

Display rules, expressive suppression, and socioemotional wellbeing during COVID-19

Display rules—people’s beliefs about how they should express emotions—are critical for successful social interaction. For example, hiding anger at our boss, or disappointment with a present, avoids disrupting social relationships. While the key dimensions of other emotional processes are well established, prior work on display rules has focused on a small number of emotions, analysed individually. To discover the underlying emotional structure of display rules, the present study tested display rules across a set of 24 emotions with established physical signals. Exploratory (N=339) and confirmatory (N=477) studies demonstrated good fit for a model comprising harmonious, vulnerable, and disharmonious factors, with invariance across men and women, and different stages of the adult lifespan. The factors demonstrated high internal reliability and external validity. Using this model, we found men believed they should control their expressivity more than women, for all emotions. In contrast, women did not show gender differences, but believed they personally should control their expressivity more than everyone else. In a new sample (N~1250), we test display rules for online compared to in-person interactions, and find that display rules may have negative as well as positive outcomes, with implications for wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Biography

Dr Dawel is a cognitive and clinical psychologist, and Senior Lecturer in the Research School of Psychology, The Australian National University. Her research aims to advance understanding of how humans respond to their own and others’ emotions, using cognitive behavioural and physiological methods. Much of her work focuses on individual differences in human emotional processes, including associations with clinical and personality traits. In 2020-21, she led a nationwide study investigating the mental health and emotional impacts of COVID-19 on the Australian general population.