-status targets (along also with happiness and surprise) was less approved, while expression of fear toward higher-status was approved more than toward lower-status targets and expression of sadness toward same-status targets received more approval than expression toward higher or lower status targets. (See Figure 1.)
In terms of closeness, expression of all emotions was more acceptable when directed to close friends than to acquaintances. (See Figure 2.)

The effect of gender, in general, depended on the sex of both interactants rather than simply on sex of respondent or sex of target. Interaction effects were highly significant for all seven emotions. Sex of respondent was significant only for happiness and sadness, with female respondents giving greater approval to expression of those emotions. Sex of target was more influential; expression of happiness and sadness was judged more appropriate to female targets, and expression of all the other emotions (anger, contempt, disgust and fear) was judged more appropriate to male targets.

Discussion and Conclusions

The most basic finding of the study is that display rules vary widely depending on the nature of the emotion and the social situation. Along with the nature of the emotion, whether the interaction takes place in public or private exerts the strongest influence on how much expressiveness is approved. Considerations of relative status also impact the rules considerably, with expression of the other-blaming moral emotions (anger, contempt, and disgust) towards higher-status interactants being less approved. Freer expression of all emotions is approved between close friends compared to acquaintances. The effect of gender is complex; while there is little difference in approval of expressiveness between male and female respondents, there are large differences depending on sex of target and on whether or not the respondent and target are of the same sex. All of these findings taken together support a situationalist interpretation of emotional display rules.

Key words: Emotions; emotional expression; cultural display rules