

**SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF BREAKING ONLINE EMOTIONAL DISPLAY  
RULES: A MIXED-METHODS STUDY IN PARTNERSHIP WITH AFRICAN  
AMERICAN ADOLESCENT MALES**

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of  
Education in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

University of Pittsburgh

2017

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

School of Education

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April 3, 2017

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The advent of social media has introduced a powerful new context for emotional development, which is particularly important for adolescents. Emotional development is especially active and susceptible to peer influences during adolescence, and by 2014, almost all U.S. teens reported using social media. Building a knowledge base about adolescents' emotional lives online could inform practice in ways that improve outcomes for youth, but research on emotional interactions via social media is in its infancy. This mixed-methods, exploratory taxonomy development study first qualitatively explored how African American adolescent boys defined emotional display rules online, and then used experimental methods to investigate the perceived social consequences of breaking these display rules. A total of 50 adolescents (mean age = 15.8) participated; of these, 10 acted as youth research partners who engaged in focus groups to help design research materials and interpret results, and 40 others engaged in experimental procedures and individual interviews. Through inductive qualitative analysis, we developed a taxonomy of emotional display rules around anger, sadness, embarrassment, and excitement. Some particularly salient display rules centered on anger. For example, one emergent display rule was: expressions

of anger that are violent in nature are not socially acceptable. Results from the within-subjects experiment using simulated social media interactions suggest that youth perceive social consequences for fictional characters who broke display rules. Ratings of likeability were significantly different among four characters; the emotionally neutral was the most liked character, whereas youth rated the three characters who violated specific display rules significantly lower. The character who violated the anger display rule received the lowest ratings. Characters who violated display rules also garnered less sympathy when they posted about the death of a friend, and participants' response intentions to these posts differed among characters. Findings suggest that breaking certain online emotional display rules can harm peer relationships. With knowledge about the nature and consequences of African American adolescent boys' emotional interactions via social networking sites, adults across developmental settings (e.g., school and after school programs) will be positioned to help youth become more intentional about online expressions and responses.

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To Matt, Grace and Matthew

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my family: I believed that I could accomplish this goal because you did. Each of you gave me unique gifts during my years in graduate school—gifts of time, comfort, advice, and homemade spaghetti (and the polpette!). Matt, you kept me facing the sun and moving forward. Your unwavering support is the single most important reason we’ve found ourselves on the other side of this mountain. Thank you for the big sacrifices you made along the way, and for the million small ones, too. Grace, I can still picture you at three and four, “working” alongside me at our dining room table, and at 6 and 7, volunteering as my “teaching assistant” in class. Matthew, you don’t know it yet, but you were with me when I defended my proposal (before you were born), and also during many hectic Skype meetings (after you were born). You kids are my heart. Spending time with the two of you is always the best part of my day, and someday I hope your work feels as much like play as mine does! Mom, the time you spent with Grace when she was little allowed me to focus; I knew without a doubt that she was safe and happy in your care. Your frequent family dinners, sympathetic ear, and fun plans helped our family to thrive under pressure. Dad, your advocacy for the “best job in the world” sure was effective! Thank you for the many long conversations over lunch and Thai Iced Tea on campus. Every day I aim to be the kind of parents you two are. To my sister Lauren, thanks for your encouragement, and most importantly your friendship. Thanks also to the rest of my extended family for being the warmest, most supportive bunch of people I know.

I would also like to thank my advisor and chair, Tom Akiva. I am forever grateful for his extensive help with this work and for years of excellent mentorship. Thanks for the many brainstorming sessions as this study developed, and for your consistent, close readings and brilliant suggestions as it progressed. You have a way of perfectly balancing kindness and constructive criticism, and it has always been clear that one of your primary goals is to provide your students with opportunities for meaningful growth. I am fortunate to have been one of them. In short, your interactions are all Z's!

The rest of my dissertation committee members were instrumental in this process as well, and I am so grateful to them. Matt Bundick has been a source of inspiration and support since early in my doctoral studies, and he continues to challenge me to think about the same old things in different ways. Jenn Russell ignited my passion for qualitative methods, and I use the skills she helped me to develop every day. Brian Galla, with his methodological creativity and caution, pushed me to identify and mitigate validity threats at every turn. Sincere thanks to each of you for helping to make this work possible, from conception to completion.

So many others played roles in the development of this project, and in my development as a researcher. Mary Margaret Kerr and Betsy Levine Brown have been great sources of support, wisdom, and opportunity. Kevin Kim taught me a great deal about statistics, and also taught me that I was capable of using them. He is sorely missed. Christina Scanlon has been a friend, confidant, and my biggest critic. Duhita Mahatmya was kind enough to review portions of this manuscript and share insightful feedback and advice. Alex Demand and Kelly Martin helped to juggle so many of the moving parts that would likely have gotten away from me during the data collection phase of this project, and stellar research assistants contributed in various, critical ways (interviewing, data entry, transcription, coding). Amy Thatcher was indispensable, and without the

hard work and dedication of Regina Yarotskya, Kate Roark, and Carolyn Procknal, this work would still be underway. Thank you all! Also, thank you to the rest of the faculty members in PSYED, from and with whom I have learned so much.

## **1.0 EMOTION AND MASCULINITY IN THE AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA: THE CHALLENGE FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN BOYS**

A pair of current hot-button issues in the U.S., gun violence and “rape culture,” have directed media attention toward a possible common root: toxic masculinity. Though there are many masculinities—that is, there are many ways to identify as a male in society—a prominent construction of masculinity in the U.S. involves the projection of toughness and aggression and the rejection of traits and behaviors associated with femininity, such as expressing feelings (see Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Coles, 2009). This is the essence of toxic masculinity, which is defined as “the constellation of socially regressive male [characteristics] that serve to foster domination, the devaluation of women, homophobia, and wanton violence” (Kupers, 2005, p. 714). These characteristics contribute to myriad social and public health issues such as the high incidence of violence perpetrated by men (Murnen, Wright, & Kaluzny, 2002; Schumacher et al., 2001; Stith et al., 2004; Sugarman and Frankel, 1996), male alcoholism, depression, and suicide (Houle, Mishara, & Chagnon, 2008; Magovcevic & Addis, 2005; Syzdek & Addis, 2010), and resistance to mental health interventions (Brooks & Good, 2001; Kupers, 2001; Kupers, 2005). In many ways, “being a man” (i.e., subscribing to social rules associated with toxic masculinity) has consequences for individual men and for society as a whole.

Public interest in and pushback against toxic masculinity have been on the rise for the better part of a decade. TED Talks that implore viewers to reconsider the “boys’ code,” to break out of



the “man box,” and to shed the “mask of masculinity” have reached millions of viewers (e.g., Katz, 2013; Horsburgh, 2014; Porter, 2010; Pozzobon, 2011). In June of 2016, shortly after the mass shooting at Pulse nightclub in Orlando, *The Atlantic* ran a story called “Toxic Masculinity and Murder,” which asked readers to consider “the role of masculinity in hatred” (Hamblin, 2016, para. 8). In August, a post on the African American Intellectual History blog connected toxic masculinity and rape culture, specifically in response to a high-profile rape case in the news (Owens, 2016). The same month, a piece in *Ebony* magazine argued that “toxic masculinity is creating global graveyards,” imploring readers to challenge the harmful status quo (Armah, 2016). In September, author Teddy Wayne gave an interview on NPR about his recent novel, *Loner*, which he wrote in response to the observation that “every few weeks...there’s another atrocity in the news perpetrated by—invariably—a man, often a young man” (NPR, 2016). Like these and countless others, he blames widespread and relentless physical and sexual violence in the U.S. largely on exposure to toxic masculinity.

In the face of such a passionate countermovement, how is this construction of masculinity perpetuated? Toxic masculinity is multi-faceted, involving power and dominance (particularly over women, but over other men, too), aggression or violence, and emotional suppression (Kupers, 2005). The current work will focus most closely on the aspect of emotional suppression. Thus, a more specific question is: How do many boys in the U.S. learn that to embody “maleness” they must appear to be relatively unemotional? Children develop understandings of such social expectations through observing and interacting with others. For decades, research has examined ways that parents socialize their young children both purposefully and unintentionally (see Eisenberg, 1998; Denham et al., 2006), and as youth enter adolescence peers become a particularly important influence on their development (Blakemore & Mills, 2014). Media has long been

identified as a key socializing force as well (Arnette, 1995); today's youth grow up immersed in various forms of rapidly evolving media—from radio and television to Twitter and Instagram. In short, messages about maleness and emotional stoicism are everywhere.

Of course, socializing experiences vary, as do the people who experience them, making for a full spectrum of person-environment interactions around masculinity. In addition to developmental identity domains closely related to masculinity, such as sexual orientation and gender, race may play an important part in determining the kind of socializing experiences a young man is likely to experience. In particular, African American boys are often exposed to strong messaging that endorses toxic masculinity, and they simultaneously tend to have lower levels of access to resources (like counseling) that could buffer negative outcomes of such exposure (Hammond, 2012). It is critical to identify accessible ways to mitigate these risks.

With the two interconnected studies (Chapters 2 and 3), that comprise this work, I will explore whether and how social media as a developmental context has thus far acted as a platform for the perpetuation of or re-definition of social norms around the expression of emotions for African American adolescent boys. The remainder of Chapter 1 will first introduce how emotional expression and masculinity connect and consider how this intersection is unique for African American boys in the U.S. Then, I will describe the social process through which emotional competence develops, and discuss how social networking sites have emerged as an important developmental setting for adolescents. Finally, I will summarize the research aims and methods of the dissertation as a whole to elucidate the connections between the studies in chapters 2 and 3.

## **1.1 MASCUINITY AND EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION**

Masculinity is a “fluid, socially constructed concept that changes over time and space” (Coles, 2009, p. 30), which men must negotiate throughout their lives. In the barest sense, masculinity is “a socially constructed set of meanings, values, and practices” about what it is to be male (Weinstein, Smith, & Wiesenthal, 1995). Though there are many constructions of masculinity (Courtenay, 2000), a prevailing version of masculinity in the U.S. (and elsewhere) involves power, dominance, strength, heterosexuality, and emotional stoicism (see Connell & Messersmidt, 2005; Coles, 2009). These characteristics are notably positioned in direct contrast to stereotypical constructions of femininity. It is this version of masculinity that has become known in the research literature as well as the popular media as “toxic” because of the many negative outcomes, from depression and suicide to rape and mass murder, that have been associated with it (e.g., Houle et al., 2008; Magovcevic & Addis, 2005; Murnen et al., 2002; Schumacher et al., 2001; Stith et al., 2004; Sugarman and Frankel, 1996; Syzdek & Addis, 2010).

These gender role expectations are not always met with acceptance, however prevailing they may be. A recent study has put forth some evidence that resistance to this masculinity may be common among adolescent boys; only 55 boys participated, but 78% of them demonstrated resistance, which typically waned as they aged (Way et al., 2014). Regardless, this construction of masculinity is still widely considered to be mainstream and stereotypical.

### **1.1.1 Toxic masculinity in black culture**

Black boys and men may experience more intense exposure to constructions of masculinity with “toxic” characteristics; Hammond (2012) argues that African American men may have greater

gender role-related stressors than men of other races. These stressors are associated with a collection of negative health outcomes such as depression, suicide, and health issues (e.g., Williams et al., 2007), and African American men are less likely than women and men of other races to access resources like mental health counseling that have the potential to help buffer negative outcomes (Hammond, 2012). Black men have described experiencing extreme pressure within their communities to conform to rigid cultural definitions of masculinity (Fields, et al., 2015). In fact, some researchers argue that hegemonic masculinity, (which essentially means normalized male dominance over women) is insufficient to describe masculinity in black culture (Franklin, 1994; Mincey et al., 2014). African American boys, therefore often develop their knowledge and understanding of emotional experiences and emotional display rules amidst strong messages that tell them they should be emotionless (Wade & Rochlen, 2013).

## **1.2 THE DEVELOPMENT OF EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE IN SOCIAL CONTEXT**

Becoming emotionally competent can be considered a key developmental task and a deeply social process rooted in culture; it cannot occur in isolation (Saarni, 1979, 1999, 2007). According to Saarni (1999), emotional competence is a functional capacity that is defined by the ability of an individual to reach their own goals after they experience an emotion in social context. She outlines eight skills that comprise emotional competence: awareness of a person's own emotions, awareness and understanding of others' emotions, emotional vocabulary and expression, empathetic response, discriminating between internal emotional experience and external expression, adaptive emotional coping, awareness of interpersonal communication about

emotions, and emotional self-efficacy (Saarni, 1999). In other words, emotional competence is a socio-cultural construct comprised of many discreet skills.

Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986) broadly conceptualizes human development as a process that occurs through interactions between cognitive, behavioral, and environmental factors. Each of these factors is considered to influence the others; Bandura calls this *triadic reciprocal causation*. A major tenet of social cognitive theory is that rather than learning solely based on experience and direct interaction with the environment, individuals develop vicariously through the observation and imitation of others, or *modeling* (Bandura & Ross, 1961). Social cognitive theory views self-regulatory (as well as self-reflective) processes as central to human behavior and development, and recognizes that social factors act upon them (Bandura, 1991). The theory maintains an explicit focus on human agency—the position that humans are “producers as well as products of social systems” (Bandura, 2001, p. 15).

Development of emotional knowledge and regulatory competencies is rooted in a social learning process called emotion socialization (see Eisenberg et al. 1998). Modes of socialization include emotion expression (verbal or nonverbal communication of felt emotions) and discussions about emotions enacted by “socializing agents” (e.g., parents), as well as these agents’ reactions to developing individuals’ emotional expressions. These interactions play a key role in constructing interpretations of individuals’ own and others’ experiences and expressions of emotions such as beliefs about what expressions are socially appropriate.

Though individuals may develop stable, trait-like ways of expressing emotions (e.g., Riggio & Riggio, 2002) across contexts, a particular social and physical setting, called a *behavior setting* (Barker, 1968), can stimulate repeated patterns in behavior unique to that setting. For example, when customers enter a coffee shop, they follow certain “rules” of behavior according

to affordances of the environment such as a line to stand in, a cashier to pay, tables at which to sit, and receptacles with a space for setting empty mugs and a space for depositing disposable cups. Recently, this idea has been applied to understanding emotional experience and expression patterns (Larson & Brown, 2007). As they engage in a particular social environment, individuals experience as well as contribute to its characteristic patterns of behavior, such as emotion expression patterns.

### **1.2.1 Emotional development in adolescence**

The development of emotional competence begins in infancy, but it is not until adolescence that individuals have accumulated enough life experiences to promote the maturation of emotional competence (Saarni et al., 2007). By adolescence, typically developing individuals have become aware of their own cycles of emotion (such as feeling guilty about experiencing anger) (Saarni, 1999). Saarni (1999) explains that by adolescence, individuals are able to enact various emotion coping skills when faced with aversive emotions, and are increasingly able to draw upon moral reasoning and aspects of identity when making decisions about how to react to emotional experiences. Thus, adults generally expect adolescents to purposefully manage their expressive behaviors in the face of a felt emotion. In doing so, adolescents have the power to manage their self-presentation purposefully to control the way that others perceive them. Finally, adolescents have typically developed an understanding of how both expressing and discussing emotions influences their social relationships; for example, that showing disappointment when someone gives them an undesirable gift might damage that relationship, or that sharing their sadness with a friend might bring them emotionally closer. In Saarni's (1999) view, the development of emotional competence does not necessarily (or even typically) have a conclusion. That is, she argues that

emotional competence is likely to continue to develop well beyond adolescence, and the process of maturation may even be intergenerational.

Socializing cues around emotions, such as the expressions and reactions of others, may be especially salient during the adolescent period. Research on brain development suggests that adolescence is a “sensitive period for the processing and acquisition of sociocultural knowledge” during which social emotion processing is heightened and sensitivity to peer evaluation is intensified (Blakemore & Mills, 2014, p. 9.16). Thus, the way peers respond to emotional expressions is likely to be particularly impactful during the adolescent phase of development.

### **1.2.2 Social and emotional competencies and emotion expression**

Expressed emotions function as “social signals” (Campos, 1994) with the potential to change an individual’s environment. By expressing emotions, individuals can build relationships or strengthen existing relationships, solicit emotional support and invite co-regulation (Gross & John, 2003; Kennedy-Moore & Watson, 2001; Srivastava et al., 2009). However, when expressed emotions are not met with positive responses, these benefits do not occur, and when responses from others are not supportive expression is likely to be detrimental (Clark & Finkel, 2004). For example, if an adolescent expresses fear of an upcoming event to a group of friends and is met with encouragement, this interaction is likely good for the individual as well as the relationships. But, if the same adolescent is met with ridicule, both the individual and the relationships might suffer.

Making the task of behaving in emotionally competent ways more difficult for developing individuals, definitions of appropriate expressions may vary across cultures (Parker et. al 2012) and settings. These definitions are essentially social norms pertaining to emotional expression, and

they are often called “display rules” (Gnepp & Hess, 1986; Saarni, 1979). A review of the literature on emotional display rules follows.

### **1.2.2.1 Emotional display rules**

As individuals navigate the social world of emotions, they encounter affordances and sanctions (both directly and through observation), which provide them with information about display rules (Gnepp & Hess, 1986; Saarni, 1979). Using emotional displays to convey disingenuous—but strategic—emotional expressions hinges on knowledge of second-order intentions (what another person intends for someone else to believe) (Misailidi, 2007). In other words, an individual needs to understand the distinction between intention and perception to comprehend why experiences of emotions and their outward expressions do not always match.

Studies and meta-analyses that examine display rules in adolescence have converged upon several relatively stable findings. First, males tend to be less emotionally expressive than females and tend to hide felt emotions (with the exception of anger) more often (e.g., Chaplin & Aldao, 2013; Polce-Lynch et al., 1998; Underwood, Coie, & Herbsman, 1992; Zeman & Shipman, 1997). The frequency with which children and youth express emotions has generally been found to decrease as they age (Underwood, et al., 1992; Zeman & Garber, 1996) and to be context-dependent (Chaplin & Aldao, 2013). Emotion suppression in adolescence may be related to expected social consequences of expression (e.g., Horner, Wallace, & Bundick, 2015; Hubbard, 2003; Zeman & Garber, 1996).

In sample of older children and emerging adolescents, Underwood et al. (1992) compared levels of suppression toward peers to suppression toward teachers. Their findings suggested that children and youth “masked” (hid) their emotions with their teachers more often than with their peers and that masking behaviors became more frequent with age. Males suppressed or “masked”



emotions more often than females in this study as well as another study, which found that during childhood and adolescence, boys hid their emotions (“dissembled”) more often than girls (Zeman & Shipman, 1997). Zeman and Garber (2008) found that in late childhood and early adolescence, girls were more likely to express sadness and pain than boys, and echoed previous findings that expression in general decreased with age. A notable exception to the relative expressiveness of females is anger; studies have suggested that boys tend to express more anger than girls, but that females tend to express other emotions more often (Chaplin & Aldao, 2013; Hubbard, 2003).

Research has also examined the social impacts of display rules. Garner (1996) found that school age children’s knowledge of pro-social display rules (e.g., hiding disappointment and expressing happiness instead when receiving an unwanted gift) predicted pro-social behavior. More emotional expression—of both anger and happiness—has been associated with social rejection (Hubbard, 2003), and children have reported that they hide emotions because of the fear of social ramifications (Zeman & Garber, 1996). Adolescents in a recent study reported that they routinely suppressed emotions in relationships with teachers, attributing their suppression in part to the fear of punitive consequences (Horner et al., 2015). Youth lacking display rule knowledge related to negative emotions (sadness and anger) were more likely to be bullied by others; they were not more likely to act as bullies (Garner & Hinton, 2010). Thus, developing the ability to understand display rules is demonstrably important to social functioning.

Finally, display rules vary across cultures (e.g., Parker et. al, 2012; Matsumoto, 1993; Matsumoto, Yoo, Hirayama, & Petrova, 2005; Novin, Generjee, Dadkhah, & Rieffe, 2008), and cultural beliefs and values come to inform the social choices that adolescents make with regard to emotional communication. Evidence of this (specific to adolescents) has been found by comparing how teens in different countries (Iran and the Netherlands) interacted with peers to how they

interacted with family members. When interacting with these different audiences, adolescents from the two countries exhibited marked cultural differences in their adherence to display rules (Novin et al., 2008). Adolescents also reported different motives for their behavior across cultures (self-protective versus prosocial), and the authors concluded that the participants' beliefs and values explained the variations in display rule adherence. This suggests that the ways in which adolescents perceive and respond to display rules may differ according to their culturally rooted values and belief systems.

Display rules also differ across cultures that exist within countries, not just between them (Matsumoto, 1993). Research has shown that African American males perform significant cultural “code-switching” as they move through different settings (such as from home to work or school; e.g., Allen, 2015); differences in expressive and communicative patterns across settings can contribute to detriments such as disproportionate discipline in school (Townsend 2000). These and other studies converge on the conclusion that the perception of display rules and ability to adhere to them is an important social task, but one that is rife with challenges.

### **1.3 SOCIAL MEDIA AS A DEVELOPMENTAL SETTING**

Youth spend time in many different spaces, but several settings stand out as particularly salient because youth spend large amounts of time in them on a regular basis, and this is sustained over a significant period of their development. Homes, schools, and out-of-school-time programs are prominent examples, and research has examined adolescent socio-emotional development within and across these settings (e.g., Durlak & Weissberg, 2007; Grusec, 2011; Roeser, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2000). However, today's youth spend a tremendous amount of time interacting with

others in another social setting: virtual space. Social media use (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr) has rapidly become normative—by 2010, 73% of teens in the U.S. were connected to one or more social networks (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010), and as of 2014, only 8% of U.S. teens said they did *not* use social media (Blaszczak-Boxe, 2014). Research thus far has focused on potential risks, such as cyberbullying and “Facebook depression,” and opportunities, such as those for identity development (Schurgin, O’Keeffe, & Clarke-Pearson, 2011). Still, there is much to be learned about how the use of social media sites influences social and emotional development, such as how peer-to-peer interactions online contribute to the acquisition of knowledge and beliefs about emotions and ways to express them.

Social media interactions differ from in-person interactions in many ways. For example, facial and vocal cues are absent, interactions between social media users are often accessible to hundreds of people, and such interactions are typically archived for later viewing. The direct exploration of emotional processes in virtual social spaces is in its infancy, and often situated outside the field of human development in business, marketing, and human-computer interaction (e.g., Gruzdz, 2013). However, descriptive research in the field of information technology has found social media to be extremely rich in user-produced emotional content; 66% of a large random sample of MySpace comments conveyed positive emotion and 20% conveyed negative emotion (Thelwall, Wilkinson, & Uppal, 2010). Emotional contagion, or the passing of an emotion among individuals, has recently been shown to occur via social media, (Kramer, Guillory, & Hancock, 2014), and the supportiveness of online friends’ responses can determine whether social media users disclose depressive symptomology (Moreno et al., 2011). Because of these important differences, it is important to critically examine interactions in virtual space distinctly rather than

assume that developmental processes that occur online are identical to those that occur in face-to-face settings like school and after-school programs.

### **1.3.1 Social media use and social-emotional functioning**

Research findings on relationships between social network use and social and emotional functioning form a complex and sometimes contradictory picture. Although Facebook use has been linked with negative experiences and outcomes such as beliefs that others lead happier lives (Chou & Edge, 2012) and the development of depression (e.g. Jelenchick, Eickhoff, & Moreno, 2013), positive outcomes have been associated with Facebook use as well. Perceived social capital has been linked to engagement in popular online social networks (Antheunis, Schouten, & Krahmer, 2014; Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007), and Facebook use is associated with increased social connectedness (Grieve et al., 2013). Studies that move past the concept of “use” in general and dig into specifics of *how* individuals engage in social media have begun to illuminate some possible explanations for this paradox. For example, focusing on “strong ties” (those with whom users have strong interpersonal relationships) during social network use has been linked to increased self-esteem (Wilcox & Stephen, 2013). Future research could helpfully begin to untangle these issues, for example, by honing in on more specific online experiences that users have, and how those experiences contribute to particular outcomes.

### **1.3.2 Expressing and responding to emotions online**

Despite the emotionally rich transactions that occur online and the intensity of adolescent social network use, social media studies that target middle and high school aged youth rarely probe

beyond the descriptive (e.g., tracking the percent of youth who report using various social networks and how often they log in; Blaszczak-Boxe, 2014; Lenhart et al., 2010). In addition, most online social network studies investigate emerging adults (college students) or adults at the exclusion of adolescents. Thus, a significant gap in research lies at the intersection of emotional interactions via social media and the adolescent stage of development.

Although the existing literature on display rules provides important information about the creation, nature, and implications of display rules among peers in face-to-face settings, online interactions are fundamentally different. First, the range of a social media post—which may reach hundreds of others—is dramatically farther than a comment at the lunch table. This means that the nature and dynamics of display rules and social emotion processing online might be somewhat different. However, some basic principles are still likely to apply.

Exposure to the emotional expressions and responses of others online influences developing individuals in several ways. The first, *emotional contagion*, is the transference of an emotion among individuals. The occurrence of negative emotion contagion (i.e., the “catching” or passing on of a negative emotional state from person to person) is well established among adolescent peers, but little research has examined the possibility of positive emotion contagion; more research is needed on both (Dishion & Tipsord, 2011). Depressive symptom contagion also occurs between adolescent peers, at least in part through corumination and the seeking of excessive reassurance and negative feedback (Dishion & Tipsord, 2011). Kramer, et al. (2014) recently demonstrated that emotional contagion can occur via online social media, though the sample was not limited to adolescents and the effect size was small.

In addition to potentially transferring emotions from person to person, interactions including emotional content provide information about social meaning attached to emotions and

their expression, contributing to emotional development (Saarni et al., 2007). On-screen social cues are different from those exchanged during face-to-face interactions. During the task of face processing, or interpreting facial expressions, individuals experience a peak in prefrontal cortex use during adolescence (Blakemore, 2008). However, there are no facial cues or even vocal cues online, which creates a fundamentally different challenge for adolescents communicating this way. This has various implications; one of which is the potential for the “breakdown” of social norms on the internet, as people hiding behind computer screens become less inhibited in their interactions with remote others (Shih, 2010). Theoretically, this creates space for the potential renegotiation of social norms on a relatively large scale.

Although interactions online are qualitatively different in many ways, social affordances and sanctions around emotional expression still occur online. When users engage via social media, they can (for example) provide textual responses, share content, “like,” “thumbs up,” or “react to” content, or use emoticons or “emojis” (derived from “emotional icons,” see Rezabek & Cochenour, 1998). Conversely, users can ignore content. As in face-to-face interactions, such responses (or lack thereof) provide others with information about display rules. One study demonstrated that social media users were more likely to disclose depressive symptomology online if others respond supportively (Moreno et al., 2011). This particular form of self-disclosure could feasibly lead to either positive (social support) or negative (corumination) consequences. Nonetheless, the implications are enticing; such findings suggest that social feedback on emotional content shared via social media has the potential to influence decisions about how users express their emotions online in the future.

Even more enticing is the possibility that feedback from others could be helpful by design. In fact, an MIT research team demonstrated that an intentionally designed web-based application

can facilitate growth in cognitive reappraisal through a process they call “crowdsourcing emotional intelligence” (Morris, Schueller, & Picard, 2015). Users of this application submit short descriptions of “stressors” and the emotions they are feeling, and others are prompted to respond with empathetic expression and cognitive reappraisal. Responses are crafted strategically based on an analysis of the submission, thereby helping the individual reframe a negative emotion-inducing thought or event in a positive but rational way.

The MIT research on “crowdsourcing emotional intelligence” supports the view that online interactions around emotional states and experiences have the potential to make a positive difference in emotional functioning. But, this particular approach is dependent upon two conditions that limit its reach: users must adopt a specific application, and trained individuals must respond to users. Therefore, it is worthwhile to look for ways to integrate emotional support into the online social networks teens already use. A first step is to discover how teens express and respond to their peers’ emotional expressions on social media sites and why.

## **1.4 THE CURRENT RESEARCH**

In the previous sections, I have argued that along with the need for research that focuses on African American males’ emotional development in social context, there is a need for social media research focused on the emotional expressions of middle school and high school aged youth. Thus, the aims of this dissertation are: 1) to explore how African American adolescent boys think about expressing emotions online and identify the display rules (social norms) they perceive, and 2) determine whether perceived social consequences of violating display rules can be demonstrated

experimentally. In Chapters 2 and 3, a series of two studies will address these aims, which I will now describe in further detail.

#### **1.4.1 Research aims, questions, and hypotheses**

The first specific aim of the current work (Study 1, chapter 2) is to explore how African American adolescent males describe their own emotional expressions online and uncover their underlying reasoning. Specifically, this study aims to develop a taxonomy of perceived emotional display rules and descriptions of social consequences related to violating those display rules.

RQ1a: In what ways and under what circumstances do African American adolescent males express emotions and respond to others' expressions of emotions via social media?

RQ1b: To what do they attribute these patterns of expression and response?

RQ2: What types of display rules (e.g., showing anger towards peers is inappropriate) do these adolescents perceive in the context of social media networks?

The second specific aim of the current work (Study 2, chapter 3) is to determine whether several specific display rule violations affect African American male adolescents' sympathy toward, desire to spend time with, and intentions to respond to a (fictional) peer online:

RQ1a: Does an African American adolescent male's online display rule adherence or violation affect likeability ratings by peers?

*H1a: Online display rule violations will result in lower likeability ratings from peers.  
Levels of likeability will vary across different display rule violations.*

RQ1b: Does an African American adolescent male's online display rule adherence or violation affect sympathy ratings by peers?



*H1b: Online display rule violations will result in less sympathy from peers. Levels of sympathy will vary across different display rule violations.*

RQ2a: Does an African American adolescent male's online display rule adherence or violation affect response intentions?

*H2a: Online display rule violations will result in less supportive response intentions and more cyberbullying intentions than conformity to display rules.*

RQ2b: Do response intentions differ by strength of social ties (strong versus weak)?

*H2b: Weak social ties will result in less supportive response intentions and more cyberbullying intentions than strong social ties.*

RQ2c: Do response intentions depend on an interaction between display rule violation type and strength of social ties?

*H2c: There will be an interaction between strength of social ties and display rule violation, such that response intentions will differ less among display rule violations in the condition of strong social ties than weak social ties.*

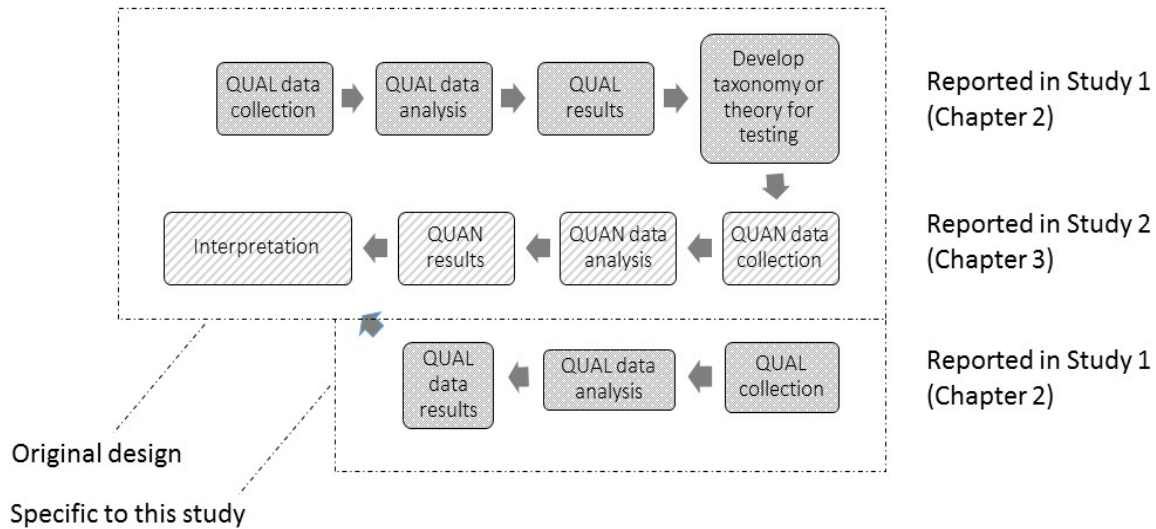
RQ3: Are age and social media use related to sympathy, likeability ratings, or response intentions?

#### **1.4.2 Methods**

The aims of these two studies taken together are best approached using an exploratory mixed methods design called a taxonomy development model (Creswell et al., 2003; Morgan, 1998; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). This model is appropriate for several key reasons. First, though ample existing research addresses emotional display rules in face-to-face settings, no research has directly investigated emotional display rules online. I have argued that it is possible that display

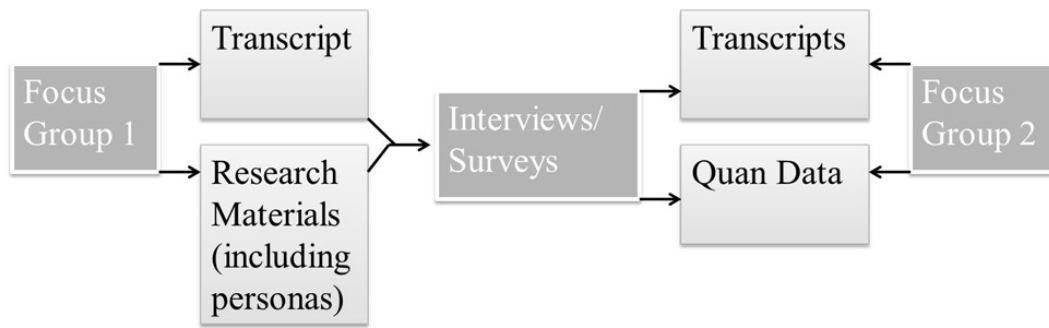
rules manifest differently in online social networks; thus it is necessary to identify them. Because norms are sociocultural constructs—that is, they are rooted in perceptions—exploratory qualitative work is the appropriate means of identifying them. I seek to understand meaning-making around emotional display rules from the perspectives of the youth, rather than imposing a prescriptive or theoretically normative list. Thus, I chose a mixed methods design that began with inductive, data-driven development of a taxonomy of emotional display rules, followed by a quantitative phase to test these rules.

This design is depicted in Figure 1.1. In this research, a second phase of qualitative data collection and analysis accompanied the quantitative collection and analysis. These activities and results are reported in Study 1, because they reinforce and deepen the results of the initial qualitative work. The original taxonomy development design and the additional steps specific to this study are indicated by dashed lines and labeled in Figure 1.1. A third phase of qualitative data collection (not pictured for the sake of simplicity) examined the interpretations of the quantitative and qualitative data from these steps. The correspondence between the processes outlined in this design and the structure of this dissertation are also indicated in Figure 1.1. The research activities in the top row (dotted) occurred in Study 1 and directly informed the activities in the bottom row (striped), which comprised Study 2.



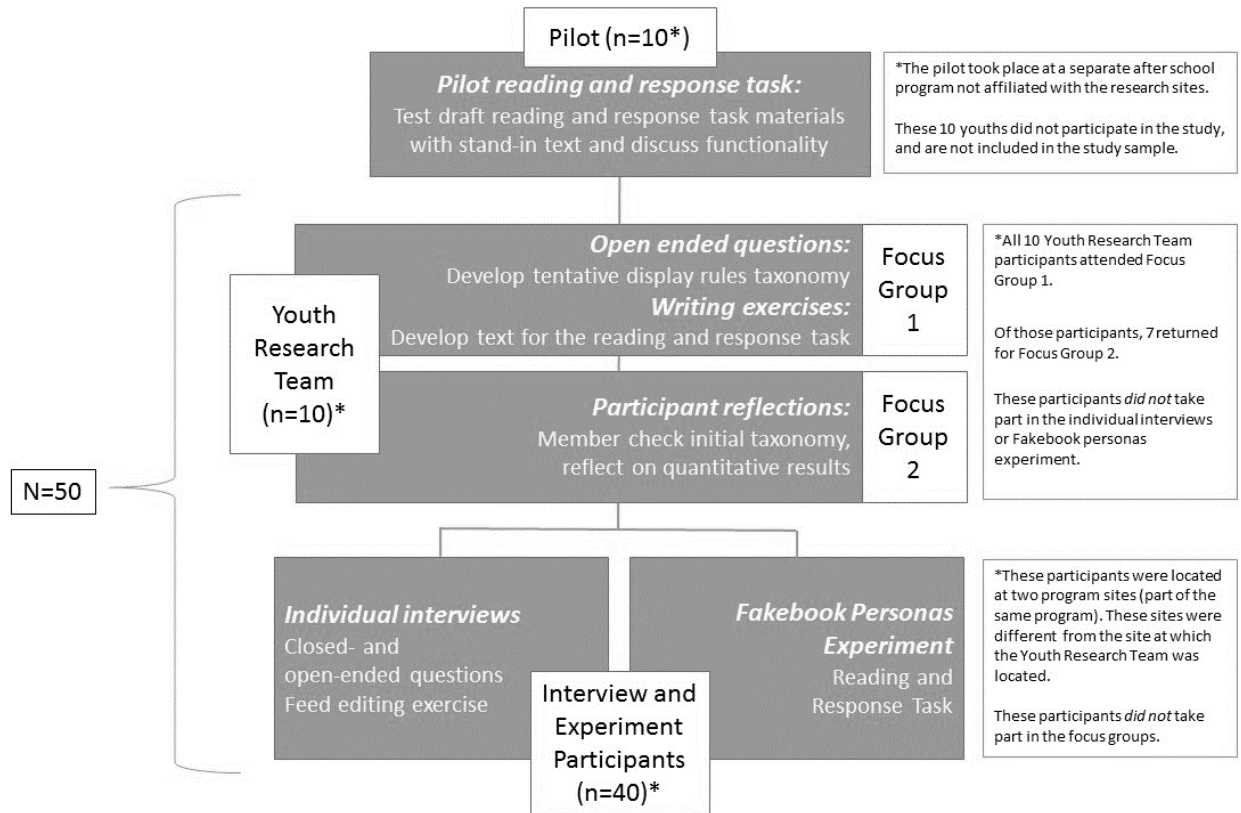
**Figure 1.1: Adapted mixed-method exploratory taxonomy development design**

Figure 1.2 depicts the research activities across the two studies and how they are related. Focus group 1 was the first activity (after a pilot, described below), which yielded a transcript for qualitative analysis and research materials. After analysis of the transcript, resulting in a tentative taxonomy, interviews and questionnaires made use of the materials developed during focus group 1. This resulted in interview transcripts for qualitative analysis (to reinforce and deepen the taxonomy) and quantitative data for analysis (for hypothesis testing). Focus group 2 reflected upon the results/findings of those qualitative and quantitative analyses, and the researcher's interpretations of their meaning and significance.



**Figure 1.2: Specific research activities and products across both studies**

The total study sample included 50 youths from 3 after school program sites. There was also a pilot phase that took place before any of the research activities commenced, which included 10 additional youths who did not participate in the study. The youths who participated in the pilot completed a draft version of the materials to which the Youth Research Team (focus group participants) contributed content. By viewing and discussing “shell” versions of these materials and completing the accompanying questionnaires, they were able to help identify potential design and procedural concerns prior to the study. Youth research team members received \$10 for each focus group attended (up to 2), and interview and experiment participants received \$10 for their participation. Figure 1.3 shows the participation structure across research activities.



**Figure 1.3: Youth involvement in research activities**

## **2.0 STUDY 1: AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES' PERCEPTIONS OF EMOTIONAL DISPLAY RULES ON SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES**

Is it socially acceptable to convey disappointment or disgust upon receipt of a gift from a loved one? The answers to questions such as this one are social norms called *emotional display rules*: socially agreed-upon understandings about the appropriateness of context-dependent emotional expressions (Ekman & Friesen, 1969; Gnepp & Hess, 1986; Taylor & Harris, 1982; Saarni, 1979). Previous research has found that knowing and following display rules in face-to-face settings is beneficial; youth experience consequences like bullying when they express emotions in socially inappropriate ways, while those who exhibit more sophisticated knowledge of and adherence to expectations around emotional expressions reap social benefits (Garner & Hinton, 2010). Further, children and adolescents seem to be aware of these social consequences, because they refer to them as reasons for following display rules. For example, Zeman & Garber (1996) found that children hid emotions because they feared social ramifications, and adolescents have reported suppressing emotions around teachers because they fear punishment (Horner et al., 2015). Thus, learning to detect and follow display rules are important developmental tasks for youth. However, these tasks can be challenging because display rules are typically implicit (rather than explicit), and vary across settings and among cultures (e.g., Parker et. al, 2012; Matsumoto, 1993; Matsumoto et al., 2005).

Much research had focused on the emergence of display rule knowledge in childhood, taking a top-down approach to defining display rules; that is, researchers assess children's "display rule knowledge" using adult-driven conceptualizations of what they are (e.g., Taylor & Harris, 1982). Research on the how children and youth develop these understandings through a process called *emotion socialization* identifies many agents of socialization, including parents, siblings, teachers, peers, and the media (Eisenberg et al., 1998). In adolescence, peers become a primary socializing agent as youth seek autonomy by shifting their dependence from parents to friends (Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986) and become more vulnerable to the evaluations of their peers (Blakemore & Mills, 2014). Historically, socializing interactions with peers have taken place on the playground, playing sports, or spending time together in pairs or groups in various face-to-face settings. But increasingly, adolescents are spending time interacting with peers virtually through the use of social media, such as social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Research has only recently begun to examine what concepts like social competence look like online (Reich, 2016) and no research has sought to understand youth's perceptions of emotional display rules for online interactions.

As they interact with others across developmental settings (e.g., home, school, peer groups), youth build understandings about the emotional display rules that exist in each of these settings (Eisenberg et al., 1998). Acting in accordance with display rules can be considered socially appropriate behavior regardless of whether those display rules encourage emotional expressions in ways that are associated with positive mental and emotional health outcomes. That is, adhering to emotional display rules can simultaneously be risky and beneficial; "emotional competence in a social context...is defined by that context, for better or for worse" (Horner et al., 2015, p. 8). Ideally, context-specific display rules would support healthy expression patterns.

For researchers and practitioners to shape the emotional cultures of developmental contexts in ways that support positive outcomes, they must first understand the display rules that participants in those contexts perceive and the social structures that underlie them. Because display rules vary widely (differences exist between genders, and among cultural groups, age groups, settings, etc.) the current study begins this work by developing a taxonomy of emotional display rules within a relatively homogenous group of youth in one setting. Specifically, this work focuses on identifying the display rules that African American adolescent males perceive in online social media networks.

## **2.1 THE SOCIAL PROCESS OF LEARNING ABOUT EMOTIONS**

People do not simply “experience” emotions; they must interpret them, evaluate them, and decide whether or not to express them, to list just a few tasks. To learn about these complexities, individuals engage in a social learning process called *emotion socialization* (Eisenberg et al., 1998) throughout their developmental trajectory and across their contexts of development. Though most emotion socialization research has focused on the role of parents in their children’s development, the model is applicable (and indeed, has been applied) across a wide range of settings and relationships. According to Eisenberg’s model, socializing “agents” include (but are not limited to) parents, teachers, siblings, and peers. The main modes of socialization are 1) agents’ emotional expressions, 2) agents’ reactions to the child’s expressions, 3) discussions about emotions, and 4) agents’ choices leading to emotional learning experiences (such as a parents’ choice to enroll a child in a program). Though interactions with and observations of these agents, children develop



understandings about emotions that are strongly rooted in cultural values and belief systems (Camras, Shuster, & Fraumeni, 2014).

Media also act as agents of emotion socialization. Artifacts as simple as children's storybooks contain implicit information about emotions, such as depicted facial expressions. One study compared emotional expressions in U.S., Romanian, and Turkish children's books, finding differences among them regarding intensity and frequency of expressions (Vander Wege et al., 2014). However, traditional forms of media (e.g., television, magazines, radio) are not interactive, and thus function differently from other socializing agents (Gonzalez-Mena, 2010). However, Arnett (1995) argued that for adolescents, media differ from other socializing agents in another important way: the higher degree of agency that youth possess in terms of choosing when, how, and with what content they engage. That may be increasingly true as the array of media proliferates; since the time of Arnett's (1995) study, social media has emerged as an important context in which adolescents spend staggering amounts of time (Blaszczak-Boxe, 2014; Lenhart et al., 2010). Social media, however, re-introduces the interactive aspect of socialization; youth can actively engage with others through online interfaces, or passively observe interactions of others.

### **2.1.1 Emotion socialization of African American males**

Males and females express emotions differently, and although biological differences play a role, socialization of emotion tends to establish display rules that are gender-dependent (Brody, 2000). Emotions have been classified in many ways; for example, by valence alone (positive/negative), by placing valence on one axis (from positive to negative) and activation (from activating to deactivating) on another, and in terms of power or dominance (dominant/submissive or

powerful/powerless). Males face social pressures that push them to suppress their emotions through the establishment of display rules that dictate keeping certain types of emotional expressions to a minimum. That is, rare expressions of submissive or powerless emotions (e.g., sadness, shame) occur within small circles and among close ties (Duck, 2007). There is an important distinction, though, between powerful and powerless emotions; males have been found to express anger—which is considered to be a dominant, powerful emotion—more than females, but express other emotions less (Chaplin & Aldao, 2013; Polce-Lynch et al., 1998; Underwood et al., 1992; Zeman & Shipman, 1997). This is arguably because of constructions of masculinity that value aggression and dominance.

Race and gender are intersectional (Wingfield, 2007), and understanding African American males' emotional development requires taking into consideration the types of adversity they face. For example, African American males are subjected to disproportionate disciplinary action in schools, and higher rates of arrest, conviction, and incarceration as well as harsher sentences than experienced by other groups of people (e.g., white males; females) (Hammond, 2012; Gordon, Piana, & Keleher, 2000; Skiba et al., 2011; Wallace et al., 2008). The stress of such realities is harmful to black men's emotional well-being (Borders & Liang, 2011), but emotional skills (e.g., regulation and understanding) can buffer the negative impacts of this adversity (Dunbar et al., 2016), as can racial socialization (DeGruy et al., 2012).

Discrimination manifests less overtly, as well, and in ways with direct implications for youth's emotional learning. For example, a study in which white participants viewed racially ambiguous faces with varying facial expressions, and then made judgements about the race, emotion, and intensity of emotion display, found that participants who were high in implicit prejudice were more likely to determine that angry faces were black, and judged black faces to be

angrier (Hutchings & Haddock, 2008). Traditional media (e.g., local news stations), powerful socializing forces, have unfairly represented black males as dangerous criminals (Rome, 2004). Thus, black males must navigate potential misunderstandings of their emotional displays driven by the negative biases and stereotyping of others.

Issues of both systemic and covert discrimination come to bear on the how black males in the U.S. are socialized in several ways. Parents of black boys report socializing their children in direct response to these negative social forces for protective purposes (Boykin & Toms; Coll, et al., 1985). For example, in a qualitative study of how black fathers socialize their sons at the intersection of race and gender, Allen (2016) found that despite experiences of racism, the fathers in his study proactively helped their sons to construct masculinities that opposed “myths” of black masculinity. Fathers encouraged skills such as “racial border crossing,” which one young man described powerfully by explaining that “you sanitize yourself so you’re not a threat” (Allen, 2016, p. 1843). Taken together, this literature suggests that African American males must overcome emotional challenges at the intersection of race and gender.

### **2.1.2 Operationalizing emotional display rules: past research**

Display rules are hard to pinpoint. As social constructions, they vary across cultures among countries as well as within them (e.g., Parker et. al, 2012; Matsumoto, 1993; Matsumoto et al., 2005). Developmental research typically relies on top-down definitions of emotional display rules; in other words, what the researchers consider to be “appropriate” expressive behavior is often built in to the measurement strategy. For example, many commonly used measures of display rule knowledge use vignettes in which children are faced with a situation where expressing a felt emotion would be considered socially inappropriate, and they must answer questions about the

situation to demonstrate their knowledge of social expectations. In one such exercise, noted in the example above, children indicate which of a series of six images depicting facial expressions they would make if they received a gift that they disliked from a relative, and then explain why they chose the expression they did (Taylor & Harris, 1982). Recent use of a similar strategy involved videotaping the facial responses of children who received a gift that was either attractive or unattractive, or did not receive a gift at all and comparing the volitional emotion regulation (i.e., false smiling) of children of different ages and genders (Kromm, Farber, & Holodynski, 2014).

Cross-cultural research has often used a validated psychometric measure to quantify display rule knowledge in a way that breaks down self-reported expression tendencies into several categories. The Display Rule Assessment Inventory (DRAI) assesses five “expressive modes” which include expression, deamplification (express with less intensity), amplification (express with more intensity), qualification (express with a smile), and masking (hide feelings) (Matsumoto et al., 2005). This measurement strategy has been used to demonstrate and explain cultural differences in emotional display rules; for example, between cultures that value constructs like social order and those that value constructs like affective autonomy, or between collectivist versus individualist cultures (Matsumoto et al., 2008a; Matsumoto et al., 2008b). It has also been helpful in explaining individual differences (within cultures) in perceptions of display rules by personality traits (extraversion and neuroticism) (Fok, Hui, Bond, Matsumoto, & Yoo, 2008).

Another approach to operationalizing emotional display rules, introduced by Novin et al. (2008), is to use semi-structured interviews that yield quantifiable answers. The authors constructed a protocol with three structured questions, asking 1) if the child has ever felt a specific emotion (e.g., sadness), but not wanted others to know and if so, 2) under what circumstances (“when”), and 3) why the child did not want others to know. Answers to these interview questions

were translated into dichotomous (presence/absence) quantitative variables; the authors reported high inter-rater reliability (Cohen's Kappa ranged from .79-.98). Codes were literature-based. The first question was used to produce a yes/no variable, while the others were coded for the presence/absence of certain concepts. The second question was coded for references to peers or family members' presence, and the third was coded for the presence of pro-social/other-oriented and self-protective reasoning (which were not mutually exclusive).

Research studies on emotional display rules in adults have sometimes taken a qualitative, exploratory approach to understanding perceptions of specific expectations about emotional display in context. For example, ethnographic research on teachers' emotional labor (job-related expression and suppression of emotions) has identified perceived display rules which tend to be centered on portraying "neutrality" or calmness despite felt emotions (e.g., Winograd, 2003; Zembylas, 2005).

### **2.1.3 Operationalizing emotional display rules: the current study**

Although assessing display rule knowledge using "top-down" conceptualizations of display rules is useful, considering display rules to be explicitly sociocultural constructs is more appropriate for the current work, particularly because the participants are adolescents. Once children reach adolescence, a developmental period marked by heightened social processing and intensified sensitivity to peer evaluation, (Blakemore & Mills, 2014, p. 202), they are likely to develop or revise display rules within their peer groups. Research has shown that individuals perceive different display rules across different settings and groups of people, adjusting their emotional display accordingly (Fok, et al., 2008; Matsumoto & Kupperbusch, 2001). Thus, a researcher attempting to test a teenager's "display rule knowledge" may instead end up testing her very

instrument's display rule knowledge. That is, adults' conceptualizations of "ideal" display rules may differ from those operating within adolescent peer groups.

Similarly, although the DRAI (Matsumoto et al., 2005) is strong in its ability to capture five expressive modes across target "interactants" and privacy levels, it does not allow for the emergence of nuanced understandings of fully contextualized display rules specific to a group of people in a certain setting. Therefore, this study will adopt the third approach to conceptualizing display rules by developing a qualitative, emergent understanding of the display rules perceived by a specific group of individuals in a specific context: African American adolescent males in the context of online social networking sites.

## **2.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Because of the paucity of extant research, this dissertation begins with foundational exploratory work in the current study, Study 1. Although this phase of the research is primarily qualitative, quantitative measures provide descriptive information about the sample. In addition, frequencies will illustrate response patterns during the interviews. There are two main research questions (the first has two parts):

RQ1a: In what ways and under what circumstances do African American adolescent males express emotions and respond to others' expressions of emotions via social media?

RQ1b: To what do they attribute these patterns of expression and response?

RQ2: What types of display rules (e.g., showing anger towards peers is inappropriate) do these adolescents perceive in the context of social media networks?

## **2.3 METHODS**

### **2.3.1 Participants**

Adolescents (n=50) from a local youth program participated in this study. The program is a multi-site, neighborhood-based after-school drop-in program which targets underserved and at-risk youth, including a large number of adjudicated youth. According to the organization's website, the program sites provide safe places for youth and the program offers mentoring, academic enrichment, career development, leadership activities, and fitness opportunities (e.g., sports). All youth from three total sites were invited to participate based on the willingness of the program site leaders to allow researchers to visit their program for recruitment and data collection. Sites were located in neighborhoods in which most residents are African American and median household incomes are lower than the city average of \$36,723, based on neighborhood profile data made available by the University of Pittsburgh University Center for Social and Urban Research (USCR, 2012).

Youth were part of 2 sub samples; 10 participants at one site took part in focus groups, and 40 participants at a second and third site took part in individual interviews. Participants were African American males, ranging in age from 13 to 21 with a mean age of 15.8 (focus group participants mean = 15.2, interview participants mean = 16). Several of the most used social networking sites (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Instagram) have a minimum user age of 13, those under 13 were not eligible to participate in this study. The study sample reflected the average age of the program participants according to a 2010 evaluation that participants ranged from 9-21 with an average age of 16 (University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development, 2010). The sampling strategy was purposive (or purposeful) and homogenous (Creswell, 2015; Miles, Huberman, &

Saldaña, 2014); all eligible (male, African American) participants in the target age range at the three after school sites were invited to participate.

All data collection took place at the program sites. Those under 18 who wished to participate took parental consent/participant assent forms home, and had ample time (a week or more) to return the forms before interviews commenced. Those over 18 could sign consent forms on site. Recruitment at the first site stopped when 10 youths agreed to participate in the focus group, and at the second and third sites when 40 total youths had taken part in the interviews. Youth Research Team participants received \$20 in appreciation of their participation in the two focus groups, and the remaining participants received \$10 for their one-time participation in the interview and survey. This number of interviews was intended to produce the conditions for thematic saturation; that is, youths' descriptions of emotional display rules were expected to become repetitive without the emergence of novel descriptions before coding was completed on the body of data.

#### **2.3.1.1 Participants' social media use**

Fifty six percent of the focus group participants reported that they use social media every day (or almost every day). Of the others, one reported using social media about once a week, one a few times per week, two marked "other" (one filled in "every hour" and the other filled in "never," and one did not answer this question). Participants most frequently reported using Facebook (7), Snapchat (4), and Instagram (5) along with a few other social media platforms that were mentioned only once (e.g., Twitter, Youtube).

Similarly, sixty percent of interview participants reported using social media every day (or almost every day) and 27.5% reported using it a few times per week. The remaining 12.5 percent reported using social media less often (once per week or a few times per month, or specified



“other”). Interview participants frequently listed Facebook (37), Snapchat (24), Instagram (16), and Twitter (8), and infrequently also listed platforms like Youtube, IG, Kik, Tumblr, Musical.ly, Tinder, and Vine (2 or fewer participants).

### **2.3.2 Procedures**

First, staff recommended a team of 10 young men to participate an active way: as youth research partners. This purposive sub-sample was called the “youth research team.” All members of the youth research team were invited to two focus group meetings, each lasting about an hour. All 10 youth participated in the initial focus group meeting, and of these, 7 also participated in the second focus group.

During the initial meeting, participants assisted with the development of two forms of research materials. The first, simulated feed editing, was used in the next phase of Study 1 (interviews), and the second, simulated social media interaction (a reading and response task), was included in the questionnaires for Study 2. The simulated social media interactions were first created with draft content (prior to the youth research team’s involvement) and piloted with a group of 10 adolescents from a different after-school program setting. These youth gave feedback on the structure of the materials (e.g., believability, readability) and questionnaire items that would be paired with them. Major revisions to the structure of the materials were based on pilot feedback. Focus group participants’ contributions then became part of these revised materials.

Following these initial focus groups, research assistants conducted interviews with 40 youth using the materials developed with the help of the youth research team. Conversations about emotions in this age group may be subject to peer effects; therefore, research team members interviewed all 40 participants individually. Interviews lasted approximately 30-40 minutes. After

these interviews, the youth research team members met once more for a final conversation about the final research materials and the preliminary findings.

### **2.3.2.1 Qualitative data elicitation**

Qualitative data were elicited through focus groups and interviews. Interviews consisted of: 1) a series of *open-ended questions* and 2) *simulated feed editing* paired with open-ended questions. These methods of data collection were chosen instead of direct observations of online interactions because of privacy concerns about research using social media data, particularly involving minors, as well as the strength of including youth as active participants in the research process. This inclusion brought their voices to the forefront, and invited their interpretation throughout the research process.

#### ***Focus groups***

Each of the two focus group meetings had a different objective, and thus different organization and content. The main objective of the first focus group meeting was to develop a list of several important emotional display rules, as understood by the participants, which specifically pertained to social media settings. In the mixed-methods taxonomy development design that comprises both the current study (Study 1) and the next phase of this research (Study 2), this list of emotional display rules is the taxonomy. However, it is important to note here that this is not meant to be a complete taxonomy of all emotional display rules even for this particular sample of youth; the study scope was limited to four emotions (anger, sadness, embarrassment, and excitement). The taxonomy developed through the analysis of the focus group data is first held up to scrutiny in Study 1 with the analysis of interview data collected after this focus group. The taxonomy is later tested in the next phase of research in a quasi-experimental design (Study 2). To make this possible,

another major objective of the first focus group was to elicit the help of the youth research team in creating the materials for the rest of the study activities included in both studies 1 and 2. To accomplish these goals, a semi-structured protocol with several writing exercises guided focus group 1 (see Appendix A).

During the second focus group meeting, participants provided interpretive feedback on preliminary qualitative analyses as a member-check (see Carlson, 2010) and also discussed preliminary quantitative findings using a semi-structured protocol. For example, I showed them the final materials created using their contributions and asked them what they noticed. I summarized the main qualitative findings in from the interviews in terms that they could easily understand, and asked them whether they were surprised and how closely the findings aligned with their own understandings. Finally, referencing the materials they helped to create, I asked them to predict the outcome of the experiment presented in Study 2.

### ***Interview protocol***

The interview protocol was semi-structured (see Rabionet, 2011) allowing for some lead-following and clarification but ensuring that each interview conversation covered the same list of topics and that those ideas were presented in the same way to each participant for consistency. The protocol consisted of 13 main questions, each with a series of flexible, open-ended prompts to follow up on the participants' answers (see Appendix A).

As a warm-up exercise, interviewers shared a few emotionally expressive social media posts made by real celebrities, and invited comments. The interviewers then use the posts as a way to introduce the topic of emotional expression online to the participant, and began to ask the open-ended questions according to the protocol. Questions probed whether, how, and why participants would be likely to express certain emotions via social media, as well as how they would interpret

and respond to others' expressions, and why. The protocol was organized by emotions; first, interviewers asked about expressing sadness on SNS sites, then anger, excitement, and embarrassment, in turn). The first question for each emotion prompted participants to consider whether they would post to SNS about feeling particular emotion (broadly contextualized; e.g., "if you were really excited because something great happened to you..." and "if you got really mad at a friend of yours...") and locate the likelihood that they would post on a visual scale (1 = definitely no, 5 = definitely yes). This technique provided a quantitative variable for each emotion representing a self-reported likelihood of posting about each emotion, and also provided a basis for beginning a conversation about these choices. The Interviewers invited participants to tell stories about their own (and their peers') related real-life experiences.

### *Simulated feed editing*

This activity (presented in Appendix A), which took place during the individual interviews, opened with a light and engaging story: "Imagine you and a complete stranger experience the weirdest thing: You somehow switch bodies for a couple of days. This guy goes on living your life as if he were you, and even uses your Facebook account, posting whatever he wants to. When you get back into your own body, you read over the posts that 'you' have made since the switch." The interviewers then presented a simulated history of past online "posts," made to look like a real Facebook page with the word "YOU!" in the profile picture box. The interviewers told the participants: "Now we're going to play a little game with these posts that this guy made while he was you. Remember, we're imagining that this is all posted on YOUR Facebook account, so all of your friends think you posted this stuff. Now, I'm going to let you delete 5 of these, and it will be like they never happened. Only 5! So, if you could only get rid of 5 of these but you had to keep the rest, which 5 would you delete? Cross out the ones you want to get rid of." The list included

a strategic assortment of emotionally neutral, positive valence, and negative valence messages designed (with the help of the core team of participants) to vary in terms of the social acceptability of the content delivery. After participants make their selections, interviewers asked follow up questions about their reasoning (“Why did you delete that one?”) and anticipated outcomes of the posts they deleted (“What kind of “comments” do you think your online friends would make if you posted that? Do you think anybody might bring that up next time you saw him or her?”).

### **2.3.3 Data analysis**

#### **2.3.3.1 Focus group data**

First, the team analyzed the audio recording of the focus group data along with hand written notes (made by the facilitators) and artifacts (scanned writings of focus group participants). The research team used an excel spreadsheet to code written artifacts and held several meetings to discuss the findings and determine a tentative taxonomy of the most salient emotional display rules that emerged from this focus group. The writings that the participants provided, which were already organized by the participants into content that did and did not violate display rules, formed the basis for the materials used in the interviews. The final focus group functioned as a member check

#### **2.3.3.2 Interview data**

Using Dedoose qualitative data analysis software, I and two research assistants coded verbatim interview transcripts in a two-cycle coding process (Saldaña, 2016) to develop and refine codes. As the PI and master coder, I first read the entire corpus of data, and then engaged in initial (or open) coding with a randomly selected subset of 10 interview transcripts to develop an initial codebook. The coding scheme included some a priori codes (e.g., each of the four emotions

covered in the protocol, gender, and use of emojis) but placed a heavy emphasis on emergent concepts and participant meaning-making. In particular, coding aimed to identify categories of online emotional expression based on characteristics of expressions themselves (e.g., the type of language used, the personal information included) as well as the perceived social competence of the expressions. Using this codebook but open to emergent codes (particularly sub-codes), I coded an additional 10 transcripts. No new codes were added to the codebook during the last five of these transcripts, indicating a degree of thematic saturation appropriate for the aims of this study (see O'Reilly & Parker, 2012). Then, one other coder and I practiced coding independently and came together several times to collaboratively refine the codebook and achieve high inter-rater reliability, which we tested using Dedoose's training center feature (final Cohen's Kappa = .80). I trained one additional coder on the use of the final (focused) codebook over the course of several meetings (Cohen's Kappa = .89). Code names are italicized in the findings section for clarity; the full list of codes appears in Table 1.

I used coded data, coding matrices (e.g., a code co-occurrence matrix) and analytic memos to confirm/disconfirm and expand the emotional display rule taxonomy identified through analysis of the first focus group data, as well as to explore patterns of emotional expression and responses to others and examine participants' meaning making about social competence in relation to emotion expression online.

Table 1: Final List of Codes

Parent Codes	Child Codes	Grandchild codes
Emotion	Sadness Excitement Anger Embarrassment	
Benefits of Expression	Spreading positivity Emotional support Congratulatory Entertaining	
Risks of Expression	Social consequences	Hurt relationships Hurt reputation Being teased People know your business People want things from you
	Physical consequences	Trouble Theft
Contextual factors	Intensity of emotion Reason for emotion	
Nature of social media	Lasts forever Public	
Individual differences	Gender	

## 2.4 FINDINGS

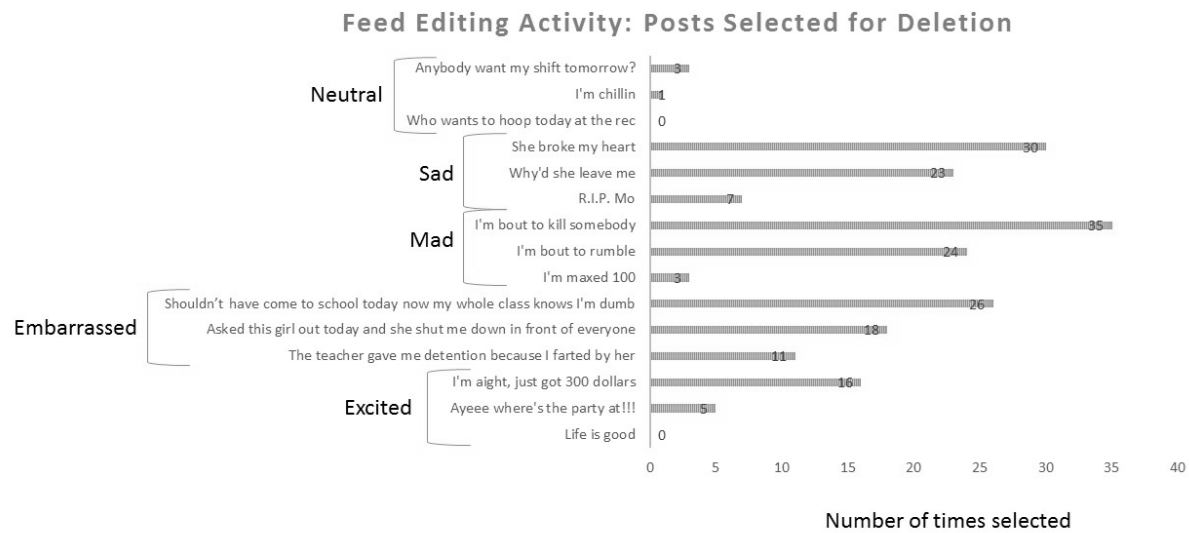
The findings section is primarily organized by emotion. For each emotion, I provide descriptive statistics on participants' self-reported likelihood of expressing that emotion online. Then, I present and describe participants' explanations of their reasoning about their own expressive tendencies and peers' expressive tendencies, addressing Research Question 1a and 1b. Direct

quotes from participants are included, and have not been censored for language that some might find offensive.

Patterns which emerged in the participants' perceptions of what kind of expressions are "ok" or "socially acceptable" and what kind are not shed light on how they define display rules. As these display rules emerge, they are listed and italicized, addressing Research Question 2. Because display rules are based on the perceptions of participants; sometimes they conflict with one another, and some are endorsed more strongly and by more participants than others. Rather than only reporting those that are most salient and leaving out the rest, I list all of them and then consider the relative salience of each.

Two figures illustrate the findings presented in this section. Figure 2.1 displays the frequency of Fakebook posts selected for deletion during the feed editing exercise. During this exercise, each participant selected only five posts from the full list to delete. Those that had the highest frequencies of deletion represent those that participants generally found most socially inappropriate (or, at least those that they would least like to have appear on their wall). The second, Figure 2.2, depicts the taxonomy of perceived emotional display rules for the four emotions included in this study. They are organized by emotion and salience.





**Figure 2.1: Frequency of posts selected for deletion during the feed editing exercise**



**Figure 2.2: Taxonomy of perceived emotional display rules for anger, embarrassment, sadness, and excitement by salience**

### 2.4.1 Anger

Most of the participants reported that they would be unlikely to express anger at a friend via social media; 80% rated the likelihood that they would post in anger at a 1 or 2 out of 5 (where 1 = definitely not and 5 = definitely). There were 6 youths who fell in the center and 2 who selected 5. The mean was 1.83, the median was 2, and the mode was 1 ( $SD = 1.035$ ).

When asked why they made these decisions, participants most often talked about two specific types of *social consequences*. Namely, they repeatedly mentioned ways that expressing anger directed at a friend online could *hurt their relationships* with that person and *hurt their reputations*. Participants also regularly mentioned the potential that angry posts would result in parents, parole officers, or police officers responding punitively.

Though most of the participants focused on reasons *not* to express anger, this argument was balanced with the possibility that expressing anger might be beneficial in recruiting *emotional support*. Participants only mentioned this one *benefit of expression* for this particular emotion. These responses were not only from those who reported being more likely to express anger; some participants who reported being unlikely to express anger also mentioned this potential benefit.

In comparison to sadness, embarrassment, and excitement, discussions around the expression of anger produced the most varied and complex accounts of display rules. I will first introduce the four main themes regarding anger along with their related display rules. These themes include: (1) anger and violence, (2) staying out of trouble, (3) when it's not too serious and (4) exposing peers.

#### **2.4.1.1 Anger and violence**

In the focus group, youth almost unanimously endorsed expressions of anger as socially acceptable, with an important caveat: threats or insinuations of violence were not generally deemed socially acceptable. For example, participants in the focus group said that it is “ok” to describe an event that caused anger, such as by posting “this nigga finessed me,” or “somebody stained me” (these terms both mean ‘hustled’ in this context). Also, focus group participants generally agreed that it is socially acceptable express anger without disclosure of further information (they wrote examples like: “I’m maxed 100” and “Fuck! Fuck! Fuck!”) These youth explained that the line between socially acceptable expressions of anger and socially unacceptable ones could be reasonably drawn at threatening violence or disclosing that violence was expected to occur. So, as one youth opined, it is ok to say “I hate snitches” but not ok to say you are going to kill someone for being a snitch. Some focus group members disagreed with this characterization, explaining that talking about violence is ok, as long as the violence is not too extreme. These youth drew the proverbial line between lesser and greater expressions of violent intentions, saying that it is socially acceptable to say “I’m about to rumble” but that it is not ok to say “I’m about to shoot him.” This type of distinction was evident during interviews as well.

It is important to note here that the interview protocol did not mention violence, and the participants did not see any research materials that did (e.g., the feed editing exercise) until after the open-ended question portion of the interview was complete. Thus, these responses and others suggest that at least for some participants, anger and violence may be tightly coupled. One youth illustrated the closeness of this link after explaining that he would not be likely to post about his anger at a friend online, and would instead approach his friend in a more private way such as in person or via text message. In regards to posting about his anger on a social network like Facebook,

he said: “if I put it out there then they’re going to think that it’s a sign of wanting to fight them or something.” This youth described the act of sharing angry content via public social media as itself a provocation, even without explicit threats of violence. Another youth described the same process of escalation, saying “they will like say something about the person, like what happened in the situation, and then tag them in it...and then people will start commenting and then they’ll be a fight.” This young man specified that the “fight” would then become physical. Another young man explained that angry expressions on Facebook were common catalysts for physical fights in the following way: “It’s how a lot of people wind up fighting in person anyway...that Facebook talking. Sooner or later that person’s going to approach you....Facebook can’t protect you, basically.” This type of scenario—in which comments made online set in motion a series of events ending in physical violence—was commonly described.

Taken together, these findings suggest that for the youth in this sample, anger and violence are closely related concepts. Youth perceived different display rules about anger in relation to violence. In addition to the all-or-nothing display rules (i.e., *expressions of anger are all socially acceptable, and expressions of anger are not socially acceptable*), two competing display rules emerged. They are: *Expressions of anger in the absence of violence are socially acceptable*, and *Expressions of anger that are violent, but not extremely so, are socially acceptable*. The latter was observed much less frequently than the former, and the position that all expressions of anger are socially acceptable was observed very rarely, especially in the interviews.

#### **2.4.1.2 Staying out of trouble**

In addition to avoiding escalating arguments and ending up in physical fights, these youth described several reasons for choosing not to express anger in violent ways via social media. In particular, they focused on the potential of getting in trouble with parole officers or the police

(there were 10 co-occurrences of *anger* and *getting in trouble*). One youth explained this concern in the following way:

*Like if you just got done fighting or something and you want to post about it like, “Oh I just beat this person up.” Like angry, like an in angry way. No, I don’t think that is, like why would you talk about it...like even, cops would probably, like cops, if they were looking for something, they will, like, “I just found the person that did it.” Cops search up on that on Facebook too. Fake pages. All that. Definitely.*

Likewise, during the feed editing activity, participants overwhelmingly chose to delete the two posts expressing anger in violent ways (Figure 2.1). When the interviewers prompted them to explain that decision, they most often explained that they would be concerned about the possibility of getting in trouble. One youth said “That’s just dumb. If he reports that. Again, your PO can be right there....[you’re] basically telling on yourself.”

Interviewers then asked participants what types of responses they would expect from others if they did share posts like these. Assumptions about how peers might respond to these angry posts were relatively consistent. Some participants said peers might comment with admonishments like: “you shouldn’t be posting this” or “you don’t want people in your business” or would refrain from commenting at all, and that these posts would get no “likes” (one-click endorsements of user-contributed content). Some youth said that their friends would try to intervene by making comments like “don’t do it” or “chill. However, many participants said that they expected that such violent-anger posts would garner interest from others. For example, one youth explained that in response to the post about an impending physical altercation, others would ask questions such as “where you going? Where’s it at? Who you fighting?” and then likely show up as spectators. One young man said that friends would say “go ahead, beat him up...and send me the video after.”

Most participants did not describe expecting violent-anger posts to cause harm to their relationships or reputation; instead, they focused on the threat of getting in trouble.

#### **2.4.1.3 When “it’s not too serious”**

Similar to the distinction some youth drew between less and more serious threats of violence during the focus group, several young men stated in interviews that less serious instances of anger could serve as acceptable posting material, while more serious instances could not. One youth, for example, said:

*Maybe if you’re in a really bad fight with a friend of yours or a girlfriend, you’re not going to post that and have everybody in your business. That’s why you don’t want to post about—but they would post about it when it’s like nothing that serious...if your friend’s too late to pick you up and you’re mad, then yeah, like you missed the concert or something.*

This idea is related to both the aversion to having others “in your business” as well as to the avoidance of escalating arguments into damaged or lost relationships or physical altercations. In other words, anger-related material that is “lighter” is safer to post, because it simultaneously does not pose a significant risk to the relationships it references, and does not violate the perceived social norm of revealing “your business.” Another youth described this decision point, explaining that:

*Just a small petty thing like, “Oh I’m so mad you took my charger,” or something where it’s just like little corny arguments or whatever, that’s okay. But nothing too much like “You stole my...!” Or whatever.*

This young man along with others drew a distinction between harmful expressions of “real” or “serious” anger and expressions of small annoyances, which they saw as relatively harmless and unlikely to escalate. In this example, the distinction was mostly in the framing of the response to

one situation—someone taking a charger. This participant explains that expressing annoyance that a friend “took” his charger in a “corny” way would be ok, but expressing anger that the friend “stole” his charger would be inappropriate.

While describing the above-discussed distinction between non-violent versus violent expressions of anger, one young man explained that:

*[If] I'm mad that we lost the championship, or I'm mad that me and my friend are fighting, that's okay. But if you're mad, but there's a different type of mad, if you're posting about doing stuff like going to a fight or doing something that you're not supposed to do, like that can get you in trouble, then yeah that certain stuff you should keep off Facebook because you never know who is looking at your page basically.*

This and other youth explicitly connected the context of the emotion—including conditions under which the emotion occurs and the intensity of the emotional experience and expression—to the social acceptability of posting about it. Though this particular comment hinges on the idea of getting ‘in trouble,’ the way this young man describes this distinction: a “different type of mad,” illustrates the difference between serious and not-so serious anger that many youths in this sample described. This display rule can be summarized like this: *Expressions of mild anger or annoyance are socially acceptable (or, conversely, that expressions of intense anger are not socially acceptable).*

#### **2.4.1.4 Exposing peers**

During the interviews, several participants described a distinction between expressions of anger in general, and those that are meant to “call out” or “expose” a peer’s wrongdoing in a public forum. The social acceptability of this was somewhat ambiguous. For example, one young man was conflicted about the social acceptability of posting when angry at a friend, first saying he would

not do it, but then saying that it could be helpful for gaining outside perspective (“an outsider looking in”). He described the way his friends sometimes post about their anger in the following way, but had trouble deciding whether this was socially acceptable:

*Youth: Like, some of them would say “Oh I hate this person.” “I wish I never met them.”*

*Interviewer: Would they say the person’s name?*

*Youth: No. No.*

*Interviewer: No?*

*Youth: They’d just say what they got to say but leave the name out.*

This idea that expressions of anger were more appropriate when they were vague was related to the understanding that, as somewhat public spaces, SNS posts can be powerful social forces. One youth told the following story:

*These two people that were like really good friends and they were really known, and they like, they were angry at each other. Well one was angry and one of them kept saying, “I’m still your friend, I’m always going to be there.”... Because like if they’re not answering your calls and you just post it on social media, like they’ll of course see it because it’ll be on their wall.*

In this particular example, the public nature of Facebook allowed these friends to reconcile; however, another participant explained that when a peer does something wrong, an angry Facebook post is a way to “warn” others about their true nature. In this case, public shaming can be used as an attempt to harm the reputation of a peer in retribution for a perceived wrongdoing. Thus, both of the following display rules are represented in these data:

*Expressions of anger that are meant to expose another person’s wrongdoing are not socially acceptable*



*Expressions of anger that are meant to expose another person's wrongdoing are socially acceptable*

#### **2.4.1.5 Summary of display rules for anger**

The display rules for anger are listed in Table 2 from most to least salient (top to bottom).

Table 2: Display Rules for Anger

Socially Acceptable	Not Socially Acceptable
	Expressions of anger that are violent in nature are not socially acceptable
	Expressions of anger are not socially acceptable
Expressions of mild anger or annoyance are socially acceptable	
	Expressions of anger meant to expose another person's wrongdoing are not socially acceptable
Expressions of anger meant to expose another person's wrongdoing are socially acceptable	
Expressions of anger that include "mild" violence are socially acceptable	
Expressions of anger are all socially acceptable	

The feed editing exercise results are consistent with these display rules (Figure 1). Very few participants (3) chose to delete the angry post without violence. Two posts referred to violence; 24 participants selected one for deletion and 35 participants selected the other. Of the two, the post suggesting relatively milder violence was selected less often.

### 2.4.2 Embarrassment

Youth also reported being very unlikely to express embarrassment via social media. Eighty percent rated their likelihood at 1 or 2 out of 5, while only 3 selected 4 or 5. The mean was 1.58, the median was 1, and the mode was 1 (SD = 1.059).

The participants' descriptions of social expectations around embarrassment were far less complex than those around anger. Across interviews, most participants agreed that it is almost always socially unacceptable to express true embarrassment on social media. The following exchange illustrates the clear, decisive way participants tended to talk about expressing embarrassment:

*Interviewer: If something embarrassing happens to you, would you post about it?*

*Youth: Nope*

*Interviewer: Why not?*

*Youth: I won't want nobody to know*

*Interviewer: What about your friends, would they post about something embarrassing?*

*Youth: Nope.*

*Interviewer: None of them?*

*Youth: Nope.*

*Interviewer: Why not?*

*Youth: They don't want nobody to know. [Laughter]*

*Interviewer: Okay. What happens if someone, if people find out, if they know?*

*Youth: They're probably more embarrassed now.*

Over and over, youth asserted that embarrassment was private, and that expressing it online would only lead to its amplification. While discussing the other two negative emotions (anger and

sadness), youth often talked about *individual differences*, saying things like “some people would” and “it depends on the person,” and sometimes mentioning *gender* differences (7 co-occurrences with *emotion*). However, they did so less often when they described their views on expressing embarrassment. Specifically, the code *individual differences* co-occurred with *sadness* 48 times, with *anger* 35 times, and with *embarrassment* 19 times (and with excitement only 10 times). This consistently described display rule can be summarized simply:

*Expressions of embarrassment are not socially acceptable.*

As with the other negative emotions, participants described assumptions that *social consequences* would occur if they posted about embarrassment. While the concern that others will “know your business” was an often-referenced reason for abstaining from posting about anger and sadness (with 13 and 21 co-occurrences, respectively), the assumption that peers would “laugh at” those who posted in such a vulnerable way deterred them from expressing embarrassment. The code *being teased* did not co-occur with anger at all, and only once with sadness, but it co-occurred 25 times with embarrassment. Participants said things like “they’ll make fun of me. They’ll make fun of me because they’re going to call me “stupid” and “dumb” and stuff when they see me.” One participant explained why he chose to remove a particular post during the feed editing exercise in the following exchange:

*Interviewer: So you also crossed out, “Asked out this girl today and she shut me down in front of everyone.” Why’d you cross that one out?*

*Youth: Because it’s embarrassing.*

*Interviewer: It’s embarrassing so you wouldn’t really want people to know that?*

*Youth: Yeah.*

*Interviewer: Okay. What do you think people would comment on this?*

*Youth: Probably laughing emojis.*

*Interviewer: Probably laughing emojis? Would any of your friends bring it up if they saw you?*

*Youth: Yeah.*

*Interviewer: Yeah? What would they say?*

*Youth: They'll just tell different types of jokes.*

This concern about being teased, laughed at, and becoming the subject of jokes was common, but there was one exception to this rule that many youths identified: when they could tell a funny story at their own expense to *entertain* others. One youth used the following examples to describe this type of post:

*Say if I fell, or like if I was standing like outside and a bus rode past and it splashed me, I'll post that because it has like a positive and negative balance.*

This young man pinpointed the “positive and negative balance” as the defining quality of an expression of embarrassment that is socially acceptable. This and other examples stopped short of embodying the type of vulnerability that the expression of “serious” embarrassment does. In these cases, laughter from peers is the goal, and because the goal is aligned with the expected outcome, it is not a risk. One youth, who rated his likelihood of posting about being embarrassed at a 5, explained his reasoning like this:

*Just for laughs...because I'm a class clown, so I like to make jokes....and if something embarrassing happened I'm going to put it up there because, you know, there's nothing to be ashamed about, we all get embarrassed sometimes in life so why not just make the best of it?*

Though he attributed this tendency in part to his own identity as a “class clown,” in saying that “we all get embarrassed” he implied that anyone could take the opportunity to make a joke out of an embarrassing situation. This *benefit of expressing* embarrassment was mentioned 11 times, and the corresponding display rule can be summarized this way:

*Expressions of embarrassment with comedic value are socially acceptable.*

Some participants did not subscribe to this exception, however, and adhered to the above-stated display rule discouraging all expressions of embarrassment regardless of the circumstances. One young man explained his reasoning for not posting embarrassing things, even when they are funny, saying: “that’s all bullying and stuff, people will tease me about it.” (It should be noted that the interview protocol did not include content about comedic value; this concept was emergent).

Another benefit of expression, emotional support, was mentioned a few times. However, this possibility did not override the social risks. One youth said “I mean I’m pretty sure some of my friends would probably make a joke out of it to make me laugh, to make me feel good all over again...like they’ll just tell me, they’ll support, like ‘It’s okay.’” But, this young man rated his likelihood of expressing embarrassment at a 1 (“definitely no”).

#### **2.4.2.1 Summary of display rules for embarrassment**

Table 3 shows the display rules for embarrassment in order of salience (top to bottom).

Table 3: Display Rules for Embarrassment

Socially Acceptable	Not Socially Acceptable
	Expressions of embarrassment are not socially acceptable
Expressions of embarrassment with comedic value are socially acceptable	

These two display rules were consistent with the posts selected for deletion in the feed editing exercise (Figure 2.1). The two posts expressing authentic embarrassment with no comedic value were selected for deletion 18 and 26 times, and the post with some comedic value was selected 11 times.

### 2.4.3 Sadness

Youth reported that they were unlikely to express sadness in a post as well. Seventy-two percent of participants rated their likelihood at 1 or 2 out of 5, 8 fell in the middle at 3, and 3 selected 4 or 5. The mean was 1.93, the median was 2, and the mode was 1 (SD = 1.047).

The participants were almost unanimous in describing their positions on expressing sadness via social media. Sadness, according to these youths, is a particularly private emotion. They explained that it is rarely ok to express sadness online at all, saying things like:

*I feel like you shouldn't put something like really sad on Facebook or anything else, but to each his own.*

*Because if I was like somewhere or something, I wouldn't want a like lot of people coming up to me to say like something while I'm still hurt about it or something. I don't like when a lot of people come up to me and say stuff about it.*

This type of explanation came up over and over again: most youth did not find sadness to be an appropriate expression online, and they frequently (22 times) explained that the main risk was that people would *know their business*. Youth used the word “business” strikingly often, saying things like “I don’t put my business out on Facebook or the internet because I don’t like my business being out there all like that.” The concept of private versus public information was often delineated

in this way. One youth described how he learned this display rule (not expressing sadness), which he found to be self-protective, explicitly:

*To me, particularly, I don't really show emotions, I don't really show it, because they told me, my mom and everybody told me if I show emotion more everybody would know how to get to you, would know your bad sides, your downs.*

Thus, the display rule that this and many youth described was simply that:

*Expressions of sadness are not socially acceptable*

There were, however, several youth who said that sharing sadness was socially acceptable and that they would do so. One young man explained this position in the following exchange:

*Interviewer: in general, do you think it's okay to show sadness on social media?*

*Youth: Yeah. There's nothing wrong with that.*

*Interviewer: So why do you say "yeah"?*

*Youth: Because sometimes it's a lot easier to express your feelings when, through online, than it is to talk to the actual person. Because even though there's going to be people that judge you, they can't judge you to your face, you know, so sometimes it's just easier to express what's really going on when you don't got to worry about nobody judging you to your face.*

Along with several others who took this position, there were also a few youth who said that sharing sadness was acceptable, yet they would not do so; for example, one young man said "I mean you could but I wouldn't. I don't post nothing on Facebook like I said before." Therefore, perceptions of the following display rule were also represented:

*Expressions of sadness are socially acceptable*

#### **2.4.3.1 Bereavement**

One exception to the above rule was the expression of sadness about the death of a loved one. In the focus group, almost all of the written examples youth gave for socially acceptable posts expressing sadness involved a death, but only one example included an emotion word (“missing”) while the rest simply stated that the death had occurred and/or said “R.I.P.” In the interviews, youth brought this up, saying things like:

*If someone passed away, I don’t see why you wouldn’t show your remorse for it. You know?*

*Say that you love that person, say that you’re missing them, say that you’re sad about them not being there anymore. So yeah.*

Although this was the position that most participants took, a few young men who agreed that sadness is uniquely private did not view death as a justification for expressing this emotion on social media. Some of these youths who said that even death is not grounds for expressing sadness went farther, saying that sadness about the loss of a loved one is not only just as personal as other sadness, but even more so. Thus, these youth positioned expressions of sadness about this type of loss as even more inappropriate than other expressions of sadness. The two competing display rules here are:

*Expressions of sadness due to bereavement are socially acceptable*

*Expressions of sadness due to bereavement are not socially acceptable*

#### **2.4.3.2 Romance**

Most youth in this sample were in strong agreement that it is not socially acceptable to express sadness related to a romantic partner (they would just say something like “single” after a breakup). This was unanimous in the focus group, but in interviews responses were somewhat more varied and complicated. For example, some participants seemed to have conflicting views; they would



describe a display rule, then endorse the opposite. This often centered on the concept of emotional support. One young man said he'd think about expressing sadness over a breakup, but then would not actually express the emotion; he said he would personally decide not to do so because even though it could lead to emotional support he did not like people "up in his business." (This same young man said that expressing sadness about death is not appropriate because it is too personal.) In fact, *Emotional support* co-occurred 33 times with sadness, yet the vast majority said they were unlikely to express it. Youth said things like:

*If you post it, like, in public, somebody might comment and like tell them to meet up with each other and probably help them not be sad no more.*

*Epecially coming from me because I won't, I'm not a poster, so it's like, "Oh he's really sad, oh let me call him." [Laughter] "If he didn't tell me and he posted it then let me call."*

*Yeah.*

Despite this expectation of emotional support being only a click away, youth almost always endorsed opting for privacy. In this way, the perceived potential to garner emotional support was in competition with the perception that in doing so they would be breaking a display rule, which could be summarized in this way:

*Expressions of sadness that are linked to romantic circumstances are not socially acceptable*

### 2.4.3.3 Summary of display rules for sadness

Table 4 shows the display rules related to sadness from most to least salient (top to bottom).

Table 4: Display Rules for Sadness

Socially Acceptable	Not Socially Acceptable
	Expressions of sadness are not socially acceptable
	Expressions of sadness that are linked to romantic circumstances are not socially acceptable
Expressions of sadness (but only) due to bereavement are socially acceptable	
	Expressions of sadness (especially) due to bereavement are not socially acceptable
Expressions of sadness are all socially acceptable	

These display rules are consistent with the results of the feed editing exercise. Of the three posts expressing sadness, the one related to bereavement was chosen for deletion the fewest number of times (7). The other two were related to romantic relationships; these were deleted 30 and 23 times; almost as often as the violent anger posts discussed above.

### 2.4.4 Excitement

In contrast to the other three emotions, youth reported being likely to post about excitement on social media sites. Only 3 participants rated their likelihood at 1 or 2, while 80% rated their likelihood at 4 or 5. The mean was 4.1, the median was 4, and 4 and 5 were each selected the same number of times (16).

#### 2.4.4.1 Congratulations and positivity

In general, participants described expressions of excitement and happiness as socially acceptable, saying things like: “If it’s something good, everyone nowadays posts everything good.” They most often mentioned *benefits of expression* here (19 co-occurrences); in particular, they noted that posting about excitement could be a way to invite *congratulations* (12 co-occurrences) from others, and that it was also a way to *spread positivity* (9 co-occurrences) to others.

Many participants described congratulations from others as something that motivated them to post about excitement because it increased or boosted their own experience of excitement. One participant said:

*Because you can post that on social media, because you could have just like won an award or something, and everyone will comment on it, “Congratulations.” It makes you feel happy about it.*

Inviting congratulations from others for personal satisfaction was the most commonly described motivation for posting about excitement, and the descriptions were quite similar. However, almost as many youth also described posting about excitement as something with the potential to have a positive influence on others. One youth said:

*I just feel more comfortable expressing something good, positive. You know what I mean? There’s so much negative and hate in the world.*

Another expressed a similar sentiment, saying:

*Because I want people to see that it’s better to post about happiness instead of what’s going bad in the world.*

Derived from these responses, the first display rule is:

*Expressions of excitement are all socially acceptable*

However, some youth said that while expressing excitement is socially acceptable, expressing “too much” excitement was not. For example, they said things like:

*Like if you're happy about something, now don't get too happy, if you post something way too happy like, like post something too happy like that nobody should be writing, like man, you shouldn't post that probably. But yeah it's okay to post a lot of happy stuff.*

Several youth made similar distinctions around the intensity of the expression, though this was uncommon. More common were specific cautions, such as avoiding strong language that others might find offensive and cautions about disclosing information about material possessions. However, this display rule can be summarized in the following way:

*Expressions of excitement that are too exuberant are not socially acceptable*

#### **2.4.4.2 Offensive rhetoric**

One main consideration, particularly in the focus group (but also mentioned across several interviews) focused on not using language that “girls” would find offensive. For example, if they were getting ready for an outing and wanted to express their excitement, it would be socially unwise to post things like “where the bitches at” or “where them hoes at.” Thus, another display rule was:

*Expressions of excitement that others might find offensive are not socially acceptable*

#### **2.4.4.3 Material possessions**

In addition to curbing vulgarity and offensive rhetoric, participants described being cautious about expressing excitement related to things like acquiring material possessions, and especially money. They explained that posting things like “I’m aight, just got 300 dollars” could pose a real risk of theft of property, and therefore represented a lack of social savvy. One young man said that:

*You don't want everyone to know your business. And if it's excited, "Oh, I just won the lottery," you're not going to put that on social media, you shouldn't want to.*

Another participant echoed this concern, describing it in the following way:

*Because I usually don't post stuff that really happens that's real good. Like some stuff that happens real good is not for it, because there's kids out here who actually will fight you over stuff that they don't have or try to take stuff that you don't have.*

For at least one young man, this fear was rooted in experience; he said "I saw one person post that he had \$500 and got jumped the next hour." Therefore, the risks of posting about excitement stemming from material or financial gains could supersede the potential emotional benefits of posting and receiving congratulations. This display rule summarizes such assertions:

*Expressions of excitement about material gains are not socially acceptable*

#### **2.4.4.4 Summary of display rules for excitement**

The display rules for excitement in order from most to least salient are depicted in Table 5.

Table 5: Display Rules for Excitement

Socially Acceptable	Not Socially Acceptable
Expressions of excitement are all socially acceptable	Expressions of excitement about material gains are not socially acceptable
	Expressions of excitement that are offensive are not socially acceptable
	Expressions of excitement that are too exuberant are not socially acceptable

These display rules were consistent with the findings from the feed editing activity (Figure 2.1). The excitement posts were selected for deletion almost as infrequently as the neutral posts;

the one post that was responsible for most of the instances of selection pertained to monetary gain. Sixteen participants selected the post about monetary gain for deletion, while only 5 selected “Ayyyy where the party at” and none selected “Life is good” (the latter of which is related to the idea of spreading positivity).

#### **2.4.5 Thinking about context**

Several key findings cut across the emotions explored in this study. These findings illuminate youths’ descriptions of how the context in which they experience emotions and the nature of social media factor into their decision making around expressing emotions online. Across these emotions, how youth think about the nature of social media when deciding whether to post about their emotions is an important consideration. In addition to the nature of social media itself, the participants described nuanced contextual details regarding the situation in which the emotions occurred when explaining their decision making around posting emotionally expressive content online. First, I will present the key finding regarding youths’ consideration of the nature of social media. Then, I will present key findings regarding the context of emotions.

##### **2.4.5.1 The nature of social media**

When participants described how the nature of social media factored into their decision-making processes, they mentioned the publicity of social networks as well as the permanence of their content. These were emergent concepts; one additional aspect, the adult audience, was included in the interview protocol.

### ***Publicity, not permanence***

When youth brought up aspects of social media that they accounted for when making decisions about whether to post about their emotions, they talked about the publicity of posts (which could be seen by hundreds of others, or more) often. Less often, they considered the permanence of the information they shared this way, which they could certainly delete later, but which others could capture (e.g., via screenshot) and save and/or distribute. Participants mentioned the idea that social media posts “last forever” only 10 times, whereas they brought up the publicity of social media posts 203 times.

### ***Adult audience: mostly ignorable***

Though most participants said adults (e.g. parents) could see their social media posts, few said that this factored into their decisions about what to post when interviewers asked them this question directly at the end of the interview. But, several did mention the possibility of “getting in trouble” with authority figures as a deterrent when discussing decision-making about posting in anger. Generally, however, the audience with which participants concerned themselves was the peer audience.

#### **2.4.5.2 The context of emotions**

The reason for the emotion and the intensity of the emotion were often linked, and both were often considered to be determinants regarding display rules. For example, participants described displaying emotions that were “too” intense as inappropriate across emotions—even excitement, which had almost no associated display rules. Further, the reason for the emotional experience was often cited as a determining factor, although this manifested differently based on varying beliefs about what information is “private business” and what is public domain. For example, some

participants described a death as the only “good reason” for expressing sadness online, while others said that experiencing a death was strictly personal and that sharing sadness because of a death was even worse than sharing sadness over something more trivial.

## **2.5 DISCUSSION**

This study identified a wide range of emotional display rules perceived by African American adolescent males. Figure 2.2 depicts these display rules on a continuum from most to least salient based on the frequency of mention and the clarity/consistency of the rule as described by the youth in interviews. They are organized by emotion.

### **2.5.1 Social consequences versus benefits of expression**

When youth considered whether they would express sadness and anger online, they mentioned the risk of hurting their reputation because others would “know [their] business.” This is in alignment with previous research on males’ perceptions of display rules and expressive tendencies (Chaplin & Aldao, 2013; Polce-Lynch et al., 1998; Underwood et al., 1992; Zeman & Shipman, 1997). The participants saw this construction of emotions as private business as simultaneously adaptive and inhibitive. That is, sometimes the participants perceived potential benefits of expressing submissive/powerless emotions (mostly in reference to sadness), but they indicated that risks were in the way. Even though they anticipated that they would receive social support if they expressed sadness, the social consequences would be too great.



Youth expected qualitatively different social consequences for breaking different display rules. Notably, “being teased” and losing social status was a major deterrent to expressing embarrassment as well as sadness, but the fear of losing or damaging specific friendships was the major social deterrent to expressing anger online. Additionally, youth might be thinking short term about the damage that could be done when posting content; while they mentioned the *permanence* of social media posts infrequently, the *publicity* of those posts was a ubiquitous consideration.

### **2.5.2 Complexities of anger and violence**

One difficulty in interpreting these data is that the focus group had a relatively clear consensus that generally, expressions of anger are socially acceptable. From there, it would be reasonable to expect that interview participants would report at least a moderate likelihood of expressing anger. However, in the interviews few youth said they would express anger. Thus, somewhat different findings emerged from the focus groups and interviews. However, “is it ok to express anger?” and “would you express anger?” are different questions. In other words, there may be an “other people do it” phenomenon: while interview responses indicated that most youth reported being unlikely to post in anger, this is notably a *different question* than whether it is socially acceptable to express anger or not, as it is specifically about each participant’s own likelihood of doing so. This is an important finding, because research on display rules often presupposes that reported emotional expression patterns and perceived emotional display rules are one and the same. This may not always be the case.

Other explanations for this discrepancy exist. First, it is possible that focus group participants were influence by one another, and reached somewhat of a consensus on things like anger expression rather than sticking with conflicting views. Or, perhaps the interview participants

would have agreed that, for example, expressing anger without violence is socially acceptable, but they lacked the opportunity to hash out this “line in the sand” with a group of peers.

This study found a tight coupling of anger and violence when youth discussed expressing emotions online. Many youth were afraid that expressing anger on social media networks could lead to real-life violence, and even gave examples of such experiences. This is a significant concern, particularly when considering the ways people might be emboldened in an online setting, often called “hiding behind screens” (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008). Further, expressing anger with allusions to or threats of violence online creates a public record; many youth said that they would be concerned about police and parole officers having access to this type of content. This concern may be unique to, or particularly salient for, black male adolescents in the U.S.

Finally, these findings show that clear, socially agreed-upon perceptions of display rules around anger may not exist in the same way for these youth as display rules around other emotions like embarrassment, which were articulated in strikingly similar ways across interviews. Rather, these youth described complex and conflicting ideas about how, and whether, they and their peers could express anger in socially acceptable ways via social media.

### **3.0 STUDY 2: SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF BREAKING EMOTIONAL DISPLAY RULES**

The vast majority of today's adolescents are immersed in social media (Blaszczak-Boxe, 2014; Lenhart et al., 2010) where emotion-centered interactions occur in unique and strikingly public ways. Adolescents' "Tweets" and Facebook and Instagram posts are visible to hundreds of their peers, or even to the general public, and open to uncensored and often unsupervised responses. Meanwhile, numerous programs and curricula aimed at improving socio-emotional skills and competencies are being employed in middle and high schools all over the U.S.; many show great promise (e.g., Durlak et al., 2011). However, a compelling criticism of attempts to infuse youth with socio-emotional skills this way is that the teachings are often out of touch with youths' real-world experiences, and therefore may fail to provide useful skills that work in their social contexts (Gillies, 2011). One potential disconnect can be found in the research base upon which these programs rest: the field's understanding of how communications about emotions translate into social and emotional development is based on research in physical settings, and largely on early childhood experiences with parents (see Horner & Wallace, 2013 for a review).

Expanding the scope of this research beyond childhood homes and into adolescents' virtual interactions with peers is critical for several reasons. First, emotional development is far from complete in early childhood (Saarni et al., 2007), and adolescence is a period of particularly volatile emotional experience paired with difficulty enacting emotional self-regulation (Steinberg,

2014). Studies have indicated that the link between supportive socializing settings (e.g., parent-child relationships) and positive outcomes persists in adolescence (Klimes-Dougan & Zeman, 2007). Second, during adolescence there is an increase in the influence of peers across developmental domains, as the “social brain” is especially sensitive to peers’ actions and reactions (Blakemore, 2008). Unsurprisingly, peers are considered to be especially salient emotion socialization agents during adolescence (Morris et al. 2007), and the need to belong, or the motivation to be accepted by and form strong relationships with peers becomes imperative (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Leary et al., 2013).

Examining the emotion socialization processes occurring between peers in online settings in which adolescents spend so much time is a critical endeavor which will allow educational researchers and educators to approach real-world experiences of youth in more informed ways. For example, past research has demonstrated the benefits to youth when adults act as emotion coaches (Gottman, Katz, & Hooven, 1996) during in-person interactions. A systematic review of research suggests that adults’ ability to connect with youth via social media represents “exciting new means...to engage this age group, identify behaviors, and provide appropriate intervention and education,” (Yonker et al., 2015). With a deeper understanding of how online emotional exchanges shape adolescents’ relationships and development, adults—both in person and online—would be better equipped to help youth express themselves in ways that are perceived as socially competent and thus result in supportive responses. In addition, adults could help youth learn how to provide support to peers while avoiding potentially harmful responses. Facilitating socio-emotional learning in this way could help youth become more intentional about their online expressions and responses, potentially leading to better social and personal outcomes.

This study builds upon Study 1 (chapter 2) that elicited African American adolescent males' perceptions of display rules in the context of social media. The previous work resulted in a tentative taxonomy of these display rules around four specific emotions. The current study aims to test this taxonomy by determining whether breaking the most salient display rules youth described results in social consequences.

### **3.1 U.S. TEENS EMOTIONAL LIVES ONLINE: WHAT IT MEANS TO GO MASSPERSONAL**

The advent of social media has introduced a powerful new context for social and emotional development. Social media are defined as “Internet-based, disentrained, and persistent channels of masspersonal communication facilitating perceptions of interactions among users, deriving value primarily from user-generated content.” (Carr & Hayes, 2015, p. 49). When social media users post content, they are communicating with many others at once “massperonally” (Carr & Hayes, 2015); this relatively new style of communication is rapidly becoming normative for adolescents in the U.S., who by 2010 had reached an adoption rate of 73% (Lenhart et al., 2010). As of 2014, 92% of U.S. teens report using social media (Blaszczak-Boxe, 2014). Masspersonal communication is no longer a novelty for teens in the U.S; rather, it is part of everyday social life.

Online social networks generally act to extend youths' face-to-face networks in several ways. Using social media, youth connect with many of the same people they see face to face (boyd, 2008), but these connections transcend time and space in ways that would have shocked individuals who grew up in the pre-social media world. Many youth operate in what Ito et al. (2010) call “always on,” in which they have near constant access to their social network at their

fingertips. They use social media at home, in school, during after-school activities, while out with friends—anywhere they go, their social network follows with ready-at-a-click asynchronous or synchronous interaction. While it is less common for youth to forge completely new relationships with strangers using social media, they do have the ability to make lasting connections with individuals they meet only briefly (whom would otherwise likely be forgotten) (boyd, 2007).

This constant connection affords youth many opportunities, but communicating masspersonally in socially savvy ways comes with challenges. The following sections consider several of these opportunities and challenges, drawing from what the developmental field knows about emotional development in social context and what the human-computer interaction field knows about social functioning in online spaces.

### **3.1.1 Emotional display rules**

Socially agreed-upon norms that pertain to emotional expressions are called *emotional display rules* (Ekman & Friesen, 1969; Gnepp & Hess, 1986; Taylor & Harris, 1982; Saarni, 1979), and research suggests that the way people perceive and respond to them varies.

#### **3.1.1.1 Gender, age, and context**

Across studies, gender, age, and context have been found to be related to display rules (e.g., Chaplin & Aldao, 2013; Polce-Lynch et al., 1998; Underwood et al., 1992; Zeman & Garber, 1996; Zeman & Shipman, 1997). Studies consistently find that males suppress emotions, “mask” emotions, and “dissemble” (hide beliefs and feelings) more often than females (Underwood et al., 1992; Zeman & Garber, 1996; Zeman & Shipman, 1997;). However, research has found that boys tend to express more anger than girls (Chaplin & Aldao, 2013; Hubbard, 2003). The frequency

with which children and youth express emotions has been found to decrease as they age (Underwood et al., 1992; Zeman & Garber, 1996). For older children and emerging adolescents, levels of suppression toward peers have been found to be lower than suppression toward teachers (Underwood et al., 1992), suggesting that youth “masked” (hid) their emotions with their teachers more often than with their peers and that masking behaviors became more frequent with age. Youth also have been found to express emotions differently in front of parents and peers (Novin et al., 2008).

### **3.1.1.2 Culture**

Evidence suggests that cultural beliefs and values such as individualism and collectivism help shape display rules, including a large-scale study that compared display rules across 35 countries and found, for example, that emotional suppression was lower when cultures prioritized things like individual affective autonomy and higher when they prioritized things like social order (Matsumoto et al., 2008). Another study compared how international adolescents from different countries (in this case, Iran and the Netherlands) interacted with their peers versus family members; the exhibited significant cultural differences in their adherence to display rules (Novin et al., 2008). When asked to explain why they behave in this way, adolescents from the two countries reported different motives for their behavior (self-protective versus prosocial). The authors determined that cultural beliefs and values explained the differences in behavior, suggesting that display rules may differ according to culturally rooted values and belief systems. Taken together, this research suggests that detecting and adhering to display rules is both important and challenging.

### **3.1.1.3 Online display rules**

Prior to Study 1 of the current work, at the time of writing no research has specifically aimed to identify online emotional display rules. However, there exists some research about emotional expression online that is relevant to this work.

First, prior research established that social media users express emotions online; Thelwall et al. (2010) randomly sampled comments made on MySpace and found that 66% conveyed a positive emotion, and 20% conveyed a negative emotion. This indicates that emotional expression is part of the emotional culture of this particular online social platform. More recently, Settanni & Marengo (2015) analyzed online emotional expressions of individuals on Facebook and found that negative emotional expressions were correlated with depression and anxiety in a sample of adults. Although this work did not directly address emotional display rules, this study also found that emotional expressiveness on Facebook decreased with age, which aligns with developmental research (reviewed above) which has found that emotional expressiveness decreases with age. This is arguably attributable, at least in part, to perceptions of emotional display rules.

In Study 1 of the current work, display rules were identified which pertained to four emotions: excitement, embarrassment, sadness, and anger. These display rules are specific to the African American males who attend one urban after-school program in a particular city, and apply to the context of online social media.

The display of excitement was considered socially acceptable, with the small caveat that peers might view excessive expressions of excitement negatively (and that bragging about assets could result in those assets being stolen). The display of embarrassment was only considered socially acceptable when the circumstances held comedic value (expressing genuine embarrassment in a vulnerable way would result in being “laughed at”).



The display of sadness was not considered socially acceptable in almost any situation; particularly regarding a breakup. Only the death of a friend or family member was considered to warrant the expression of sadness, and even then, most examples of socially acceptable “expressions” were little (if any) more than factual representations of events from which the audience was expected to extrapolate sadness (e.g., “R.I.P. Ziggy”).

The display of anger was almost universally acceptable, regardless of reason or target. However, expressions of anger in the form of references to or threats of violence were not generally seen as appropriate (because these could bring trouble if police or parents saw them, but not because they were socially offensive—participants mostly expected peers to respond with interest, e.g., “where’s the fight at?”).

### **3.1.2 Emotional expressions and social support**

Research on face-to-face interactions has described emotional expressions as “social signals” (Campos, 1994) that provide individuals with the opportunity to affect changes on their environments. For example, such expressions can foster relational closeness or solicit emotional support or co-regulation (Gross & John, 2003; Kennedy-Moore & Watson, 2001; Srivastava et al., 2009). When messages posted to social media networks contain emotional content, they can invite social support from many others at once (Carr, Wohn, & Hayes, 2016). Adopting Cobb’s (1979) definition of social support, the authors define the experience of receiving social support as being the recipient of words or actions that inspire feelings that one is “cared for and loved ... esteemed and valued” along with feelings of belonging and “mutual obligation.” (Carr & Hayes, 2015). Though social media messages are masspersonal, they can be considered examples of social bidding (Gottman, 2011). That is, they strive for social connection. Face-to-face, youth who bid

emotionally in ways that adhere to display rules are more likely to reap social benefits (Hubbard, 2003; Zeman & Garber, 1996).

### **3.1.3 Closeness of social ties**

All Facebook “friends” are not equal. That is, connections that social media users have on social network sites range from very close (typically those with whom users interact regularly in real life) to very weak (distant acquaintances) (Wiese et al., 2011). Social closeness, or relationship strength, has important implications relevant to this work.

Emotional display rules regarding close versus weak social ties often dictate that more expression is appropriate with close ties (e.g., close friends) and less with weak ties (e.g., acquaintances) (e.g., Clark & Finkel, 2005). Clark & Brissette (2000) posit that “emotional expressions [take] on different meanings in different relationship contexts” (p. 228). Specifically, they argue that across studies (Clark et al., 1987; Clark & Taraban, 1991; Shimanoff, 1987; Sommers, 1984), when individuals expresses a negative emotion to someone with whom they have weak ties, the other person’s feelings toward them will become more negative, but when they expresses a negative emotion to someone with whom they have strong ties, the other person’s feelings toward them actually become more positive.

The importance of closeness of ties has more recently been evidenced by research showing that the amount of self-disclosure, including emotional self-disclosure, is more ubiquitous within close relationships (Duck, 2007); this has also been found to be true when individuals interact via SNS like Twitter (Bak, Kim, & Oh, 2012). An interesting complexity related to the nature of social media yet to be explored is that when social media users post (or tweet) to their entire audience of friends, followers, etc., they are simultaneously reaching those with whom they have

close and weak ties. Previous research suggests that the presence of others in public spaces can dampen emotional expression (Matsumoto & Kupperbusch, 2001), so it could be that the presence of weak ties in the social networking audience serves to dampen emotional expressions as well.

### **3.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES**

Following the exploratory groundwork provided by Study 1, Study 2 aims to identify social consequences of breaking display rules regarding emotional expressions via social media.

The research described above has shown that when youth express emotions in ways that are viewed as socially inappropriate, they face social ramifications, while youth with better adherence to expectations around emotional expressions reap social benefits. Thus, the primary research questions ask whether several specific display rule violations affect African American adolescent boys' liking of, sympathy toward, and intentions to respond to a (fictional) peer online:

RQ1a: Does an African American adolescent male's online display rule adherence or violation affect likeability ratings by peers?

*H1a: Online display rule violations will result in lower likeability ratings from peers. Levels of likeability will vary across different display rule violations.*

RQ1b: Does an African American adolescent male's online display rule adherence or violation affect sympathy ratings by peers?

*H1b: Online display rule violations will result in less sympathy from peers. Levels of sympathy will vary across different display rule violations.*

RQ2a: Does an African American adolescent male's online display rule adherence or violation affect response intentions?

*H2a: Online display rule violations will result in less supportive response intentions and more cyberbullying intentions than conformity to display rules.*

RQ2b: Do response intentions differ by strength of social ties (strong versus weak)?

*H2b: Weak social ties will result in less supportive response intentions and more cyberbullying intentions than strong social ties.*

RQ2c: Do response intentions depend on an interaction between display rule violation type and strength of social ties?

*H2c: There will be an interaction between strength of social ties and display rule violation, such that response intentions will differ less among display rule violations in the condition of strong social ties than weak social ties.*

RQ3: Are age and social media use related to sympathy, likeability ratings, or response intentions?

### **3.3 METHODS**

#### **3.3.1 Participants**

African American adolescent males (N=40) from a multi-site neighborhood-based after-school drop-in program participated in the current study (Study 2). These 40 youths also participated in the individual interviews component of study 1 (see Figure 1.3). The after school program targets underserved youth and indicates that a major objective is to provide safe spaces for youth after school. Youth from two different program sites were invited to participate in Study 2. The mean age for this group of participants was 16 years, and ranged from 13-21 with a median age of 15;

only 6 participants fell outside the 14-18 range. This is similar to the demographics of the program as measured in 2010 during an evaluation; at that time the average age was 16 with a range from 9-21 (University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development, 2010). Because the current work is about social media use and several major SNSs (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Instagram) require users to be at least 13, youth under age 13 were not considered to be eligible for participation in the study. All eligible (male, African American) participants at the after school sites were invited to participate, and recruitment stopped when 40 youths had taken part in the study (these 40 youths comprised the mixed-methods sample; the qualitative interviews took place during the same data collection session as the below described quantitative study procedures). For more detailed information on the sample, such as about the after school program site, please refer to section 2.3.1.

#### **3.3.1.1 Participants' social media use**

Sixty percent of participants reported using social media “every day (or almost every day)” and 27.5% reported using it a few times per week. The remaining 12.5 percent reported using social media less often, such as a few times per month, or specified “other.” When asked to list the social media sites they used, participants frequently listed Facebook (37), Snapchat (24), Instagram (16), and Twitter (8), while platforms like Youtube, IG, Kik, Tumblr, Musical.ly, Tinder, Vine, and others were listed infrequently (2 or fewer participants).

#### **3.3.2 Procedures**

Participants completed questionnaires at their program sites. Measures included demographics and social media use (frequency of use, number of online ‘friends’). A reading and response task that

simulated social media interactions captured how youth respond to emotional expressions while using social network sites.

### **3.3.2.1 Reading and response task procedures: simulated interactions**

This within-subject experimental procedure asked participants to read and then react to several different simulated Facebook walls (“Fakebook walls”) belonging to fictional characters, or personas.

#### ***Material Development Process***

Prior to Study 1, I created and piloted prototypical Fakebook walls along with the experimental procedures with 10 youths (at another after-school program in the same city) using draft content. Then, during Study 1, a participant research team (comprising 10 youths demographically similar to the Study 2 participants) co-designed the content of the final research materials. Qualitative analysis during Study 1 focused on developing a taxonomy of display rules related to several negative emotions (sadness, anger, and embarrassment). These display rules guided the development of the personas. Three of these four fictional social media users violate a specific emotional display rule, while one adheres to display rules. To enhance the believability of the Fakebook walls and the authenticity of the personas, the participant research team supplied original writing representing social media content that would and would not violate these display rules. Thus, the personas include content that was written by member of the target population. Besides the different display rule violations, the Fakebook walls of the personas differed only enough that they were easily recognizable as representative of separate individuals. For example, each featured a different city skyline image.

### *Responding to Fakebook Personas*

The above-described process resulted in four experimental conditions. One was *neutral*, in that it did not represent a broken display rule. One represented the violation of a display rule regarding *sadness*, one regarding *anger*, and one regarding *embarrassment*. Details about these display rules and violations can be found in Table 6, and images of the research materials (reduced in size) can be found in Appendix B.

Table 6: Fakebook Personas: Display Rules and Posts that Break Them

	Display Rule	Persona's Unique Posts			
Anger	Expressions of anger that are violent in nature are not socially acceptable	Somebody finessed me I'm bout to shoot this place up		I hate snitches yall better watch your back	
Sadness	Expressions of sadness are not socially acceptable	I just wanna jump off a building right now			
	Expressions of sadness that are linked to romantic circumstances are not socially acceptable	She broke my heart			
Embarrassment	Expressions of embarrassment are not socially acceptable	Wish I stayed home the whole class just saw how dumb I am		Asked this girl out today and she shut me down in front of everyone	
Neutral	None	I'm just chillin	Who's hooping today at the rec?	Anybody want a 5-9 shift tomorrow?	Got a new phone but same number so text me your name and I'll save your contact

Note: The neutral persona contained only neutral posts which did not break display rules. Each other persona contained a mix of neutral posts listed (or slight rewordings of these), and two unique posts that broke specific display rules. These are based on content submitted by the youth research team.

Participants each experienced all four of the conditions, and the sequence of these conditions was randomized to control for order effects. For each condition, participants followed a two-step procedure:

Step 1: Participants read a Fakebook wall representing a persona. Instructions indicated that they should assume this person is someone around their own age. Visual cues (a slightly blurred profile photo) indicated that this person is also similar to them in age, race, and gender.

Participants answered a set of questions about the persona's likeability based on the Fakebook content. The likeability measure was original to this study, and included three items on a 1-5 agreement scale where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree. The items included: "This seems like someone I would want to hang out with"; "This person seems like they would make a good friend"; and "I would spend time with this person in real life." One likeability score, an average of these three items, was calculated for each participant for each condition. The sample size was insufficient for exploratory factor analysis, but the items performed reasonably well in terms of internal consistency with an average Cronbach's alpha of .727 across the 4 conditions.

Step 2: Participants read an additional post for each treatment condition; these posts were identical across conditions. The instructions indicated that the social media user had just posted again. In each case, the fictional person writes: "Just lost my best friend. R.I.P."

After reading this additional post, participants responded to four original items tapping into sympathy for this person. Item response options were on a 1-4 scale where 1 = not at all and 4 = very much, and included: "I feel bad about what happened to this person"; "I think this person probably deserved what they got (reverse coded)"; "I feel sorry that this happened"; and "I feel sad for this person." The internal consistency of these scales was much improved by removing



the reverse coded item (“I think this person probably deserved what they got”). In addition to the relatively lower internal consistency exhibited by reverse coded items in general (Pedhazur & Schmelkin, 2013), the wording of this item was arguably more malicious than the others. Therefore, it was removed. Final sympathy scores (one for each participant for each condition) were averages of the three remaining items, with an average Cronbach’s alpha of .871 across the 4 conditions.

Finally, participants answered questions about their response intentions following the R.I.P. post. Questions about response intentions were original to this study, and each question asked participants to consider how likely they would be to respond in a certain way. Each response intention was rated on a scale of 1-5 (1 = very unlikely, 5 = very likely). Participants rated each response intention twice: first they indicated if/how they would respond if the social media user who posted this content was someone they *did not know very well* (indicating a weak social tie), and then they indicated how they would respond if this person was a good friend of theirs (indicating a strong social tie). These questions were not combined for analysis; each represents a stand-alone variable. The questions were as follows: “I would post something nice;” “I would post something mean;” “I would ignore this post;” “I would talk about the breakup the next time I saw this person.” The full reading and response activity can be found in Appendix C.

### **3.3.2.2 Additional Questionnaire Measures**

Participants provided demographic information and social media use (e.g., years of use, networks used, use intensity/frequency, number of social network “friends/followers”). The Facebook Intensity Scale (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007) captured engagement with this particularly popular social media site, including an updated variable indicating the number of online “friends” are “actual friends” (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2011). See Appendix D for the questionnaire.

### **3.3.2.3 Data Analysis**

Within-subjects analysis of variance addressed research question 1 to test hypotheses regarding differences in participants' likeability ratings of and sympathy toward fictional individuals' display rule violations (versus display rule adherence). A two-way repeated measures analysis of variance addressed differences in each of the four response intentions (post something nice, post something mean, ignore, and talk about it in person) between both levels of social closeness (close versus weak social ties) among all four personas (neutral, sad, embarrassed, and mad).

#### ***Missing data***

There was an extremely low rate of missing data; most items used in the following analyses did not have any missing values and no item had more than one missing value. The pattern of missing data, evaluated using Little's MCAR test (Little, 1988; Rubin, 1976) indicated that the data points that were missing were missing completely at random ( $p = 1.0$ ), meaning that the missing values were not related to the value of any other variables. Because of the extremely low rate of missingness and the MCAR pattern of missingness, listwise deletion was appropriate for the following analyses (Bennett, 2001).

## 3.4 RESULTS

### 3.4.1 Research question 1

The first research question asked whether an African American adolescent male's online display rule adherence or violation would affect likeability (RQ1a) or sympathy (RQ1b) ratings by peers. Results for each dependent variable will be presented in turn.

#### 3.4.1.1 RQ1a: Likeability

A one-way within-subjects (repeated measures) ANOVA compared likeability for each of the display rule violation types (neutral, mad, sad, and embarrassed personas). I tested assumptions using SPSS version 24; Mauchly's Test indicated that the assumption of Sphericity was not violated,  $\chi^2(5) = 6.579$ ,  $p = .254$ . Normality was violated for three conditions; mad, sad, and embarrassed; however, a recent re-investigation using Monte Carlo methods has provided evidence that ANOVA is robust to violations of normality (Schmider et al., 2010). All other assumptions were met.

There was a significant effect of display rule violation type (persona) on likeability;  $F [3, 114] = 50.116$ ,  $p < .001$ . Pairwise comparisons using the Bonferroni post hoc adjustment indicated that the neutral persona, which included content without emotional expression, or the lack of a display rule violation, was the most liked ( $m = 3.65$ ) as compared to every other persona ( $p < .001$ ). The sad persona ( $m = 7.71$ ) and the embarrassed persona ( $m = 2.65$ ) were the next most liked, and were not significantly different from one another ( $p = 1.0$ ). The mad persona ( $m = 1.74$ ) was the least liked with a likeability score that was significantly lower than all others ( $p < .001$ ). Likeability means and standard deviations for each persona are displayed in Table 7.

Table 7: Likeability, Sympathy, and Response Intention Means by Persona and Tie Strength

			Mean	SD	N
Neutral Persona	Likeability		3.65	.733	39
	Sympathy		3.35	.787	39
	Response Intentions				
	Post something nice	Close ties	3.48	.905	40
		Weak ties	3.0	.961	40
	Post something mean	Close ties	1.33	.859	40
		Weak ties	1.25	.63	39
	Ignore	Close ties	1.85	1.04	39
		Weak ties	2.35	.921	40
	Talk about in person	Close ties	3.13	1.02	40
		Weak ties	2.30	1.05	40
Mad Persona	Likeability		1.73	.771	40
	Sympathy		2.79	.905	40
	Response Intentions				
	Post something nice	Close ties	3.10	1.03	40
		Weak ties	2.28	1.13	40
	Post something mean	Close ties	1.43	.844	40
		Weak ties	1.35	.736	40
	Ignore	Close ties	2.03	.920	40
		Weak ties	2.38	1.09	39
	Talk about in person	Close ties	2.80	1.11	40
		Weak ties	2.08	1.10	40
Sad Persona	Likeability		2.71	.784	39
	Sympathy		3.19	.744	39
	Response Intentions				
	Post something nice	Close ties	3.38	.952	40
		Weak ties	2.75	1.032	40
	Post something mean	Close ties	1.18	.675	40
		Weak ties	1.18	.601	40
	Ignore	Close ties	1.68	.859	39
		Weak ties	2.08	.859	40
	Talk about in person	Close ties	3.0	1.16	40
		Weak ties	2.23	1.09	39
Embarrassed Persona	Likeability		2.65	.758	40
	Sympathy		3.26	.804	40
	Response Intentions				
	Post something nice	Close ties	3.4	.928	40
		Weak ties	2.67	.955	39
	Post something mean	Close ties	1.35	.921	40
		Weak ties	1.18	.501	40
	Ignore	Close ties	2.03	1.12	40
		Weak ties	2.18	.854	39
	Talk about in person	Close ties	3.03	1.17	40
		Weak ties	2.5	1.11	40

### **3.4.1.2 RQ1b: Sympathy**

A one-way within-subjects (repeated measures) ANOVA compared sympathy for each of the four display rule violation types (personas). Mauchly's Test indicated that the Sphericity assumption was not violated,  $\chi^2(5) = 6.921$ ,  $p = .227$ . As in the previous analysis, normality was violated, and all other assumptions were met.

There was a significant effect of display rule violation type (persona) on sympathy;  $F [3, 111] = 10.132$ ,  $p < .001$ . Pairwise comparisons using the Bonferroni post hoc adjustment indicated that the mad persona had the lowest sympathy score ( $m = 2.81$ ); it was significantly lower than each of the other three (neutral,  $p < .001$ ; sad,  $p = .008$ ; embarrassed,  $p = .003$ ). There were no other significant differences. Table 7 shows the sympathy means and standard deviations for each persona.

### **3.4.2 Research question 2**

The second research question asked whether various online display rule violations would result in different response intentions. Specifically, this question related to the part of the reading and response task that asked participants to determine the likelihood of responding to each persona's additional post expressing the death of a friend; they responded once under the assumption that the persona was a close friend (signifying a close social ties) and once under the assumption that the persona was an acquaintance (signifying a weak social tie). I conducted a two-way repeated measures analysis of variance with each of the four response intentions (post something nice, post something mean, ignore, and talk about it in person) as a function of social closeness (close versus weak social ties) and persona/display rule violation type (neutral, sad, embarrassed, and mad).

There was not a significant interaction (RQ2c) between persona/display rule violation type and closeness of ties ( $F [12, 303] = 1.397, p = .167$ ). However, main effects for persona and closeness of ties were both significant (respectively:  $F [12, 303] = 2.698, p = .002$ ;  $F [4, 31] = 22.449, p < .001$ ).

#### **3.4.2.1 RQ2a: Responses among display rule violations**

To determine where the differences on each of the four responses (post something nice, post something mean, ignore, and talk about it in person) could be found among display rule violation type, I conducted pairwise comparisons using the Bonferroni adjustment. In response to the neutral persona (no display rule violation), participants were significantly more likely to say they would “post something nice” ( $m = 3.229$ ) than for the “mad” persona ( $m = 2.743$ ) ( $p = .005$ ). Though the reported likelihood of posting “something mean” was relatively low across the board ( $m = 1.318$ ), participants reported a slightly lower likelihood of posting “something mean” in response to the “sad” persona ( $m = 1.2$ ) than in response to the “mad” persona ( $m = 1.443$ ),  $p = .036$ . Likewise, they were less likely to say they would “ignore” the “sad” persona’s post ( $m = 1.857$ ) than the “mad” persona’s post ( $m = 2.271$ ),  $p = .023$ . In terms of responding by “talk[ing] about what happened the next time [he] saw this person,” participants were significantly less likely to do so for the “mad” persona ( $m = 2.529$ ) than for the “embarrassed” persona ( $m = 2.9$ ),  $p = .005$ .

#### **3.4.2.2 RQ2b: Responses between strong and weak social ties**

To determine where the differences on each of the four responses (post something nice, post something mean, ignore, and talk about it in person) could be found between strong and weak social ties (close friend and acquaintance), I conducted pairwise comparisons using the Bonferroni adjustment. Participants reported being significantly more likely to post “something nice” in

response to a close friend ( $m = 3.357$ ) than an acquaintance ( $m = 2.729$ ),  $p = 3.357$ , and reported being less likely to “ignore” a close friend ( $m = 1.9$ ) than an acquaintance ( $m = 2.257$ )  $p = .015$ . Similarly, they reported a greater likelihood of talking about the event in person with a close friend ( $m = 3.150$ ) than an acquaintance ( $m = 2.336$ ). The reported likelihoods of posting “something mean” in response to both a close friend and an acquaintance were low ( $m = 1.364$ ;  $1.271$  respectively); there was not a significant difference between the two ( $p = .362$ ).

### 3.4.3 Research Question 3

Age was negatively correlated with sympathy, but only for the embarrassed persona ( $r = -.317$ ,  $p = .046$ ). Total Facebook friends was negatively correlated with likeability rating for the sad persona ( $r = -.408$ ,  $p = .034$ ). Social media use time was negatively correlated with sympathy for both the sad ( $r = -.393$ ,  $p = .013$ ) and neutral ( $r = -.326$ ,  $p = .043$ ) personas. No other correlations were significant; correlations are reported in Table 8.

Table 8: Correlations between Sympathy, Likeability, Age, and Social Media Variables

		Age	Social Media Time	Total Facebook Friends
Neutral Persona	Likeability	-.300	.143	-.040
	Sympathy	-.147	-.326*	-.001
Sad Persona	Likeability	-.052	.002	-.408*
	Sympathy	-.244	-.393*	.086
Embarrassed Persona	Likeability	-.080	.042	.130
	Sympathy	-.317*	-.124	-.106
Mad Persona	Likeability	-.021	.124	.185
	Sympathy	-.304	-.309	.031

\* indicates  $p \leq .05$

## **3.5 DISCUSSION**

### **3.5.1 Research Question 1: The Effect of Display Rule Violation on Likeability and Sympathy**

Both likeability scores for and sympathy toward fictional peers (personas) were affected by display rule violation. The hypothesis stated that “Online display rule violations will result in lower likeability ratings and less sympathy from peers. Levels of likeability and sympathy will vary across different display rule violations.” The results supported this hypothesis

Even though the display rule violations affected both likability and sympathy, sympathy was only affected a small amount. That is, participants expressed relatively high levels of sympathy for each of the personas. In other words, the sympathy ratings were influenced by the display rule violations to a lesser degree than likeability, indicating that for the most part, the participants sympathized with even those personas they did not particularly like. However, the “mad” persona was highly disliked, with participants disagreeing to strongly disagreeing with statements like “this seems like someone I would want to hang out with” and is the only persona that had comparatively less sympathy (hovering between “a little bit” and “some” in the face of tragedy, while the other three personas garnered somewhere between “some” and “very much”) in an identical situation.

These findings around anger are critical. Previous research has been rather consistent in finding that across samples, display rules for males dictate more suppression of most emotions than for females (e.g., Underwood et al., 1992; Zeman & Garber, 1996; Zeman & Shipman, 1997). However, the notable exception to this pattern is that males often express more anger than females (Chaplin & Aldao, 2013; Hubbard, 2003). This is arguably because constructions of masculinity



that value aggression and dominance, and thus dictate different display rules for men that allow for expressions of emotions in alignment with these concepts (Duck, 2007; Wade & Rochlen, 2013). In this study, however, there is evidence that online, these African American males viewed others' strong expressions of anger quite negatively in comparison to display rule violations related to other emotions. Thus, while many of the youths in this sample indicated (in Study 1 of this research) that expressing anger is socially acceptable or socially acceptable within certain parameters, the experimental findings of the current study provide evidence that those who express anger online in ways that allude to violence may damage social relationships with their peers. Future research could usefully test the more nuanced display rules presented in Study 1; for example, many youths described social expectations that discouraged violent expressions of anger but allowed non-violent ones. Whether these expressions would also result in negative social consequences, and if so, whether these consequences would be as severe, remains an empirical question.

These findings also illuminate an opportunity for adult intervention: helping youth understand potential "hidden" social consequences of their online posts. The results around response intentions indicated that it may be hard for adolescents to detect the social consequences described above based on peers' responses to their online posts. That is, these results suggest that there was a social consequence (in terms of lower likeability scores) but that peers might respond similarly to others (in terms of posting either supportive or harmful comments) regardless of how much they like them. However, this could be driven completely by the sympathy scores; these hypothetical responses were directed at a post designed to elicit sympathy, which it accomplished across conditions; though the sympathy scores were slightly lower for the "mad" persona. Asking participants whether they would post something "nice" or "mean" in direct response to posts that

represented the display rule violations themselves might have resulted in more variation between conditions.

### **3.5.2 Research Question 2: The Effects of Display Rule Violation and Closeness of Ties on Response Intentions**

#### **3.5.2.1 RQ2a: Display rule violation**

The second research question asked whether various online display rule violations result in different response intentions, and I hypothesized that online display rule violations would result in less supportive response intentions and more cyberbullying responses than conformity to display rules.

There was partial support for this hypothesis. Across these response findings, the “mad” persona was more likely to be ignored, less likely to be approached about his loss in person, and less likely to receive supportive (“something nice”) responses. However, the personas representing the sad and embarrassed violations were not significantly more likely to receive supportive responses than the neutral persona. Further, the intentions to “post something mean” (i.e., cyberbullying) were very low for all personas, and display rule violations were not more likely to elicit this response intention than the neutral persona.

#### **3.5.2.2 RQ2b: Closeness of ties**

Closeness of ties had implications for response intentions in ways that aligned with previous research. Youth were more likely to say they would post “something nice” in response to a close friends’ expression of sadness over the death of a loved one than that of an acquaintance, and also less likely to “ignore” a close friend than an acquaintance. Youth also said that would be more

likely to talk in person about the event with a close friend than an acquaintance. Overall, the intention to post supportive responses was relatively high, and the intention to engage in cyberbullying was very low.

Taken together, these findings indicate that youth intended to offer social support to those with whom they shared close ties, which reflects previous research in face-to-face contexts. These findings expand this knowledge base to include findings specific to the social media context. The main difference here is that the masspersonal nature of social media adds a layer of complexity; when a youth expresses an emotion to bid for support via a social networking site like Facebook, the information reaches both close and weak ties, who may respond differently.

### **3.5.2.3 RQ2c: Interaction between display rule violation and closeness of ties**

This research question asked whether response intentions depend on an interaction between display rule violation type and strength of social ties. Because previous research has shown that individuals evaluate and respond to others' emotional expressions differently depending on the strength of social ties (Clark et al., 1987; Clark & Taraban, 1991; Shimanoff, 1987; Sommers, 1984), I hypothesized that response intentions would differ less among display rule violations in the condition of strong social ties than weak social ties. That is, violating a display rule seen as a more egregious violation by peers was expected to influence the response intentions of weak social ties more significantly than close ties.

There was no support for this hypothesis; social ties did not interact with display rule violation type. In other words, a more serious display rule violation did not have a greater influence on response intentions for weak social ties than close social ties. In part, this could be because the expected social sanctions predicted in RQ2 did not occur—the intentions to “post something mean” were low across all display rule violations and did not differ from the neutral condition.

Another explanation could be that the experimental conditions did not adequately simulate close versus weak ties; participants were simply first asked to assume that a persona was a close friend, and then to imagine that they were an acquaintance. However, because there was a main effect of closeness of ties on response intentions, and the difference was in the predicted direction, the results suggest that this simulation did prompt participants to consider how they might respond differently to close friends and acquaintances. Perhaps some nuance was lost here that could be detected using different methods that more closely simulated reality. Also, it may have been difficult for participants to imagine close friends posting content that so clearly violated display rules, and thus hard to decide how they would respond. Finally, it is certainly possible that the lack of interaction between closeness of ties and display rule violation is reflective of social reality for these youth; perhaps they would not respond to more egregious display violations differently depending on the closeness of their social ties.

### **3.5.3 Research question 3: age and social media use**

The results for age and social media use were negligible. Age was negatively correlated with sympathy (the older participants were, the less sympathetic they felt), but only for the embarrassed persona. The direction of the correlation is unsurprising; because display rules tend to dictate less expression as people age (Underwood et al., 1992; Zeman & Garber, 1996), it follows that older adolescents may be less likely to respond with sympathy to negative expressions.

The number of Facebook friends participants had was negatively correlated with the likeability rating for the sad persona, and Facebook use time was also negatively related to sympathy ratings for the sad persona as well as the neutral persona. So, in some cases, it seems that the more time youth spend on Facebook and the more Facebook friends they have, the less

they like and feel sympathy for those who express sadness online. Even the neutral persona, in the case of the sympathy rating, has expressed sadness at the time of the sympathy rating, because the nature of the sympathy prompt was an expression of sadness. This could potentially indicate some form of desensitization or compassion fatigue: these high-useage youths might see more expressions of sadness on a regular basis, and become less affected by them.

These relationships in the absence of others that would have been in alignment (e.g., a negative correlation between age and sympathy for the other negative emotion personas) indicates the possibility that these correlations were erroneous; however, the sample size was small and perhaps underpowered to detect such relationships.

## **4.0 THINKING BACK AND LOOKING FORWARD**

The current research was based on several early decisions that shaped the work in essential ways. I wanted to explore some component of emotional development in social context, and through a series of decisions I narrowed the scope to focus on peer-peer socialization of and by African American male adolescents, specifically in the context of online social networking sites. In the first section of this chapter, I outline the reasons for these decisions. In doing so I briefly summarize and synthesize the main points of chapter 1 and the introductions and literature reviews of chapters 2 and 3, noting the broad ways in which the current work has contributed. In the second section, I first highlight and connect the main findings across the two studies, and then draw conclusions based on this synthesis. In the third section, I explore the significance of centering youth voice and perspective in research design and the importance of working with youth as research partners. To illustrate these arguments, I describe specific ways in which this set of studies benefited from the involvement of youth in activities such as designing study materials. Finally, in the fourth section I discuss key limitations of this work and suggest directions for future research.

## **4.1 SHAPING THE RESEARCH: THREE BIG DECISIONS**

The three big decisions that shaped this work were: 1) to recruit a sample of African American males, 2) to study peer-peer socialization in the adolescent phase of development, and 3) to study how this socialization operates via online social networking sites. These decisions could certainly be broken down further; for example, the decision to study peer-peer socialization and the decision to study the adolescent phase of development. However, it is specifically in the intersection of peer-peer socialization and adolescence that I understand the unique significance of this choice; the same is true for other decisions.

### **4.1.1 Why African American males?**

In chapter 1 of this dissertation, I explored the intersection of masculinity and emotional development for African American adolescents. The development of emotional competence, including the ability to express emotions in socially acceptable ways (Saarni, 1999), occurs through observations and interactions with others; a process called emotion socialization (Eisenberg et al., 1998). But, research suggest that often boys—and African American boys in particular—receive strong messages from socializing agents (including media, family, and peers) that most emotional expressions are unacceptable (Fields, et al., 2015; Franklin, 1994; Mincey et al., 2014). This socially expected emotional suppression is one component of what researchers have called toxic masculinity, which has garnered interest because of links to numerous social and public health crises. These include an alarming rate of violence perpetrated by men (Murnen et al., 2002; Schumacher et al., 2001; Stith et al., 2004; Sugarman and Frankel, 1996), high rates of male alcoholism, depression, and suicide (Houle et al., 2008; Magovcevic & Addis, 2005; Syzdek &

Addis, 2010), and male resistance to mental health interventions (Brooks & Good, 2001; Kupers, 2001; Kupers, 2005). This essentially creates a paradox. On one hand, becoming able to express emotions in socially appropriate ways, thereby achieving goals, is a key developmental task (Saarni, 1999). On the other hand, males may be socialized to perceive emotional expression as categorically socially unacceptable. Because they may experience the crux of this paradox, research on African American males' emotional development is crucial.

These two studies have added to this literature by prioritizing the voices of African American males on the nature of the emotional display rules they perceive. Study 1 described these display rules in detail, and Study 2 tested whether breaking them would result in social consequences. Several of these display rules seem to be particularly salient, and these findings both align with and extend previous research. For example, generally the display rules found in Study 1 dictate the suppression of emotions with negative valence. Previous research and theory suggests this to be the case as well; particularly for “powerless” emotions (e.g., sadness) (Chaplin & Aldao, 2013; Polce-Lynch et al., 1998; Underwood et al., 1992; Zeman & Shipman, 1997). Further, it has been long suggested that display rules around anger, which is a “powerful” emotion, are different for men and women, with men using displays of anger to reinforce their hegemonic masculinity (Kupers, 2005). However, this work suggests much more nuanced social understandings around the display of both positive and negative emotions (see Figure 2.2 for a summary). Most notable, perhaps, is the wide array of display rules around anger and the severe social consequences of breaking them. In fact, the displays of anger in this research elicited the most severe and most numerous social consequences, challenging the idea that males are, by virtue of being male, “allowed” to express anger.



#### **4.1.2 Why adolescent peers?**

A significant gap exists at the intersection of emotion socialization research in adolescence and among peers. I have argued that this gap affords a particularly important opportunity for research because of two main conditions: 1) adolescence is an especially important phase of emotional development, and 2) peers are an especially strong socializing force during adolescence. Because there is relatively little research on emotion socialization among peers, and also little research on emotion socialization in adolescence, conducting studies where the two meet is a powerful way to contribute to the body of knowledge about emotional development.

Further, emotional display rules (social norms around emotional expression) have thus far been primarily studied in a top-down way: researchers determine the emotional display rules and measure children and youths' understanding of those rules. To my knowledge, no study before this one has attempted to elicit and catalogue adolescents' perceptions of specific display rules for various emotions. I have argued that this approach is important because adolescents' social referencing is heavily reliant on peers; therefore, the social norms they co-construct within their peer groups are especially salient to them and may or may not adhere to adults' conceptualizations of emotional display rules. In Study 1, the youth reinforced this idea by almost unanimously expressing that when they decide what to post on social media, they most often have their peers—and not their parents or other adults—in mind.

With increased interest in providing emotional support to youth through programs and curricula and informal emotion coaching opportunities with non-familial adults, it is important to understand the social norms operating within peer groups. The findings across these two studies can provide a starting point for adults to help youth develop emotional skills that are more likely to operate as anticipated and thus help youth meet goals.

### **4.1.3 Why online social networking sites?**

Social media use has become ubiquitous in the lives of most U.S. adolescents (Blaszczak-Boxe, 2014, Lenhart et al., 2010), and researchers are just beginning to understand the myriad implications of growing up in a masspersonal world. The ability to interact with one another in the ways that social networking sites have allowed has changed the landscape of peer-peer emotion socialization dramatically. When a youth posts emotional content online, it is often viewable by several hundred others, and the reactions of others (e.g., “likes” or comments)—or the lack of reactions—are also public. This is quite a different arena for emotional expression than a circle of friends standing around in the school parking lot, or one or two friends driving in a car. And, the differences are many; in a social media interaction, peers have more time to think about what they will post and how they will respond. Rather than spoken words with controlled intonation and volume paired with facial cues and body language, youth must communicate their meaning using text, photos, emojis, etc.

By specifically locating this research in the context of online social networking sites, I have been able to start to explore what and how youth are learning about emotional expression from participating in these virtual settings that simply did not exist when previous generations were adolescents. Because the participation is so widespread and intense, this is an increasingly important task. The findings of Study 1 indicate that the youth did take into account some of the differences between face-to-face interactions and social media interactions. However, results also indicate that they may be overlooking a critical component: the permanence of social media posts and the potential for long term consequences.

Further, these boys did not often use specific emotion words to convey emotional content. When I asked the youth research team to think of examples of posts that they or others have or

would use to express sadness, they wrote posts like “R.I.P. Moe,” which were almost completely devoid of words that mean “sad.” They saw these posts as direct expressions of sadness, but left much of the work of inference of to their audience, favoring the provision of contextual information over the use of emotional description to convey their feelings. Some youth in the interviews did use emotion words when describing what they would post, however. These findings highlight the importance of specifically studying social media interactions around emotions and addressing the very different nature of social media as a forum for emotion socialization.

## **4.2 CONNECTING THE STUDIES: CONCLUSIONS**

Looking within and across these two studies, several findings stand out. First, the complexity of the display rule taxonomies varied by emotion. Social consequences for breaking display rules included lower levels of likeability, less sympathy in the face of tragedy and less supportive response intentions. The presence of these consequences varied by emotion, and results across studies suggest that social consequences for online emotional display rule violations may be “invisible” in some cases. Generally, participants reported high levels of sympathy and supportive response intentions despite display rule violations. In this section, I organize main conclusions by posing four broad questions that reach across the studies, and answering them with the main conclusions of this research.

#### **4.2.1 Are there clear emotional display rules online?**

The answer is: In some cases, yes; in other cases no. That is, the clarity and complexity of display rules was very different depending on the emotion to which they pertained.

##### **4.2.1.1 Conclusion 1: Complexity of display rules depends on the emotion**

###### ***Embarrassment? Very clear***

The set of display rules around embarrassment was the least complex. Participants only described two different display rules for embarrassment: one disallowing any expression of embarrassment, and the other allowing such expressions only for the purpose of humor. These findings were consistent across focus groups and individual interviews; participants seem to have a relatively clear consensus that expressing genuine embarrassment on social networking sites is not socially acceptable, and that the only exception is in the case of humor (but only some participants noted this exception).

###### ***Anger? Very unclear***

Many different and conflicting display rules were described regarding anger, though some were quite salient and others were only endorsed by one or two youth. However, the nuance around expressions of anger was quite complex; there were many particulars to which youth pointed that, to them, dictated when and how they could express anger online.

###### ***Sadness? Somewhat clear***

Though there was nuance around the expression of sadness, most youth either agreed that it should not be expressed online, or they agreed on one specific exception to that rule: namely, that only in

the case of bereavement was it socially acceptable to express sadness. There were, however, two directly conflicting display rules; very few youth said that it was especially inappropriate to express sadness in the case of bereavement.

### ***Excitement? Very clear***

The display rules for excitement were very clear, and did not directly conflict with one another. Most youth simply agreed that all expressions of excitement were socially acceptable. Some youth added conditions, the most frequent being that it is unwise to brag about material possessions (like a sum of money) because others might try to take it from you forcibly. A few youth balked at expressing “too much” excitement or using terms that others (namely, “girls”) might find offensive, but even these youth said that expressing excitement was ok as long as it was sufficiently toned down.

## **4.2.2 Are social consequences present, predictable, and visible?**

Social consequences were present and youth were somewhat able to predict them, but they were often “invisible.”

### **4.2.2.1 Conclusion 2: Social consequences are present**

Social consequences were present for all emotional display rule violation types that were identified in Study 1 and tested in Study 2. The strength and nature of these display rules varied among emotions; that is, some violations were seen as more egregious than others. Violating the anger-violence display rule invited the most serious social consequences; indeed, the likeability of the

angry persona was the lowest of all, and the angry persona was the only one which garnered less sympathy and diminished supportive response intentions.

#### **4.2.2.2 Conclusion 3: youth are able to anticipate social consequences**

Broadly, the findings from these two studies taken together suggest these youth were reasonably able to predict the social consequences of violating display rules, with one important caveat around anger. One of the first things that I did during the second focus group with the youth research team was to show them the Fakebook pages representing each persona and ask them to read over them and then vote for the one they thought that study participants liked and wanted to hang out with the least. The vote was unanimous by show of hands: they chose the “mad” persona—correctly! The runners up were the other display rule violators: sad and embarrassed. These three people seemed to “have problems,” they explained, while the neutral persona (which, notably, did not include any emotional content at all) was “more positive.”

Participants expected that others would “laugh at” and tease them if they expressed embarrassment on social media. They indicated that this might happen online as well as in person. The social consequences found in Study 2 indicate that violating these display rules resulted in lower likeability scores, but not lower sympathy scores. That is, the “embarrassed” persona received lower likeability scores than the “neutral” persona, but not lower sympathy scores. While Study 2 did find that likeability scores were affected by violating this display rule, this work only partially addressed the specific expectation of visible negative responses, and perhaps not in the most authentic way. Participants predicted that others would post mean, teasing comments *in direct response* to a hypothetical post divulging embarrassment. Study 2 did test whether others would be more likely to “post something mean,” if someone had violated this display rule, but it was in response to another post (the sympathy prompt); there was not a greater likelihood of this response

for the embarrassed persona than the neutral persona. Similarly, many of the participants described expecting reputational damage if they posted about anger in Study 1; the experimental results of Study 2 corroborate this expectation.

An important exception to the alignment of expectations with results occurred around expressions of anger. Youth in Study 1 generally did not anticipate damage to their reputations (though sometimes they anticipated damage to specific relationships) or visible negative responses from friends if they expressed anger. Instead they often pinned the display rule primarily on enforcement on parole officers, police officers, and parents. That is, they described the display rules, but anticipated consequences of breaking them that were not particularly social. However, experimental evidence in Study 2 shows that there *were* social consequences associated with breaking this display rule—in fact, this is where the most serious and numerous social consequences were found. This idea leads to the next conclusion, and will be further discussed in terms of the visibility of these social consequences.

#### **4.2.2.3 Conclusion 4: social consequences are sometimes “invisible” online**

Across studies there was evidence that some social consequences for breaking display rules could be “invisible” online. The most prominent example of this pertains to breaking the display rule pertaining to anger, which states that expressions of anger that are violent in nature are not socially acceptable. While Study 2 found that the “mad” persona was highly disliked and was the only persona that had comparatively less sympathy than the other three personas in an identical situation (posting about a friends’ death), participants generally expected social responses that were rather neutral (like peers asking where the fight would occur). This could be interpreted as evidence while these consequences exist and can even be considered rather serious (the mean likeability score for

the “angry” persona was almost two full points lower than the neutral persona on a five point scale), they are likely to be “invisible” to the display rule violators as well as observers.

Further, the violation of the anger-violence display rule resulted in differences in response intentions that may not be visible to adolescents. Rather than an increase in the intention to “post something mean” in response to the sympathy prompt, participants were more likely to say they would do things like “ignore” the peer who had violated this display rule. Thus, youths who either violate the anger-violence display rule or observe others violating it may be likely to incur social damage, but unlikely to see evidence of that social damage online.

A similar conundrum may occur around sadness. Study 2 results seem to suggest that these youth would likely incur social damage (but to a lesser extent than anger) by doing something like posting about being “heartbroken” after a breakup. But, youth in Study 1 most often said that the social risk was simply that people would “know their business.” The results of Study 2 are also in alignment with a situation in which social consequences are invisible: like with the anger violation, youth would be no more likely to “post something mean” in response to the sympathy prompt (though results may have differed if I would have probed the response intentions to the specific posts that included display rule violations).

The consequences of display rule violation pertaining to embarrassment stood out as the most “visible.” Whereas with sadness they feared others “knowing their business,” participants specifically feared being “bullied,” “teased,” and “laughed at” both online and in person if they expressed embarrassment online.



### **4.2.3 How do youth think about “masspersonal” display rules?**

#### **4.2.3.1 Conclusion 5: Youth consider both their audience and the nature of social media**

One of the most compelling conclusions, taking into account the findings from both studies, is that for these youths, bidding for social support online presents a double bind. Here is the conflict: in Study 1, participants expressed the knowledge that if they were struggling emotionally, social support was just a click away. But, they also expected to experience social consequences. So, in most cases, youth said they would choose not to post about these emotions for fear of incurring some sort of relational/reputational damage. Indeed, *both* assumptions were substantiated by Study 2. That is, youth said they would respond supportively to their friends (so the one-click-away support was, indeed, there), but they collectively *did* hold negative emotional expressions against the personas (i.e., they overwhelmingly rating the expressers lower).

This double bind is connected to previous research on close versus weak ties (which says that there are different emotional display rules in each case), and may be a conundrum that springs from the nature of social media. When communicating masspersonally, close and weak ties are often intermingled in the audience, and youth mentioned the “publicity” of social media posts again and again when describing their decision making around posting emotional content.

When participants viewed the personas and rated likeability, they were in the position of someone with weak ties. Under these circumstances, previous research (e.g., Clark & Brissette, 2000) would suggest that the expression of negative emotion would negatively impact their liking of the personas. This is somewhat redundant with what was expected in terms of the negative expression of emotions online constituting a display rule violation. In other words, perhaps these youth took into account the social expectations for disclosure among close versus weak social ties when they considered what constituted violations of emotional display rules online. Findings

across the two studies suggest that youth understood the general rule that emotional disclosure is more appropriate with close ties, and took into consideration that social media reaches a wide audience. This is supported by findings from Study 1, such as the frequent mentions of publicity and “private business,” along with quantitative findings from Study 2, such as the lower likeability scores for the personas including negative expressions.

This focus on *publicity* of content came at the expense of consideration of *permanence* of content. This suggests a potential area for adult coaching: helping youth think about how the permanence of content posted online could also help them make decisions about what to post. This could include longer-term considerations about audience (linking publicity and permanence), such as a potential future employer or a future significant other.

#### **4.2.4 How might race inform online display rules?**

##### **4.2.4.1 Conclusion 6: Race may complicate anger-related display rules**

Though participants did not mention their race as a component of their decision making around emotional expressions online, the complexity of the display rules about negative emotions, and particularly anger, could be manifestations of conflicting social expectations and common lived experiences. For example, strong and pervasive messages that perpetuate hypermasculine norms tell young men (particularly black young men) that exuding aggression will elevate their social status (Fields, et al., 2015). But, there is widespread and public pushback against such norms (e.g., Katz, 2013; Horsburgh, 2014; Porter, 2010; Pozzobon, 2011). Further, black men in the U.S. are aware that they are often portrayed and viewed in stereotypical ways (e.g., as “dangerous”), and they report having to take steps to challenge these stereotypes (e.g., Allen, 2016).

All of this identity and relational work occurs within a context of very real concerns about involvement with legal authorities such as police and parole officers. Black males often begin to experience disproportionate disciplinary action in childhood schools, and these experiences continue into adolescence and adulthood with disproportionate introduction into and treatment within the legal system (Hammond, 2012; Gordon, Piana, & Keleher, 2000; Skiba et al., 2011; Wallace et al., 2008). This justifies concerns about posting content that may be of interest to police and parole officers. Thus, considering if, when, and how to express an emotion like anger may be particularly complex for these youth: doing so may simultaneously signal adherence to hypermasculine norms and bolster social status, reinforce unwelcome stereotypes, and invite unwanted attention from authority figures. In light of these realities, it makes sense that the display rules youth perceive around anger in a social “setting” that includes a wide audience of both close and weak ties would be wrought with complexity.

### **4.3 YOUTH AS RESEARCH PARTNERS**

From my perspective, the design decision that most strongly and positively shaped this research was unequivocally the meaningful incorporation of youth voice. A close second would be mixing methods, but I believe that the mixed methods approach in this case worked well *because* of the youth voice component.

The pilot, which occurred prior to the first focus group with a separate set of youth from a different after school program, was absolutely critical to the internal validity of Study 2, as was the participation of the research team during focus group 1 in Study 1. Through this process, design flaws that caused confusion were fixed before they could become validity threats. One example of

this is that had I created the research materials myself, without the input of the youth research team, I would have used a different sympathy prompt: a tough breakup. Because of the first focus group discussion, I learned that this would have been a serious mistake. As reported in Chapter 2, posting about being sad because of a breakup is, itself, in violation of a display rule. Although the bereavement prompt I eventually chose was also seen as a display rule violation by some youth (who considered all expressions of sadness online to be inappropriate), it took the form of what many other youth considered a notable exception. This was an important course adjustment; had I used the breakup prompt, the results of Study 2 regarding sympathy and response intentions (RQ1b and RQ2) may have been impacted.

Likewise, during the pilot, I became aware of several more visual design flaws that caused confusion. Probably the most important was the several of the pilot participants, upon completing the draft version of the reading and response task, believed that the personas were all the same person. I had made them identical (except for the text of the posts) in an attempt to eliminate the potential for other factors like attractiveness and cover photo content to influence participants' evaluations. However, the tradeoff was too great: it was important for youth to easily identify that these personas were intended to represent four different people. Therefore, I made changes to the design that cued participants to this, while still attempting to reduce the potential for other factors to influence their evaluations. For example, I used four different city skyline cover photos. Further, asking the youth research team to assist with the design of the research materials was crucial; by using posts that these youth authored, I was able to present believable language and relatable circumstances to the rest of the study participants.

Finally, during focus group 2, the youth research team provided an opportunity for me to conduct a member check. As described above, all of the youth research team participants guessed

the outcome of Study 2 upon reading the “Fakebook” pages. I shared a summary of the most salient display rules and most notable exceptions with them, and most of them agreed that these accurately represented their perceptions. However, some pushed back against these rules (in ways that aligned with other conflicting display rules discovered in Study 1). Further, some of these youth pushed back against the idea of having certain emotional experiences at all: one said he “wouldn’t care” if he broke up with a girlfriend. Thus, he would not post about being sad not because it was against a display rule, but simply because he would not be sad. We then engaged in a critical discussion of the display rules uncovered by this study. When I asked the group of ten boys whether it would be a good thing or a bad thing if the display rules were magically changed so that it was suddenly “ok” for them to post about things like sadness. There were uncomfortable-seeming shifts and glances, and some snickers. One young man piped up, saying “it would be weird.” Another, loudly, opined “we’d be a bunch of [w]ussies” and the group exploded into laughter. He continued, explaining: “we ain’t gonna change. That would have to be something for the next generation.”

#### **4.4 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

An important limitation of this research is the incompleteness of the emotional display rule taxonomy. This work only targeted display rules around anger, sadness, embarrassment, and excitement, and only tested select display rules related to the three of those which are negative in valence. Future research can build upon this work to discover display rules related to other emotions such as fear. Also, future work could explicitly test whether expressions of each of these emotions that do *not* break display rules (when applicable) prompt social consequences, rather than accepting the assumption that they would not. For each emotion, and particularly for anger,

future work could determine how peers respond to displays that violate display rules that seemed to be less salient. That is, deriving the salience of a list of display rules around a certain emotion based on qualitative evidence is only a first step.

In addition to a limited focus on specific emotions, this research included a homogenous sample of African American male adolescents. Similar studies with diverse samples could provide information about how various groups of youth interpret emotional display rules online and allow for comparisons. It is possible that findings would be very different, for example, within a sample of white female adolescents. In particular, for example, future research might determine whether publicity concerns pertaining to displays of anger online (i.e., fear of police involvement) are more salient for black males than for other groups in the U.S.

Further, it is not certain that the experimental findings presented here accurately represent what would be found in real-life interactions. This is a difficult limitation to overcome; to maintain an experimental design but use authentic interaction with others that they know (or such “interactions” that youth think are real) would introduce various ethical problems, and would likely limit experimental control. It would be possible to address some of these research questions by collecting and distilling large amounts of available qualitative data (e.g., via Facebook) and then quantitating those data, but this would be labor intensive, potentially high inference, and would introduce difficulties around obtaining parental consent.

The potential for social consequences to be present but “invisible” online is an important contribution of this research. However, this set of studies was not designed to address this directly (as discussed in section 4.2.2.3). Additionally, if future research does corroborate or extend these findings, determining whether this invisibility is specific to the online setting, and whether it is due to certain features of social networking sites would be important next steps. Having less visible

social feedback when breaking display rules online could have implications for the type and level of support that youth need as they navigate masspersonal communication.

The social consequences that were addressed in Study 2 of this research were limited to likeability, sympathy, and certain response intentions. Others should be explored in the future. For example, the most commonly described expected consequences of expressing embarrassment online were being laughed at or teased in direct connection to the content. This consequence was not fully addressed in this study, as outlined in section 4.2.2.2. Future research might explore these and other potential consequences.

Along with exploring different types of social consequences more thoroughly, future research could work to discover how other constructs related to display rules might be involved, for example, by moderating or mediating the relationship between display rule adherence and likeability. One construct of particular interest is social status. In this study, participants did not have information about the personas' social statuses (e.g., number of Facebook friends, number of "likes" and comments on posts). Providing that type of information might have made a difference in how the participants viewed the personas. Future work could determine whether signaling "popularity" would moderate the relationship between display rule violations and social consequences, such as testing whether youth would react less negatively to a popular persona who breaks display rules than an unpopular persona. Another variable of interest might be personality. One possibility is that participants' assumptions about the personality traits of each persona partially mediate the relationship between display rule violation and social consequences. For example, participants may assume that the sad persona has traits consistent with a neurotic personality; these assumptions may help to explain the relationship between breaking display rules and social consequences.

The findings of this study on the differences between close and weak social ties—specifically, the “double bind” these youth seem to experience regarding bidding for emotional support (i.e., support is available but there are social consequences for doing so) may rest upon the assumption that close and weak ties are intermingled in the audience. So, future research could explore whether youth use sorting features (e.g., groups) to target emotional content to selective audiences to receive social support. If not, would doing so help to address the double bind problem, allowing these youth to bid for social support without suffering the consequences?



## APPENDIX A

### INTERVIEW MATERIALS

#### Focus Group Protocol

- When I say “expressing feelings online,” what comes to mind?
- Do your friends show their feelings online (like on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram?)
- What kinds of things do people on your social networks post that show their feelings? Why do you think they post stuff like that? How do other people react?
- Do you think that sometimes people show feelings online in ways that they probably shouldn’t? Like what? What do other people think when they post stuff like that?
- Are there some feelings that are better or worse to show online than other feelings?

*Everyone has a piece of paper. I need your help to make a list of pretend social media posts that sound like they could be real. Feel free to think of examples from real life, but please don’t use any names. We are going to use these posts that you make up to help us with the next part of this research study. Other teens will read them and answer questions about them, so the work we are doing today is really important! Don’t worry, only the people in this room will know who made up these posts, so feel free to be creative.*

Imagine you are really happy because you found out you’re going on a really cool weekend trip to New York City, and you wanted to post about it on a social network you use. What would you say? Try to think of at least two different posts you might write in real life. Go ahead and be creative!

Ok, now, try to think of at least two different things you would definitely NOT say to express your excitement. Or, think of things you have seen other people write that you didn’t like for some reason.

- Who is willing to share an example of what they would and would not say?  
Can you talk about why?
- What do others think? What’s good about the first post? What’s not so good about the second post?
- Who else wants to share some examples? Why do others think?

Now, we're going to do that same exercise for a few other feelings. First, let's do sadness.  
(Repeat for anger and then embarrassment).

Thank you for all of those great posts! We are almost done. Now, to finish up, can you each please write about 3 or 4 posts that DO NOT express any feelings at all?

Which of these posts were the hardest for you to make up? Why?

Thank you all for your help! I look forward to meeting with you again in our next meeting.

## **Interview Protocol**

### **Warm Up**

As a warm-up exercise, the interviewer will share a few emotionally expressive social media posts recently made by real celebrities, and non-judgmentally invite comments. The interviewer will use the posts as a way to introduce the topic of emotional expression online to the participant, and then begin to ask open-ended questions.

### Part 1: Open-ended questions

#### **SAD**

1) If you were sad because you were going through a rough breakup, would you post about it [on social media]? (*Present visual scale, and prompt participant to mark where they fall*).

- Why/why not?
- (if yes) What would you post?

2) How about your friends? Would they post about it if it happened to them?

- Why/why not?
- (if yes) What would they post?
- Would you answer these questions pretty much the same way for all of your friends, or would your answers be different depending on which friend you're thinking of? (If they just say "different," prompt with: "tell me more about that")

3) In general, do you think it's ok to show sadness on social media? By "ok" I mean "socially acceptable."

- Why/why not?
- Are there certain situations where showing sadness might be ok, but other situations where it's not ok? Can you give examples?
- Are there certain ways people might show sadness that are ok, and other ways that are not ok?

If you are really upset about something bad that happened and you post it to social media, do you expect that your friends will respond to you right away? How do you feel if they take too long? How do you feel if they don't respond at all?

## MAD

4) If you got really mad at a friend of yours, would you post about it? (*Present visual scale, and prompt participant to mark where they fall*).

- Why/why not?
- (if yes) What would you post?

5) How about your friends? Would they post something if they were mad at you?

- Why/why not?
- (if yes) What would they post?
- Would you answer these questions pretty much the same way for all of your friends, or would your answers be different depending on which friend you're thinking of? (If they just say "different," prompt with: "tell me more about that")

6) In general, do you think it's ok to show anger on social media? Again, by "ok" I mean "socially acceptable."

- Why/why not?
- Are there certain situations where showing anger might be ok, but other situations where it's not ok?
  - Can you give examples?
- Are there certain ways people might show anger that are ok, and other ways that are not ok?
  - Can you give examples?

## EXCITED

7) If you were really excited because something great happened to you, would you post about it? (*Present visual scale, and prompt participant to mark where they fall*).

- Why/why not?
- (if yes) What would you post?

8) How about your friends? Would they post about their excitement?

- Why/why not?
- (if yes) What would they post?
- Would you answer these questions pretty much the same way for all of your friends, or would your answers be different depending on which friend you're thinking of? (If they just say "different," prompt with: "tell me more about that")

9) In general, do you think it's ok to show excitement on social media? Again, by "ok" I mean "socially acceptable."

- Why/why not?
- Are there certain situations where showing excitement might be ok, but other situations where it's not ok?

- Can you give examples?
- Are there certain ways people might show excitement that are ok, and other ways that are not ok?
  - Can you give examples?

## EMBARASSED

10) If something really embarrassing happened to you, would you post about it [on social media]? (*Present visual scale, and prompt participant to mark where they fall*).

- Why/why not?
- (if yes) What would you post?

11) How about your friends? Would they post about it if something embarrassing happened to them?

- Why/why not?
- (if yes) What would they post?
- Would you answer these questions pretty much the same way for all of your friends, or would your answers be different depending on which friend you're thinking of? (If they just say "different," prompt with: "tell me more about that")

12) In general, do you think it's ok to show embarrassment on social media? Again, by "ok" I mean "socially acceptable."

- Why/why not?
- Are there certain situations where showing embarrassment might be ok, but other situations where it's not ok?
  - Can you give examples?
- Are there certain ways people might show embarrassment that are ok, and other ways that are not ok?
  - Can you give examples?

Do adults that you know see your social media posts? Do you think that you would post differently if they (did/didn't)? In what ways? Why?

Interview Supplement

Open-ended questions 1, 4, 7, 10

Sad (1)

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

Mad (4)

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

Excited (7)

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

Embarrassed (10)

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

## Part 2: Simulated Feed Editing

### Opening Script

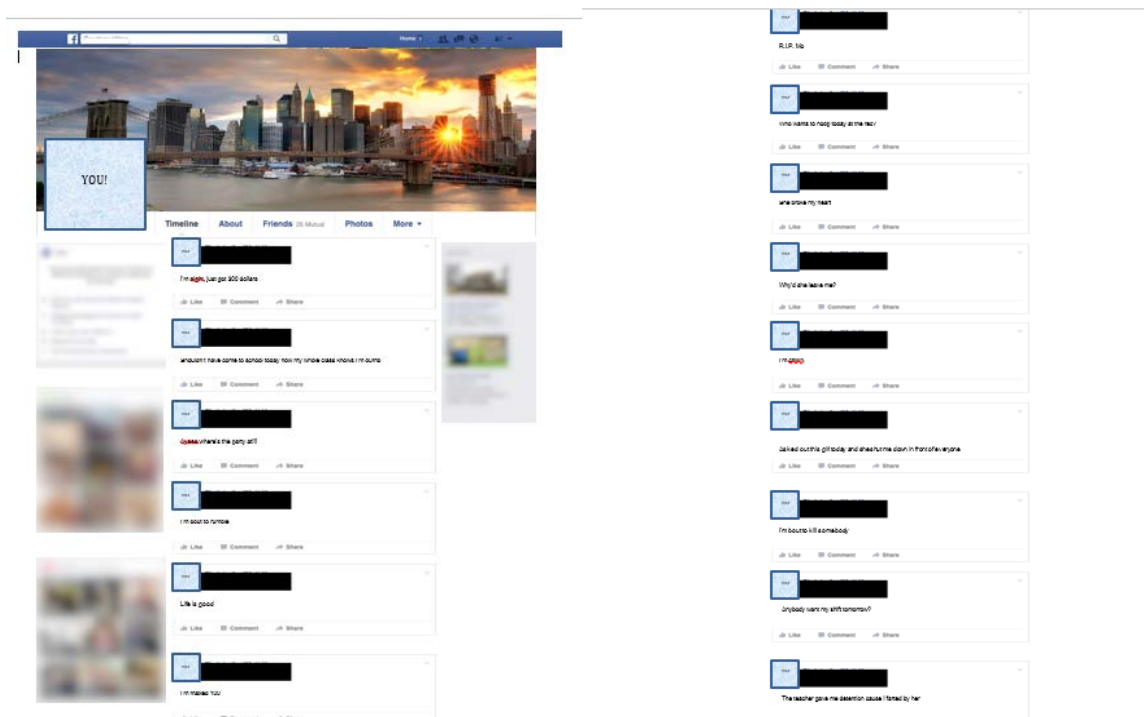
*Imagine you and a complete stranger experience the weirdest thing: You somehow switch bodies for a couple of days. This guy goes on living your life as if he were you, and even uses your Facebook account, posting whatever he wants to. When you get back into your own body, you read over the posts that ‘you’ have made since the switch.”*

Hand them the Feed.

*Now we’re going to play a little game with these posts that this guy made while he was you. Remember, we’re imagining that this is all posted on YOUR Facebook account, so all of your friends think you posted this stuff. Now, I’m going to let you delete 5 of these, and it will be like they never happened. Only 5! So, if you could only get rid of 5 of these but you had to keep the rest, which 5 would you delete? Cross out the ones you want to get rid of.*

After participants make their selections, ask follow up questions about their reasoning:

- Why did you delete that one?
- What kind of “comments” do you think your online friends would make if you posted that?
- Do you think anybody might bring that up next time you saw him or her?



**Figure A1: Pages 1 and 2 of the Fakebook feed**

## APPENDIX B

### FOUR FAKEBOOK PERSONAS

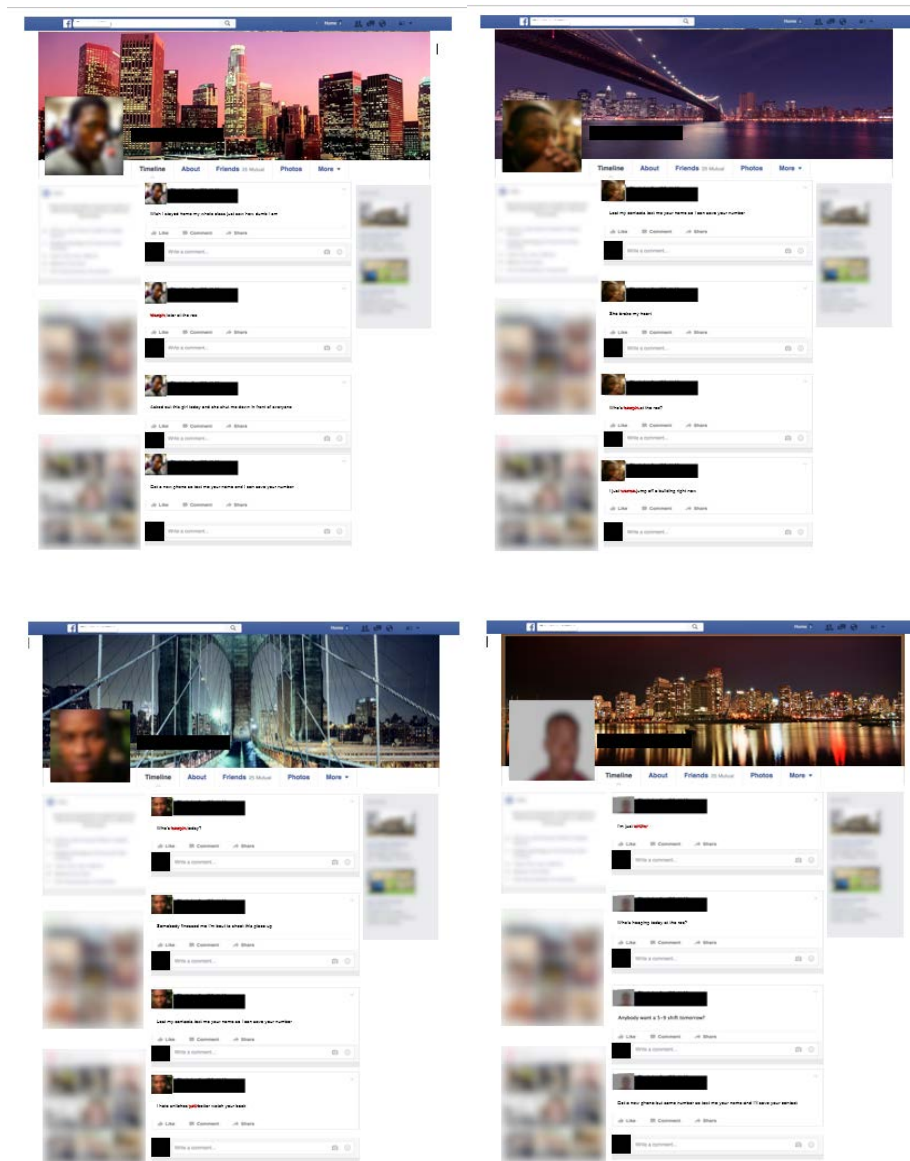


Figure B1: Fakebook Personas: embarrassed, sad, neutral, angry (clockwise from top left)

## APPENDIX C

### READING AND RESPONSE TASK

#### Profile A

Please read the Facebook profile labeled “A.”  
Imagine this person is a male about your age.

Please answer the following questions:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
This seems like someone I would want to hang out with.	1	2	3	4	5
This person seems like he would make a good friend.	1	2	3	4	5
I would spend time with this person in real life.	1	2	3	4	5



**Now, imagine he just posted this:**



Please answer the following questions after reading this post.

	Not at all	A little bit	Some	Very much
I feel bad about what happened to this person.	1	2	3	4
I think this person probably deserved what they got.	1	2	3	4
I feel sorry that this happened.	1	2	3	4
I feel sad for this person.	1	2	3	4

**If I knew this person, but not very well:**

	Definitely not	Probably not	Probably	Definitely
I would post something nice.	1	2	3	4
I would post something mean.	1	2	3	4
I would ignore this post.	1	2	3	4
I would talk about what happened the next time I saw this person.	1	2	3	4

**If this person was a good friend of mine:**

	Definitely not	Probably not	Probably	Definitely
I would post something nice.	1	2	3	4
I would post something mean.	1	2	3	4
I would ignore this post.	1	2	3	4
I would talk about what happened the next time I saw this person	1	2	3	4

## Profile B

Please read the Facebook profile labeled “B”  
Imagine this person is a male about your age.

Please answer the following questions:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
This seems like someone I would want to hang out with.	1	2	3	4	5
This person seems like he would make a good friend.	1	2	3	4	5
I would spend time with this person in real life.	1	2	3	4	5

Now, imagine he just posted this:



Please answer the following questions after reading this post.

	Not at all	A little bit	Some	Very much
I feel bad about what happened to this person.	1	2	3	4
I think this person probably deserved what they got.	1	2	3	4
I feel sorry that this happened.	1	2	3	4
I feel sad for this person.	1	2	3	4

**If I knew this person, but not very well:**

	Definitely not	Probably not	Probably	Definitely
I would post something nice.	1	2	3	4
I would post something mean.	1	2	3	4
I would ignore this post.	1	2	3	4
I would talk about what happened the next time I saw this person.	1	2	3	4

**If this person was a good friend of mine:**

	Definitely not	Probably not	Probably	Definitely
I would post something nice.	1	2	3	4
I would post something mean.	1	2	3	4
I would ignore this post.	1	2	3	4
I would talk about what happened the next time I saw this person	1	2	3	4

## Profile C

Please read the Facebook profile labeled “C”  
Imagine this person is a male about your age.

Please answer the following questions:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
This seems like someone I would want to hang out with.	1	2	3	4	5
This person seems like he would make a good friend.	1	2	3	4	5
I would spend time with this person in real life.	1	2	3	4	5

Now, imagine he just posted this:



Please answer the following questions after reading this post.

	Not at all	A little bit	Some	Very much
I feel bad about what happened to this person.	1	2	3	4
I think this person probably deserved what they got.	1	2	3	4
I feel sorry that this happened.	1	2	3	4
I feel sad for this person.	1	2	3	4

**If I knew this person, but not very well:**

	Definitely not	Probably not	Probably	Definitely
I would post something nice.	1	2	3	4
I would post something mean.	1	2	3	4
I would ignore this post.	1	2	3	4
I would talk about what happened the next time I saw this person.	1	2	3	4

**If this person was a good friend of mine:**

	Definitely not	Probably not	Probably	Definitely
I would post something nice.	1	2	3	4
I would post something mean.	1	2	3	4
I would ignore this post.	1	2	3	4
I would talk about what happened the next time I saw this person	1	2	3	4

## Profile D

Please read the Facebook profile labeled “D”  
Imagine this person is a male about your age.

Please answer the following questions:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
This seems like someone I would want to hang out with.	1	2	3	4	5
This person seems like he would make a good friend.	1	2	3	4	5
I would spend time with this person in real life.	1	2	3	4	5

Now, imagine he just posted this:



Please answer the following questions after reading this post.

	Not at all	A little bit	Some	Very much
I feel bad about what happened to this person.	1	2	3	4
I think this person probably deserved what they got.	1	2	3	4
I feel sorry that this happened.	1	2	3	4
I feel sad for this person.	1	2	3	4

**If I knew this person, but not very well:**

	Definitely not	Probably not	Probably	Definitely
I would post something nice.	1	2	3	4
I would post something mean.	1	2	3	4
I would ignore this post.	1	2	3	4
I would talk about what happened the next time I saw this person.	1	2	3	4

**If this person was a good friend of mine:**

	Definitely not	Probably not	Probably	Definitely
I would post something nice.	1	2	3	4
I would post something mean.	1	2	3	4
I would ignore this post.	1	2	3	4
I would talk about what happened the next time I saw this person	1	2	3	4

## APPENDIX D

### QUESTIONNAIRE

#### Basic Information

How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your gender?

☐ Male

☐ Female

Do you identify as Hispanic or Latino/Latina?

☐ Yes

☐ No

How do you identify racially?

☐ White or Caucasian

☐ Asian

☐ Black or African American

☐ Pacific Islander or Hawaiian Native

☐ American Indian or Alaskan Native

☐ Multi-Racial

#### Social Media Information

**Social media** is defined by Wikipedia as "websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking." There are thousands of social media tools. Some popular examples are Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

Do you use social media?

☐ Yes ☐ No

In general, how often do you use social media?

☐ A few times a year

☐ About once a week

☐ About once a month

☐ A few times a week



☐ Every day (or almost every day)

☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

Which social media sites do you use? *Circle the one you use most often.*

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

FIS

The following items ask about your involvement with Facebook. Please answer to the best of your ability.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
a Facebook is part of my everyday activity	1	2	3	4	5
b I am proud to tell people I'm on Facebook	1	2	3	4	5
c Facebook has become part of my daily routine	1	2	3	4	5
d I feel out of touch when I haven't logged onto Facebook for a while	1	2	3	4	5
e I feel I am part of the Facebook community	1	2	3	4	5
f I would be sorry if Facebook shut down	1	2	3	4	5

Approximately how many TOTAL Facebook friends do you have?

- ☐ 10 or less
- ☐ 11-50
- ☐ 51-100
- ☐ 101-150
- ☐ 151-200
- ☐ 201-250
- ☐ 251-300
- ☐ 301-400
- ☐ more than 400

Approximately how many of your TOTAL Facebook friends do you consider actual friends?

\_\_\_\_\_

In the past week, on average, approximately how much time PER DAY have you spent actively using Facebook?

\_\_\_\_\_

Did you give your answer in ☐ minutes or ☐ hours?

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