

# The Impact of Emotional Expression on Interpersonal Relationship Quality and Mental Health

Yan Cui\*

Hohhot Vocational College, Hohhot, 010050, China

Corresponding author: cuiyan0501@sina.com

**Abstract:** As an important externalization of the human emotional system, emotional expression plays a fundamental role in regulating an individual's psychological state and constructing interpersonal relationships. In recent years, the impact mechanism of emotional expression on mental health and interpersonal interaction has attracted widespread attention. However, existing research lacks systematic integration and in-depth exploration of mechanistic models. This article analyzes the psychological mechanisms and behavioral patterns of emotional expression based on three dimensions: cognitive processing, individual differences, and regulation strategies. It further explores the symbolic construction function of emotional expression in interpersonal interactions, the impact of expression consistency on relationship stability, and the regulation paths of empathy feedback in interaction contexts. In terms of mental health, the article focuses on the interactive mechanism between cognitive load accumulation caused by expressive suppression, emotional externalization, and psychological resilience, as well as the constructive value of expressive ability as a psychological resource for health levels. The study constructs a "expressive ability—cognitive regulation—emotional feedback—mental health" chain model, providing theoretical support for understanding the dual functions of emotional expression in social interactions and psychological regulation.

**Keywords:** Emotional expression; Mental health; Interpersonal relationships; Expressive ability; Emotional regulation; Individual differences

## Introduction

Emotional expression, as a behavioral representation embedded within cognitive systems and social interaction structures, profoundly influences an individual's psychological functions and modes of interpersonal connection. With the acceleration of social interaction and the increasing demands for emotional management, how to achieve appropriate emotional expression in changing contexts has become a focal point in the intersection of psychology and social behavior research. Emotional expression not only affects an individual's ability to regulate internal emotions but also deeply engages in the process of constructing interpersonal relationships. Trust generation, interaction coordination, and the stability of social support systems all rely on effective expression mechanisms. Although existing research has explored aspects such as expression strategies, cultural differences, and personality influences, there remains significant theoretical space and empirical need regarding the internal coupling relationship between expression mechanisms and mental health, the resource attributes of expressive ability, and its contribution to the stability of interpersonal structures. This article aims to systematically review the psychological mechanisms and relational functions of emotional expression, analyze its role in constructing mental health, and provide a theoretical basis for improving social psychological regulation models and promoting interpersonal adaptation.

## 1. Psychological Mechanisms of Emotional Expression and Individual Differences

### 1.1 Cognitive Processing Pathways of Emotional Expression

Emotional expression, as a key outward manifestation of the human emotional system, relies on the dynamic integration of multiple cognitive processes. In the cognitive neural mechanisms, emotional stimuli are first processed rapidly by the sensory system, and then the emotional significance and initial

judgment are completed through the limbic system (especially the amygdala and hippocampus). This stage mainly involves the generation of emotional arousal and primary responses. Following this, the prefrontal cortex conducts higher-level processing of emotional information, including emotional regulation, social context assessment, and selection of expression modes, thus preparing and controlling outward expression. Research indicates that emotional expression is not only constrained by the content of the emotions themselves but also by the individual's ability to perceive social cues, the awareness of internal emotional states (emotional awareness), and their degree of adaptation to social norms. Both verbal and non-verbal expressions (such as facial expressions, body movements, tone changes, etc.) exhibit different processing pathways and control mechanisms during this process. The former relies more on the processing integration of the left language region, while the latter significantly depends on the rapid response ability of the mirror neuron system. Therefore, the cognitive processing pathway of emotional expression presents a continuous dynamic mechanism of "perception—recognition—integration—expression," with its extensibility along the time dimension and flexibility along the situational dimension, together forming the basis for an individual's emotional accessibility in social interactions<sup>[1]</sup>.

### ***1.2 Factors Constraining Emotional Expression Patterns Based on Individual Differences***

Emotional expression presents significant variability at the individual level. This variability arises both from stable psychological traits and is influenced by physiological foundations and socialization experiences. Personality dimensions such as extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism are widely regarded as important psychological variables that influence emotional expression tendencies. Extraverted individuals typically exhibit higher emotional expressiveness and more frequent emotional interaction behaviors, whereas higher levels of neuroticism may lead to irritability in emotional expression and deviations in emotional recognition ability. Additionally, attachment type is an important structural variable in regulating emotional expression styles. Individuals with secure attachment are more likely to engage in open and regulation-functional emotional expression in intimate relationships, while avoidant and anxious attachment styles tend to suppress expression and exhibit excessive emotional externalization, respectively.

From the perspective of cultural psychology, different cultural orientations (such as collectivism and individualism) significantly affect the rules, priorities, and social expectations surrounding emotional expression. For instance, individuals in a collectivist cultural background are more inclined to suppress negative emotions to maintain social harmony, while in individualistic cultures, expressing true emotions is seen as an expression of self-consistency. Furthermore, gender role norms, language ability, emotional recognition ability (emotional granularity), and early emotional socialization experiences profoundly shape an individual's expression tendencies and behavioral strategies in various contexts. Individual differences are not isolated variables; rather, they interact in a networked manner to jointly influence the generation and regulation logic of expression patterns.

### ***1.3 Regulatory Strategies and Functional Positioning of Emotional Expression***

The regulation of emotional expression is not a simple process of "suppression" or "release," but rather a complex psychological mechanism based on goal orientation and social environmental regulation. In Gross's emotion regulation theory, expressive suppression and cognitive reappraisal are regarded as two typical strategies. The former controls the overt expression of emotions by reducing external expression after the individual's emotions have been activated. Although it helps with behavioral control in the short term, long-term use is gradually associated with negative psychological outcomes, such as increased cognitive load and reduced sense of social connection. Cognitive reappraisal, on the other hand, regulates the generation and expression tendencies of emotions by changing the way emotional events are interpreted, and is seen as a more adaptive regulatory strategy<sup>[2]</sup>.

From a social functionalist perspective, emotional expression is not only a tool for reflecting internal states but also a strategic tool for social interactions. Its basic functions include information transmission, relationship regulation, and behavior guidance. In intimate relationships, appropriate emotional expression can enhance emotional resonance and emotional synchronization, contributing to the stability and intimacy of the relationship. In group settings, the "signal function" of emotional expression can regulate the interaction rhythm and sense of belonging among members. At the same time, the timeliness, contextual suitability, and cultural appropriateness of expression are necessary conditions for achieving its social functions. Based on this, the regulation of emotional expression should be viewed as an adaptive adjustment to interpersonal structural arrangements within specific

social structures and cognitive systems, rather than a mere selection of a single behavioral strategy.

## **2. Coupling Mechanism of Emotional Expression and Interpersonal Relationship Quality**

### ***2.1 The Significance Structure of Emotional Expression in Relationship Construction***

In prosocial interactions, emotional expression not only serves the basic function of emotional transmission but also constitutes the core semantic structure for the generation and maintenance of interpersonal relationships. From the perspective of symbolic interaction theory, emotional expression, as a highly symbolized social behavior, generates meaning through the process of recognizing, decoding, and re-encoding emotional content by interacting subjects. Individuals use multiple forms of expression, such as facial expressions, tone changes, body posture, and verbal content, to display their internal states, and in the process, they achieve emotional co-construction with others and role positioning. The expression of positive emotions helps establish trust expectations and emotional connections, while moderate expression of negative emotions can also activate empathy mechanisms, thus forming deeper psychological bonds.

In the early stages of relationship construction, the openness and authenticity of emotional expression play a key role in predicting the developmental path of the relationship. Expressive behavior is perceived by others as a social cue for an individual's stability and reliability and also forms the premise for negotiating relationship norms. The selection and adjustment of emotional expression reflect an individual's social perception and regulatory ability concerning interaction goals, further shaping role recognition and psychological boundaries within the relationship. Therefore, emotional expression should not only be viewed as an output of an individual's psychological state but understood as a constructive symbolic behavior. It continuously generates relational meaning, repairs interaction gaps, and solidifies psychological expectations in multiple interaction contexts<sup>[3]</sup>.

### ***2.2 Expression Consistency and the Dynamic Stability of Interpersonal Interaction***

Expression consistency refers to the degree of alignment between an individual's internal emotional experience and external emotional expression, playing a fundamental role in generating interaction stability and psychological safety in interpersonal interactions. When expression and experience are highly consistent, the interaction partner is more likely to accurately interpret emotional states, thereby enhancing the predictability of the interaction and the willingness to cooperate. On the relational dimension, expression consistency promotes the construction of social transparency and trust, contributing to the formation of a sustained interaction structure and the internalization of relationship rules.

In specific interactions, the phenomenon of expression inconsistency (such as emotional masking, deliberate suppression, or social facades) may meet the needs of relationship maintenance or social expectations in the short term. However, frequent use over time can lead to interaction imbalance, increased cognitive load, and heightened psychological alienation. Expression consistency is not only constrained by an individual's expressive ability but also regulated by the power structure, relationship type, and interaction density in the interaction environment. For example, individuals in asymmetric relationships may suppress expression due to role expectations, weakening the immediacy of emotional feedback and the symmetry of the relationship.

Dynamic stability refers to the sustainable balance in maintaining the interaction rhythm and expressive style in the course of a relationship. Its construction depends on the modifiability of emotional expression and the acceptability of the partner's feedback, manifested as the formation of stable expression-feedback cycles and psychological adaptation structures through multiple rounds of interaction. There exists a bidirectional promotion relationship between expression consistency and dynamic stability: the former provides cognitive foundations and emotional cues, while the latter continuously feeds back and calibrates expression tendencies during the interaction process, thereby constituting a self-organizing interpersonal steady-state system.

### ***2.3 Emotional Regulation and Empathy Feedback Mechanism in Interaction Contexts***

The emotional regulation mechanism in interaction contexts determines how individuals choose modes of expression, regulate the intensity of expression, and respond to others' emotional inputs in complex interpersonal situations. Effective emotional regulation helps reduce interaction tension,

maintain expression consistency, and promote the development of structural integration in relationships. In intimate relationships, cooperative relationships, and group interactions, emotional regulation not only reflects an individual's regulatory ability but also demonstrates composite psychological traits such as social cognition, situational adaptability, and emotional resilience<sup>[4]</sup>.

Empathy feedback, as a bidirectional response mechanism based on emotional consensus, establishes an emotional channel between expression and reception. Its operational mechanism includes cognitive activities such as emotional recognition, emotional imitation, and emotional reasoning, and achieves synchrony and responsiveness through non-verbal signals and verbal confirmation. Empathy feedback not only enhances the accuracy of emotional communication but also strengthens the emotional intensity and situational adaptability of social connections in interactions. Research indicates that in interactions with high levels of empathy feedback, individuals are more likely to experience emotional value, a sense of security, and relationship satisfaction, thereby improving the overall quality of interpersonal relationships.

The interaction context is essentially a dynamically generated emotional interaction network, with emotional regulation and empathy feedback constituting the dual mechanisms that sustain the operation of this network. Emotional regulation ensures the appropriateness and flexibility of expressive behavior in context, while empathy feedback provides social responses and psychological confirmation for expressive behaviors. Together, these mechanisms form the internal support system for relationship quality. Through the continuous practice of bidirectional regulation of expression and response in specific contexts, interaction relationships gradually generate stable emotional patterns and trust frameworks, thus enhancing the overall coordination and psychological resonance of interpersonal interactions.

### **3. Constructing Pathways for Emotional Expression and Mental Health Indicators**

#### ***3.1 Expressive Suppression and the Cumulative Mechanism of Psychological Load***

Expressive suppression is a commonly used emotion regulation strategy in social interactions, typically manifested as an individual intentionally suppressing outward behavior in response to emotional stimuli in order to maintain social norms, avoid conflict, or uphold personal image. In the short term, this strategy does offer certain benefits in behavioral regulation and social adaptation, enhancing an individual's sense of self-control and social conformity. However, the frequent and prolonged use of expressive suppression, especially in high-pressure or high-density interpersonal interactions, often leads to cumulative psychological load. According to cognitive load theory, expressive suppression requires individuals to continually mobilize executive function resources to suppress automatic emotional responses. This high cognitive demand interferes with information processing, reduces working memory efficiency, and, in turn, affects problem-solving ability and decision-making efficiency. Additionally, expressive suppression can lead to distractions, delayed verbal expression, and delayed interaction feedback, causing individuals to experience "cognitive fatigue" and "expression freeze" in interpersonal interactions, resulting in suboptimal psychological states<sup>[5]</sup>.

From a neurophysiological perspective, long-term expressive suppression activates the sympathetic-adrenal medullary (SAM) axis and the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis, triggering sustained high-level stress responses. This manifests in physiological indicators such as abnormal cortisol secretion, decreased heart rate variability, and impaired immune function. This physiological stress state, in turn, weakens an individual's emotional regulation resilience, making them more susceptible to emotional exhaustion and behavioral rigidity when faced with new sources of stress. From a psychological perspective, expressive suppression is deeply coupled with the self-evaluation system. When individuals anticipate that their expressions may provoke negative evaluations, they develop heightened social vigilance and self-monitoring behaviors, which, in turn, trigger avoidance tendencies and emotional rumination. Such rumination can solidify negative cognitive structures, amplifying emotions like anxiety, depression, and shame, leading to an inner cycle of these emotions. Ultimately, this triggers a vicious cycle of interpersonal alienation, reduced self-efficacy, and psychological burnout. Therefore, expressive suppression should not be simplified as a conventional path of "silence equals adaptation." Instead, it should be carefully assessed from the intersecting perspectives of cognitive load, neurophysiological mechanisms, and social significance, in order to explore more resilient and sustainable emotional expression strategies.

### ***3.2 The Associative Structure between Emotional Externalization Behaviors and Individual Psychological Resilience***

Emotional externalization behaviors refer to the actions in which individuals directly express their internal emotional states to the external world through speech, movement, facial expressions, and other means. Under certain conditions, these behaviors can become an important supporting factor for psychological resilience. Psychological resilience, which reflects an individual's ability to recover psychologically in the face of stress and adversity, relies on the integration of multiple psychological resources, with effective emotional expression ability serving as the core foundation. Appropriate emotional externalization helps regulate physiological activation levels, reduce the tension caused by inner conflict, and facilitate cognitive restructuring and the self-integration process.

Studies have shown that in individuals with a strong tendency for emotional externalization, negative emotions are quickly released and receive external feedback, thereby enhancing their ability to recognize and control their emotional states. This emotional-cognitive interaction mechanism can activate the regulatory function of the prefrontal cortex, improve the flexibility of coping strategies, and enhance the accessibility of the social support system. Emotional externalization behaviors also play an important social role in group interactions, enhancing an individual's emotional expression self-efficacy, building a positive feedback system of self-worth and emotional control, and indirectly strengthening the individual's psychological resilience and adaptability when facing external pressure.

It is important to note that the functional effects of emotional externalization have boundary conditions. In the absence of situational adaptability or expression regulation abilities, emotional externalization behaviors may lead to conflict, misunderstanding, or even social exclusion. Therefore, when exploring its relationship with psychological resilience, emotional externalization behaviors should be examined within the overall structure of individual regulatory abilities, social interaction patterns, and cultural cognitive frameworks, in order to avoid oversimplifying them as a one-way positive variable<sup>[6]</sup>.

### ***3.3 Constructing the Psychological Resource Role Model of Expressive Ability***

Expressive ability is not only a means of emotional output in the structure of psychological health but also a core psychological resource embedded within an individual's cognitive and social functional systems. This ability encompasses subsystems such as emotional recognition, labeling, regulation, and communication, with its operational process presenting a dynamic chain of "recognition—transformation—adaptation—output." In stress coping and interpersonal interactions, expressive ability works by enhancing emotional sharedness and information clarity, reducing cognitive ambiguity and uncertainty, thereby maintaining the integration and stability of the psychological system. It becomes an important supporting mechanism for ensuring psychological adaptation.

From the perspectives of resource conservation theory and social identity theory, expressive ability can serve as a resource to delay psychological exhaustion under pressure, and also enhance emotional connections to improve social belonging and psychological resilience. Its regulatory effectiveness is influenced by emotional complexity, metacognitive levels, and interaction experience, displaying high plasticity and situational sensitivity. Based on this, a "expressive ability—cognitive regulation—emotional feedback—mental health" chain model can be constructed, revealing the fundamental role of expressive behavior in the psychological system and providing a theoretical basis for constructing psychological regulation mechanisms and intervention pathways centered around expressive ability.

## **Conclusion**

This article systematically explores the multidimensional mechanisms of emotional expression in cognitive processing, individual differences, and regulatory strategies, further analyzing its logical significance in interpersonal relationship construction, the interaction stability facilitated by expression consistency, and the synergistic effect of emotional regulation and empathy feedback mechanisms in the interaction context. In the dimension of mental health, the study reveals the cumulative effect of expressive suppression on psychological load, the supporting mechanism of emotional externalization behaviors on psychological resilience, and the chain model of expressive ability as a psychological resource. Overall, emotional expression is both an intrinsic path of psychological regulation and a core language of social interaction, playing a dual role of generation and regulation in the psychological

ecosystem. Future research can further combine physiological data, cross-cultural comparisons, and longitudinal tracking methods to delve into the variation mechanisms and intervention potential of expressive ability at different developmental stages and in various social structures, in order to construct more adaptive and operable emotional expression models and psychological support programs.

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