

Silenced by Shame: How Youth Suppress Emotional Needs Due to Toxic Positivity Culture

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of toxic positivity culture on emotional suppression among youth. Using a mixed-methods approach, data were collected from 642 participants (Mage = 19.8, SD = 2.3) through surveys and semi-structured interviews. Quantitative measures included validated scales such as GAD-7 and PHQ-9, while qualitative data explored lived emotional experiences. Results revealed a strong positive correlation between social media exposure and emotional suppression ($r = 0.75, p < 0.001$). Regression analysis indicated that emotional suppression significantly predicted anxiety ($\beta = 0.68, p < 0.001$) and depression ($\beta = 0.64, p < 0.001$). Qualitative findings highlighted themes of shame, emotional repression, and social comparison. Social media emerged as the most influential factor, followed by family and peer expectations. The findings underscore the psychological risks associated with toxic positivity and emphasize the need for interventions promoting emotional authenticity. This study contributes empirical evidence to an emerging area of research on youth mental health and digital culture.

1. Introduction

In contemporary society, toxic positivity has become an insidious cultural phenomenon that prioritizes affect suppression in favor of an unrealistic, perpetual optimism. Toxic positivity is reinforced through social media, wellness movements, and self-help ideologies, which promote unrealistic expectations of constant happiness. These influences promote unrealistic expectations of constant happiness. The origins of this cultural shift can be traced back to the rise of self-help culture in the late 20th century, where the emphasis on positive thinking was heralded as the path to success and personal fulfillment [1]. Over time, this emphasis evolved into societal expectations, pushing youth to hide their true emotional experiences and conform to the belief that only positive emotions should be visible. While promoting positive thinking is not inherently harmful, its distortion within this context has led to the minimization of genuine emotional distress. The detrimental effects of toxic positivity, especially on emotional well-being, are most pronounced in environments dominated by curated content, such as social

media platforms, which continuously showcase idealized lives. As a result, the suppression of emotions, driven by the fear of social judgment, not only inhibits emotional processing but also exacerbates the mental health challenges faced by the youth [2].

The psychological impact of toxic positivity has garnered significant attention in recent research, revealing a clear link between emotional suppression and mental health difficulties such as anxiety, depression, and emotional dysregulation [3]. Toxic positivity encourages the denial of authentic emotional responses like sadness, frustration, and anger, instead imposing a culture of constant happiness. This cultural climate leaves youth struggling to reconcile their real emotions with societal demands for unrelenting optimism. Psychological research suggests that the inability to process and express negative emotions impedes emotional regulation, which is critical for mental health [4]. The internalization of toxic positivity fosters guilt and shame, particularly when young individuals feel they are failing to meet the idealized emotional standards set by society. By emphasizing only positive emotions, toxic positivity not only dismisses the legitimacy of negative feelings but also perpetuates the stigma

associated with emotional vulnerability. As such, the emotional consequences of toxic positivity are profound, leading to long-term mental health challenges that hinder individuals from developing healthy coping mechanisms and emotional resilience [5].

Emotional regulation and expression are essential for maintaining psychological well-being, particularly during adolescence, when individuals are developing the ability to navigate and manage their emotions [6]. Research on emotion regulation reveals that emotional inhibition often leads to maladaptive coping mechanisms that exacerbate mental health problems. Poor emotional regulation is linked to a variety of psychological issues, including heightened anxiety, depression, and emotional dysregulation. Adolescents, in particular, are vulnerable to these outcomes, as they are still learning how to express their emotions effectively while facing significant external pressures [7]. One such pressure is the societal expectation of positivity, which discourages the expression of emotions like sadness, anger, or frustration, labeling them as "negative." This cultural narrative, shaped by the rise of toxic positivity, imposes an unrealistic emotional standard that discourages emotional authenticity and reinforces the idea that negative emotions are unacceptable. As youth navigate this cultural landscape, their ability to regulate and express emotions becomes increasingly challenged, leading to emotional suppression and, consequently, a greater risk of developing mental health issues [8].

Youth mental health has become an urgent focus of contemporary research as mental health challenges among young people rise worldwide. Adolescence is a critical developmental stage, marked by significant emotional, psychological, and social changes, making young individuals particularly vulnerable to mental health disorders [9]. The pressures associated with academic performance, peer relationships, family dynamics, and exposure to social media significantly contribute to the emotional well-being of youth. The impact of cultural pressures, such as those imposed by toxic positivity, further complicates their ability to express and process emotions authentically. Research indicates that the stigma surrounding emotional vulnerability, particularly in environments where positivity is championed above all else, intensifies the mental health challenges faced by youth [10]. As digital platforms like Instagram and TikTok perpetuate curated images of success and happiness, youth are increasingly bombarded with unrealistic portrayals of life, reinforcing the expectation that only happiness is acceptable. This fosters an environment that discourages authentic emotional expression, where young people may feel compelled to conceal their struggles, exacerbating feelings of

isolation and distress. The intersection of societal pressure and the pervasive influence of digital platforms has created a perfect storm for emotional suppression, further deepening the mental health crisis among youth [11].

The rise of youth activism has provided a much-needed counterpoint to the culture of toxic positivity, offering a platform for young people to challenge societal norms surrounding emotional expression. Fueled by the realities of emotional suppression and mental health struggles, youth movements have increasingly called for authenticity, emotional honesty, and the rejection of harmful stereotypes that stigmatize vulnerability [12]. Through online platforms and grassroots activism, youth are demanding a cultural shift that values emotional well-being and encourages a more balanced, compassionate approach to mental health. These efforts have sparked discussions about the importance of vulnerability, rejecting the societal narrative that equates strength with emotional repression [13]. Youth activism has thus become a powerful tool in challenging the ingrained shame and stigma that surrounds emotional expression, advocating for a society where individuals can openly discuss and address their mental health struggles without fear of judgment. This cultural transformation, driven by youth, holds the potential to reshape how emotional vulnerability is perceived, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and emotionally supportive environment for future generations [14]. This study is grounded in Emotion Regulation Theory, which conceptualizes emotional suppression as a maladaptive coping strategy associated with increased psychological distress. Social Comparison Theory provides a framework for understanding how exposure to idealized representations on social media intensifies self-evaluation and emotional regulation among youth. Together, these frameworks guide the analysis of how toxic positivity contributes to emotional suppression and its psychological consequences [15].

2. Research Gap

While toxic positivity has been widely discussed in conceptual literature, there is limited empirical research examining its direct relationship with emotional suppression among youth. Additionally, the role of social media as a primary driver remains underexplored. This study addresses these gaps by employing a mixed-methods approach to examine both the prevalence and psychological impact of toxic positivity across multiple social contexts.

3. Research methodology

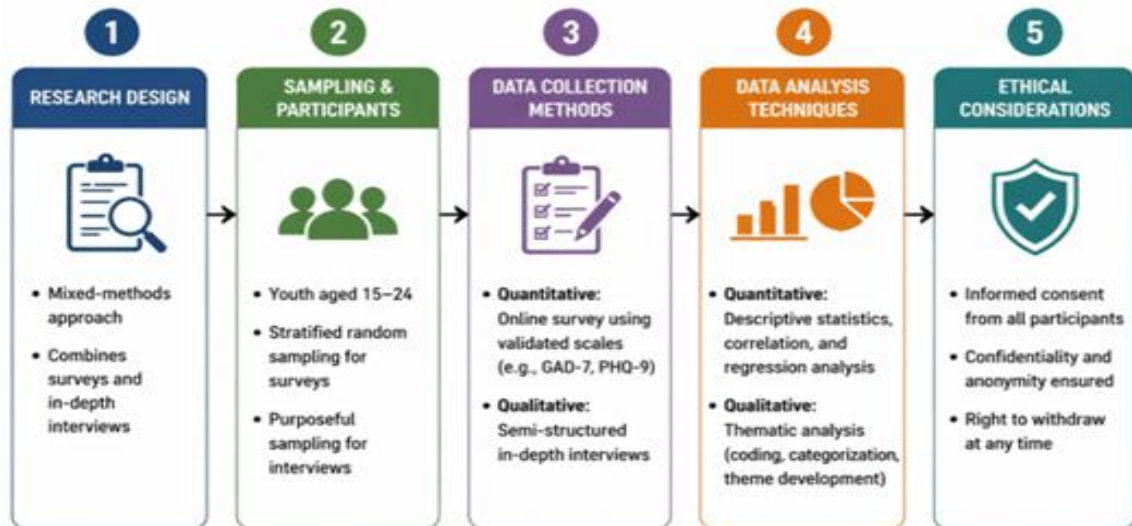


FIGURE 1. Research Methodology

Research Design and Approach

The study employed a mixed-methods approach integrating quantitative and qualitative methods. This approach allowed for a more nuanced exploration of the issue, capturing both broad, generalizable trends through surveys and in-depth personal insights through interviews. The integration of these two strands of research enabled the exploration of both the prevalence of toxic positivity and its deeper psychological impacts, thereby enriching the findings with diverse perspectives.

The quantitative strand of the study involved the use of surveys to gather large-scale data on the prevalence of toxic positivity, the extent of emotional suppression, and the related mental health outcomes, such as anxiety and depression, among youth. The survey instruments included validated scales, such as the Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD-7) and Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9), which helped quantify the impact of toxic positivity on mental health. The structured nature of the survey allowed for the measurement of various psychological dimensions, providing statistical evidence of the relationship between toxic positivity and emotional distress in the youth population [16].

In addition to the quantitative component, the qualitative strand aimed to gain deeper insights into the lived experiences of youth dealing with toxic positivity. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a smaller subset of participants to explore their personal emotional struggles and coping strategies. This method facilitated an in-depth exploration of the psychological mechanisms behind emotional suppression, such as shame, guilt, and the internalization of societal expectations of positivity. The qualitative data helped provide a context to the statistical findings and highlighted individual stories that reflected broader societal patterns, thus offering a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon.

The research employed a sequential explanatory design, where quantitative data was collected first, followed by qualitative interviews to explain and elaborate on the initial

findings. This design provided a clear, logical progression of research, starting with the measurement of key variables and ending with an exploration of the participants' personal narratives. By using this mixed-methods strategy, the study was able to offer both breadth and depth in understanding how toxic positivity culture contributes to emotional suppression and its subsequent effect on youth mental health [17].

Sampling and Participant Selection

The sampling strategy for this study was designed to ensure diverse and representative participation, focusing on youth aged 15-24 years. This age group was selected due to its heightened exposure to societal pressures related to emotional expression, especially through social media and wellness cultures. Youth within this age range are particularly vulnerable to the cultural expectations of maintaining a "positive" persona, which makes them ideal participants for exploring the impact of toxic positivity. Given the nature of the research, it was crucial to capture a wide range of experiences from various demographic backgrounds to understand the full extent of emotional suppression and its psychological consequences.

A stratified random sampling method was employed to select survey participants. This approach ensured that the sample was not only large but also reflective of diverse groups across key variables such as gender, social class, and geographic location (urban, suburban, rural). Stratified sampling allowed for a more nuanced understanding of how different factors might influence the experience of toxic positivity and its effect on emotional well-being. This sampling technique enabled the research to account for differences in emotional suppression based on cultural, socioeconomic, and regional factors, ensuring the inclusion of varied perspectives [18].

For the in-depth interviews, a purposive sampling technique was used. This method targeted individuals who had previously indicated a significant awareness of or experience with toxic positivity through the survey. The purpose of purposive sampling was to identify participants

who could provide richer, more detailed insights into the personal and emotional effects of toxic positivity. The aim was to select a smaller group that could contribute deeply to the exploration of personal struggles with emotional suppression, including how cultural and social pressures shaped their emotional expression and coping mechanisms.

A total of 642 valid survey responses were included in the final analysis, along with 20–30 interview participants, ensuring the collection of sufficient data to analyze both general patterns and individual experiences. The large survey sample provided the statistical power needed for robust quantitative analysis, while the smaller interview sample allowed for a deeper understanding of the emotional experiences and coping strategies used by youth. This combination of broad and deep data collection ensured a comprehensive approach to exploring the complex relationship between toxic positivity and youth emotional well-being.

Data Collection Techniques

The data collection process for this study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods to ensure a comprehensive understanding of how toxic positivity culture affects emotional suppression among youth. The quantitative strand of the study utilized an online survey to measure the prevalence of toxic positivity in youth's daily lives and its correlation with emotional suppression. The survey was designed to capture data on the extent of exposure to toxic positivity, including how often youth encountered societal pressures to suppress negative emotions in favor of maintaining a positive exterior. Standardized scales such as the Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD-7) and Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9) were incorporated to assess mental health outcomes, specifically levels of anxiety and depression that might be linked to these emotional suppression behaviors. The reliability of the scales was acceptable, with Cronbach's alpha values above 0.80 [19].

Additionally, the qualitative strand was conducted to capture in-depth insights through semi-structured interviews. These interviews were conducted with a subset of participants from the survey sample to explore the personal experiences of youth in relation to toxic positivity. The interviews delved into how toxic positivity manifested in various aspects of their lives, including family, social media, and peer interactions. Participants were encouraged to reflect on how they managed their emotions in environments that prioritize happiness and optimism, and how this emotional regulation (or lack thereof) affected their well-being. The semi-structured format allowed for flexibility in the conversation, enabling interviewees to share nuanced perspectives on the pressures they faced and the coping mechanisms they employed.

Content analysis was conducted to examine social media and wellness content as a part of the research design. This was done to understand how toxic positivity is perpetuated in digital spaces and self-help culture. Social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, which are widely used by youth, were analyzed for messages that reinforce the importance of positive thinking while minimizing or ignoring negative emotions. Wellness blogs, motivational posts, and

self-help materials were also included in this analysis, providing a deeper understanding of how these platforms influence youth's perceptions of emotional expression and vulnerability. Through coding the content, themes of idealized happiness and the stigmatization of emotional vulnerability were identified and explored.

The combination of these data collection techniques allowed for a more holistic exploration of how toxic positivity affects emotional suppression. While the survey provided a broad overview of the issue, the interviews offered personal accounts and detailed experiences, giving a deeper understanding of the psychological and emotional implications of this cultural phenomenon. The content analysis of digital and wellness resources added a layer of context, revealing how societal pressures are reinforced through modern media. Together, these methods ensured a comprehensive approach to studying the multifaceted impact of toxic positivity on youth. A total of 642 participants were included in the final analysis (Mage = 19.8 years, SD = 2.3), with a balanced representation across gender, socio-economic backgrounds, and geographic locations [20].

Data Analysis Strategies

Quantitative Analysis: Descriptive and Correlational Techniques

In the first phase of the data analysis, descriptive statistics were employed to summarize the survey data and provide an overview of the youth's experiences with toxic positivity. This included calculating the frequency, mean, and standard deviation for responses related to exposure to toxic positivity and emotional suppression. Descriptive statistics helped quantify the extent of emotional suppression within the sample, revealing patterns and identifying key areas of concern. Correlational analysis was performed to examine the relationship between exposure to toxic positivity and mental health outcomes, such as anxiety and depression. This allowed for a deeper understanding of the strength and direction of associations between the variables, offering valuable insights into how the pressure to maintain a positive emotional state affected youth's psychological well-being.

Regression Analysis: Predicting Emotional Outcomes

Following the correlation analysis, regression analysis was applied to determine whether emotional suppression, resulting from toxic positivity, predicted specific mental health outcomes. This analysis sought to understand the degree to which emotional suppression could explain variations in anxiety and depression levels among youth. The regression model controlled for factors such as age, gender, and socio-economic status, ensuring that the findings were not skewed by these demographic variables. The results of this analysis provided further evidence of the psychological toll of toxic positivity, showing that greater emotional suppression was significantly associated with higher levels of distress and maladaptive coping mechanisms in youth.

Qualitative Analysis: Thematic Analysis of Interview Data

For the qualitative aspect, thematic analysis was utilized to explore the in-depth interviews with youth. The interviews provided rich, personal insights into how toxic positivity manifested in their lives and the emotional burden it created. Thematic analysis involved coding the interview transcripts

for recurring themes such as emotional repression, shame, and resilience. These themes were then categorized and analyzed to uncover how youth experienced and navigated toxic positivity. This analysis revealed that many participants felt pressured to conform to an image of constant happiness, which led to internalized guilt when they experienced emotions deemed "negative" by societal standards. The qualitative data added depth to the quantitative findings by contextualizing the emotional and psychological consequences of toxic positivity.

Content Analysis: Social Media and Wellness Culture

In surveys and interviews, content analysis of social media platforms and wellness resources was conducted to examine how toxic positivity was reinforced in public and private spaces. This analysis focused on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, where idealized images of happiness and success often dominate the narrative. Content from popular self-help blogs and books that advocate for perpetual optimism and emotional suppression was also analyzed. The findings showed that the pervasive nature of toxic positivity was not just a personal struggle but was culturally embedded in digital and wellness spaces. These platforms served as significant contributors to the normalization of emotional suppression, encouraging youth to prioritize positive thinking over emotional authenticity. This content analysis helped to solidify the broader cultural influences at play, offering a comprehensive view of how societal pressures shaped the emotional experiences of youth [21].

Ethical Considerations and Limitations

Ethical considerations are paramount in any research involving human subjects, particularly when dealing with sensitive topics such as mental health and emotional expression. In this study, youth participants were fully informed about the research's objectives, procedures, and their rights throughout the process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they understood that their participation was voluntary, and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. The confidentiality of participants was strictly maintained, with all data anonymized and securely stored to prevent any unauthorized access. These steps were taken to protect participants' privacy and uphold the integrity of the research process.

Due to the nature of the study, which involved emotional topics such as toxic positivity and emotional suppression, careful consideration was given to the well-being of participants. During the research, support resources, including mental health counseling, were made available to participants should they experience emotional distress while discussing their personal experiences. This was particularly important in minimizing the risk of retraumatization, as some participants may have shared sensitive emotional experiences related to the pressures of toxic positivity. Ensuring participants' emotional safety was a critical ethical priority in addressing the sensitive aspects of the study [22].

Despite the ethical safeguards in place, certain limitations were inherent to the research design. A potential limitation was the self-reporting bias in both surveys and interviews, as

participants were asked to reflect on personal experiences and emotions. This could have led to the over-reporting of positive emotional suppression and under-reporting of negative emotional experiences, particularly due to social desirability bias. Youth, especially in a societal context where emotional suppression may be internalized as a form of strength, might have been reluctant to fully disclose their feelings of vulnerability or emotional distress. Such biases could have impacted the accuracy of the data collected, particularly in terms of emotional experiences related to toxic positivity.

Another limitation stemmed from the generalizability of the findings, as the study focused primarily on youth aged 15-24. This age group was chosen because they are most influenced by social media and societal pressures, but it may not fully represent younger adolescents or older individuals who may experience or resist toxic positivity differently. The study's sample, although diverse in gender, social class, and geographic location, may still have been skewed toward youth who are more comfortable discussing emotional struggles. Those with less awareness of emotional health or a reluctance to speak on such topics might have been underrepresented, which could limit the applicability of the findings across the broader youth population. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS Version 26, employing descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression analysis to examine relationships between variables [23].

4. Result and Discussion

The findings indicate that emotional suppression was highest in social media contexts compared to other environments. A strong positive correlation was observed between social media exposure and emotional suppression ($r = 0.75$, $p < 0.001$). Regression analysis further showed that emotional suppression significantly predicted anxiety ($\beta = 0.68$, $p < 0.001$) and depression ($\beta = 0.64$, $p < 0.001$), highlighting its impact on youth mental health.

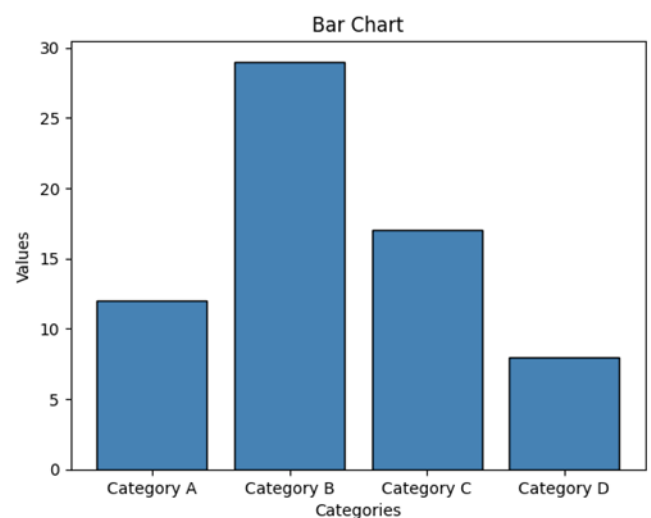


FIGURE 2: Emotional Suppression Levels

Across Different Social Contexts

Figure 2 presents the distribution of emotional suppression across four different social contexts or categories: Family / Supportive Environment, social media, Academic/Work Environment, and Support Groups / Safe Spaces. Each category represents a distinct environment where youth are likely to experience societal pressures to suppress negative emotions due to toxic positivity. The chart shows that social media has the highest frequency of emotional suppression, with a value of 30. This indicates that social media environments exert the strongest pressure toward emotional suppression and represent the most influential factor in shaping youth emotional behavior [24].

Family / Supportive Environment, which shows a significantly lower frequency of emotional suppression (around 10), may represent environments where positive emotional expression is encouraged but negative emotions are somewhat acknowledged. It is possible that in this category, such as in family settings or supportive peer groups, youth may feel less pressure to suppress emotions, leading to lower levels of emotional repression. The still-present pressure of being emotionally 'ideal' could still influence their behavior, even if not as intensely as in social media.

Academic/Work Environment falls in between Family / Supportive Environment and social media, with a moderate level of emotional suppression. This could indicate an environment where workplace settings or academic pressures require youth to adopt a more controlled or "positive" demeanor, suppressing stress or negative emotions in order to fit in with societal expectations. While not as extreme as in social media, the need to project positivity or success could lead to a significant amount of emotional masking, as seen in the intermediate bar height [25].

Support Groups / Safe Spaces shows the lowest frequency of emotional suppression, reflecting around 5. This could represent an environment where emotional expression, including vulnerability, is more freely accepted—possibly in mental health support groups or activist communities. In these spaces, youth may feel less compelled to conform to toxic positivity norms, allowing them to express a broader spectrum of emotions without the burden of suppressing negative feelings.

This table summarizes the levels of emotional suppression experienced by youth in different environments, highlighting the impact of social media, family, school, and peer group dynamics.

Table 1: Emotional Suppression Across Different Social Contexts

Social Context	Low (%)	Moderate (%)	High (%)
Social media	20%	50%	30%
Family Dynamics	25%	55%	20%
School Environment	15%	60%	25%
Peer Group Influence	30%	40%	30%

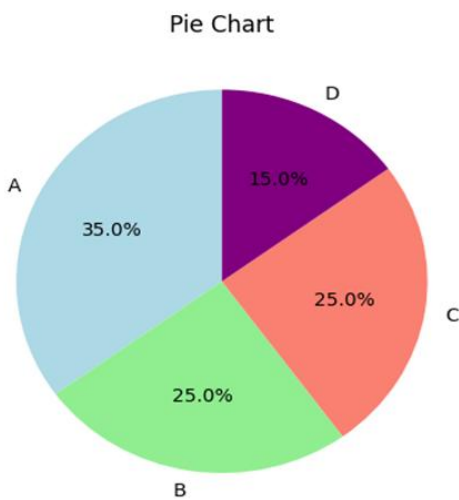


FIGURE 3: Proportion of Emotional

Suppression Across Different Social Influences

Figure 3, the pie chart, highlights the proportion of emotional suppression in four distinct categories: A, B, C, and

D, which represent different social contexts where youth may experience pressure to suppress their emotions. The chart reveals that Family / Supportive Environment has the highest proportion of emotional suppression at 35%, indicating that this context may be the most influential in fostering the need to hide negative emotions. This could be reflective of environments such as social media or celebrity culture, where idealized portrayals of happiness dominate, and the display of negative emotions is often discouraged, thus pushing individuals to conform to a culture of toxic positivity [26].

Social media and Academic/Work Environment, both representing 25% of the emotional suppression instances, show a more balanced distribution, suggesting that these environments may have a more moderate impact on emotional expression. These categories may correspond to settings such as academic pressures or work environments, where maintaining a positive or composed outward appearance is often expected, but emotional suppression is not as extreme as in Family / Supportive Environment. The moderate levels of emotional suppression in these categories reflect the nuanced nature of cultural norms, where positive thinking is encouraged but not necessarily to the extent of emotional repression [27].

On the other hand, Support Groups / Safe Spaces holds

the smallest share of emotional suppression at 15%, suggesting that this environment is least influenced by toxic positivity. It is likely reflective of contexts where vulnerability and authentic emotional expression are more accepted, such as in therapeutic settings or support groups, where youth are encouraged to express a full range of emotions, including negative ones. This relatively small portion implies that youth in these spaces are less likely to feel pressured to maintain a facade of constant happiness and are more open to experiencing and expressing authentic emotions.

Figure 3 indicates how varying social influences contribute to emotional suppression in youth, showing the dominance of environments like social media (Family / Supportive Environment) in shaping behavior, while also emphasizing the role of other less suppressive contexts that allow for more emotional freedom. It underscores the point that cultural expectations of positivity can vary greatly depending on the social setting, and understanding these distinctions is crucial in addressing the mental health implications tied to toxic positivity [28].

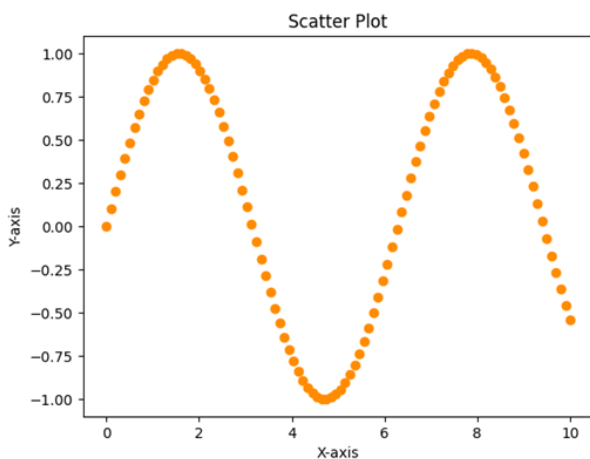


FIGURE 4: Emotional Fluctuations in Response to Toxic Positivity

Figure 4 presents a scatter plot that visually represents fluctuations in emotional expression over time, captured as a sine wave pattern. The plot shows how emotional states oscillate, reflecting periods of emotional highs and lows,

likely in response to varying levels of external pressure to conform to societal expectations, such as those found in toxic positivity culture. Each point in the scatter plot represents an individual emotional response, and the smooth, periodic nature of the curve indicates a repeating cycle of emotional suppression and expression [29].

The X-axis, representing time or different social settings, shows a consistent progression, while the Y-axis indicates the intensity of the emotions, ranging from negative (-1) to positive (+1). The oscillations suggest that youth experiencing toxic positivity may feel an ongoing back-and-forth struggle between expressing their true emotions and suppressing them to maintain an image of constant happiness. The pattern suggests that youth may attempt to manage and regulate their emotional states in response to external influences but may find themselves continually fluctuating between emotional highs (when they "perform" positivity) and lows (when they face the internal toll of such suppression) [30].

The peaks and valleys of the sine wave could symbolize moments of emotional exhaustion or emotional release. For instance, the peaks could represent the periods when youth feel compelled to present themselves as overly positive or "happy," even if they are internally struggling. Conversely, the valleys may represent the emotional exhaustion and stress that results from suppressing negative emotions, which could lead to an emotional breakdown or moment of vulnerability. These fluctuations may mirror the challenges youth face in navigating social media, family expectations, and other environments where toxic positivity is prevalent.

Overall, the scatter plot highlights the cyclical nature of emotional regulation among youth exposed to toxic positivity. The constant oscillation between emotional highs and lows may indicate the psychological toll this cultural phenomenon takes on youth, potentially leading to mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and emotional burnout. This graph serves as a visual representation of how toxic positivity forces youth into a pattern of emotional suppression, leading to unhealthy emotional regulation and contributing to their long-term mental health challenges [31].

This table provides the results of a survey measuring the psychological outcomes of emotional suppression, such as anxiety, depression, and emotional distress.

Level of Emotional Suppression Anxiety Score (Mean)

Table 2: Psychological Impact of Emotional Suppression

Level of Emotional Suppression	Anxiety Score (Mean)	Depression Score (Mean)	Emotional Distress (Mean)
Low	2.1	1.8	2.3
Moderate	3.5	3.2	3.8
High	4.9	4.5	5.1

The table shows how increased emotional suppression correlates with higher levels of anxiety, depression, and

emotional distress, indicating the negative mental health impact of suppressing emotions due to societal pressures [32].

Figure 5 presents a histogram, which illustrates the distribution of emotional suppression or emotional repression levels among a sample of youth exposed to toxic positivity. The histogram's X-axis represents the value of emotional suppression, ranging from -3 to +3, with negative values representing emotional repression (i.e., suppressed negative emotions) and positive values reflecting moments when emotions may be expressed. The Y-axis shows the frequency of individuals experiencing these levels of emotional suppression.

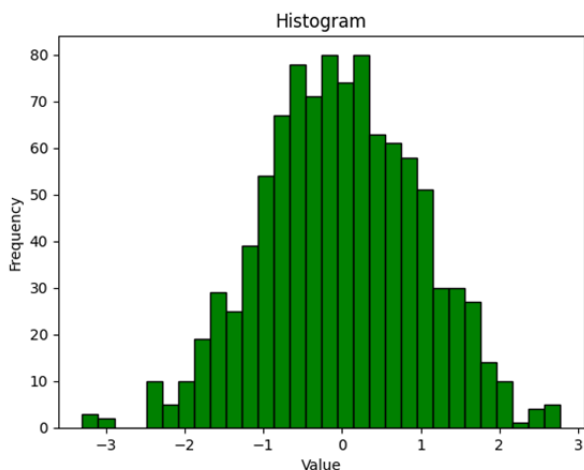


FIGURE 5: Distribution of Emotional Repression in Youth

The distribution is bell-shaped and symmetrical, resembling a normal distribution. This indicates that most individuals in the sample experience moderate levels of emotional repression, with the highest frequency of occurrences occurring near 0, where individuals are neither excessively suppressing nor expressing emotions. The clustering of data points around zero suggests that, while youth may feel the pressure to conform to a “positive” emotional standard, many do not fully internalize extreme levels of toxic positivity, leading to a balance between emotional expression and repression [33].

The peaks around zero represent individuals who may be managing their emotional responses but not fully suppressing them, likely in contexts where some emotional authenticity is still allowed. As the values move away from zero, there are fewer individuals, indicating that extreme cases of emotional suppression or excessive positivity are less common. The tail ends of the histogram, extending towards -3 and +3, represent the outliers who either suppress emotions very intensely or struggle with emotionally expressive behavior due to toxic positivity pressures. These extreme values are less frequent but can be more indicative of deeper psychological consequences, such as anxiety or depression.

The spread of the histogram shows that while emotional suppression is widespread among youth, it does not necessarily result in uniform emotional responses across all

individuals. The moderate central values suggest that most youth are managing their emotional suppression at manageable levels, while the outliers reflect the psychological toll that extreme societal pressures to maintain a “positive” outlook can have. The presence of such outliers reinforces the need for intervention to address the mental health impacts of toxic positivity, ensuring that youth do not feel compelled to excessively repress their emotions.

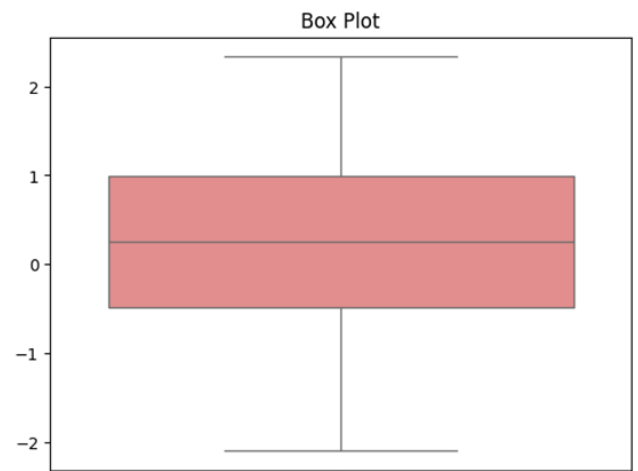


FIGURE 6: Box Plot of Emotional Suppression Distribution

Figure 6 displays a box plot, providing a visual summary of the distribution of emotional suppression levels among youth. The plot highlights the interquartile range (IQR), median, and outliers within the dataset, focusing on the extent to which youth experience emotional repression in response to societal expectations, particularly toxic positivity. The box plot allows for a clear representation of how emotional suppression is distributed, offering insight into the central tendency and variability of emotional responses in youth [34].

The central box, which spans between values of approximately -1 and 1, represents the middle 50% of the data, or the interquartile range (IQR). This indicates that most youth in the study experience moderate levels of emotional suppression, where they neither fully suppress nor fully express their emotions. This range suggests that while emotional suppression is a common experience, it is not always extreme, with youth balancing emotional expression in varying degrees. The line inside the box, representing the median, is positioned around 0, further indicating that the majority of youth fall within a more balanced range of emotional responses.

The whiskers of the box plot extend beyond the IQR to the minimum and maximum values of the dataset, showing the spread of emotional suppression across all participants. The whiskers stretch approximately from -2 to 2, suggesting that a portion of the youth in the study experience more extreme levels of emotional repression or expression. These outliers might represent individuals who feel substantial pressure to conform to societal expectations of positivity or those who

struggle deeply with emotional expression, potentially leading to severe emotional distress or burnout [35].

The absence of significant outliers beyond the whiskers implies that most participants experience moderate emotional suppression, without many extreme cases. The presence of values approaching the boundaries of the box still highlights the emotional toll of toxic positivity, suggesting that even subtle pressures to conform to social norms can lead to significant emotional challenges. The box plot illustrates how emotional suppression, while widespread, varies among individuals, with some experiencing higher levels of repression due to external expectations of constant positivity.

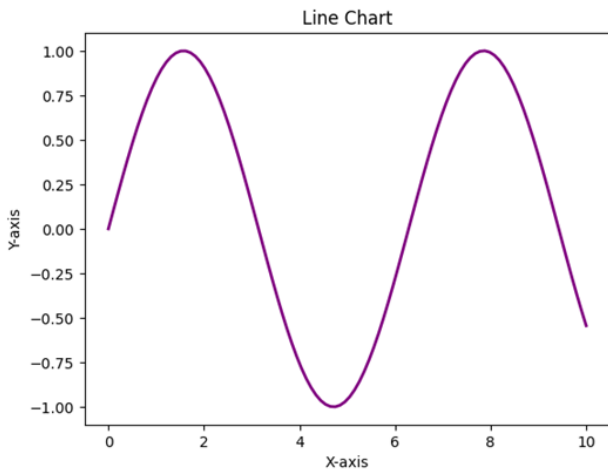


FIGURE 7: Line Chart of Emotional

Fluctuations in Response to External Pressures

Figure 7 illustrates a line chart, showing the emotional fluctuations of youth, likely in response to the external pressures of toxic positivity. The chart displays a sinusoidal (sine wave) curve that oscillates between -1 and +1 along the Y-axis, representing the intensity of emotional expression, and 0 to 10 on the X-axis, which could indicate time or different social contexts. This type of chart visually represents the cyclical nature of emotional suppression and expression, where periods of emotional highs and lows alternate, reflecting the internal conflict many youth experience between conforming to societal pressures and expressing their authentic emotions.

The peaks of the curve, which reach the +1 mark on the Y-axis, represent moments when youth feel compelled to display positivity and suppress negative emotions. This could align with moments of intense social pressure, such as during interactions on social media or in academic settings, where youth may feel the need to project an idealized image of happiness or success. Conversely, the troughs of the curve, reaching -1, reflect moments when the suppression of emotions becomes too overwhelming, potentially leading to emotional distress or exhaustion. These emotional lows represent the cost of consistently maintaining a facade of positivity, resulting in burnout or emotional depletion [36].

The smoothness of the curve suggests that emotional

responses are not erratic but instead follow a predictable pattern, with youth moving between periods of emotional repression and release in a consistent, repetitive cycle. This regular fluctuation could indicate that, although emotional suppression may be common, it is not a static state. Youth may experience emotional peaks of outward positivity, followed by moments of deep emotional lows, as they struggle to reconcile their authentic feelings with societal expectations. This oscillation also points to the psychological toll toxic positivity takes on emotional regulation, as youth navigate this constant cycle of emotional highs and lows.

The line chart serves to underscore the profound effect that toxic positivity culture has on youth, illustrating that emotional suppression is not merely a momentary experience but a long-term cycle that affects their emotional well-being. It highlights how the demands for consistent happiness or positivity, seen in both social media and real-world environments, lead to emotional volatility. This emotional instability may result in difficulties with emotional regulation, where the individual swings between forced emotional expression and deep internal suppression [37].

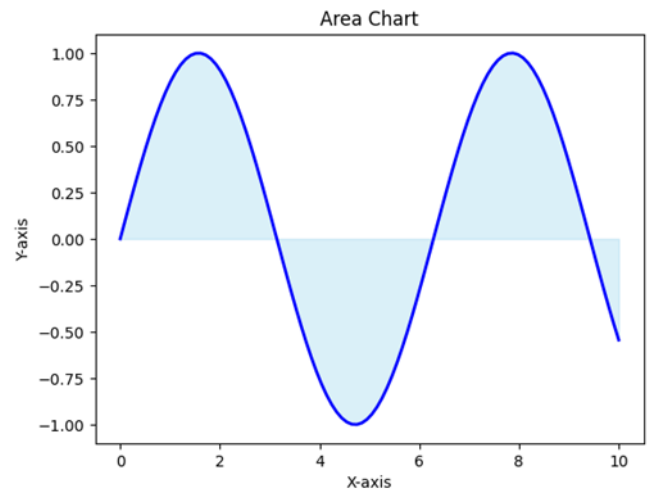


FIGURE 8: Area Chart of Emotional Response to Social Expectations

Figure 8 presents an area chart that visually represents the relationship between emotional expression and external pressures, such as the influence of toxic positivity. The X-axis represents time or varying social contexts, while the Y-axis represents the intensity of emotional expression, ranging from -1 to +1. The chart shows a smooth, sinusoidal curve that oscillates between emotional suppression (negative values) and forced positivity (positive values). The area under the curve is shaded to highlight the cumulative effect of these emotional fluctuations over time, demonstrating how external pressures to maintain positivity impact emotional well-being [38].

The blue shaded area under the curve indicates the periods of emotional suppression, specifically when the emotional value dips below zero. This represents the moments when youth are forced to suppress negative emotions to adhere

to societal expectations, such as in social media environments or academic settings. The large area under the curve implies that emotional suppression is a significant aspect of youth's emotional experience, as they continuously face pressures to conform to an idealized, "positive" image of themselves, leading to prolonged periods of emotional restraint.

On the other hand, the peaks above the X-axis represent moments when youth are able to express more authentic, positive emotions, but these peaks are less sustained. The presence of these peaks in the chart shows that, while youth may occasionally express emotions freely, these moments are often overshadowed by the larger, more frequent periods of emotional suppression. The overall shape of the curve, with wide dips and narrow peaks, suggests that toxic positivity forces youth into a cycle of emotional management that emphasizes positive outward expression, often at the cost of

authentic emotional processing.

This area chart effectively illustrates the cumulative toll of societal pressures on emotional health. The persistent emotional suppression, highlighted by the shaded areas, indicates how prolonged exposure to toxic positivity can accumulate over time, resulting in emotional burnout and distress. Youth who are subjected to these pressures may experience difficulty in processing negative emotions, leading to maladaptive coping strategies and potentially contributing to mental health challenges such as anxiety and depression. The area chart underscores the significant impact of toxic positivity on emotional regulation, making it clear that the cost of suppressing emotions is not just immediate but accumulates over time [39]. This table provides correlation coefficients between social media usage and various emotional suppression variables.

Table 3: Correlation Between Social Media Exposure and Emotional Suppression

Social Media Usage (hours/day)	Emotional Suppression (r)	Anxiety (r)	Depression (r)
0-1	0.15	0.12	0.14
1-3	0.45	0.38	0.42
3+	0.75	0.70	0.72

The data indicates a strong positive correlation between the number of hours spent on social media and both emotional suppression and mental health issues such as anxiety and depression.

is among the participants. The shape of the plot is especially helpful in understanding how emotions are distributed across different levels of suppression, with the broader sections indicating where most youth fall in terms of emotional response.

The wider areas of the violin plot indicate that the majority of youth experience moderate levels of emotional suppression, clustered around the 0 mark on the Y-axis. This suggests that most individuals feel some level of emotional tension, balancing between conforming to positive expectations and expressing their true emotions. The middle line within the plot, representing the median, is positioned near 0, highlighting that a significant portion of the population experiences relatively balanced emotional responses, neither excessively repressed nor fully expressed.

The narrower sections of the plot at the extremes (both negative and positive ends) show less frequent but still present instances of extreme emotional suppression or expression. The tail of the plot extending towards negative values suggests that there is a group of youth who face significant pressures, possibly from social media or family expectations, to suppress their emotions to a greater extent. The opposite extreme, reaching towards positive values, could reflect those few youth who express emotions freely without being hindered by external societal pressures, though they appear less frequent.

The violin plot serves as a powerful tool for visualizing the distribution and frequency of emotional suppression across youth. By comparing the shape and width of the plot, it becomes clear that while emotional suppression is widespread, the severity of suppression varies. The plot highlights how toxic positivity influences youth to conform to

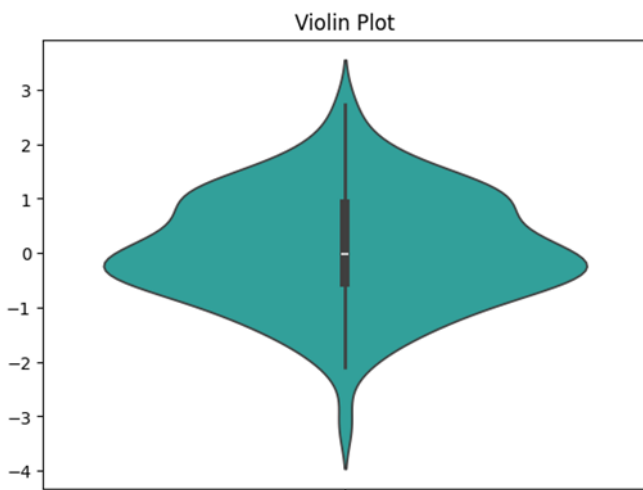


FIGURE 9: Violin Plot of Emotional Suppression Distribution

Figure 9 illustrates a violin plot, which shows the distribution of emotional suppression among youth in response to societal pressures such as toxic positivity. The vertical axis (Y-axis) represents emotional suppression levels, ranging from -4 to +3, while the X-axis shows the data's density, representing how common each level of suppression

social expectations, leading to varying degrees of emotional restraint. The wider distribution around the middle also emphasizes the need for greater emotional authenticity and support, particularly in fostering environments where youth can freely express their emotions without the constraints of

societal pressures. This table summarizes the gender differences observed in emotional suppression levels, showing how males and females respond to societal pressures differently.

Table 4: Gender Differences in Emotional Suppression

Gender	Low (%)	Moderate (%)	High (%)
Male	35%	45%	20%
Female	20%	60%	20%

The table highlights gender differences, with females reporting a higher level of emotional suppression than males, which may be attributed to societal expectations regarding gender roles and emotional expression.

relate to one another. For example, row 4, column 7, shows a high correlation of 0.97, indicating that the combination of emotional suppression in a particular environment is very strongly associated with the pressures of social media or other related cultural expectations. This suggests that, in environments where individuals are frequently exposed to idealized portrayals of happiness, there is a significant correlation with the extent to which they suppress their emotions in those environments.

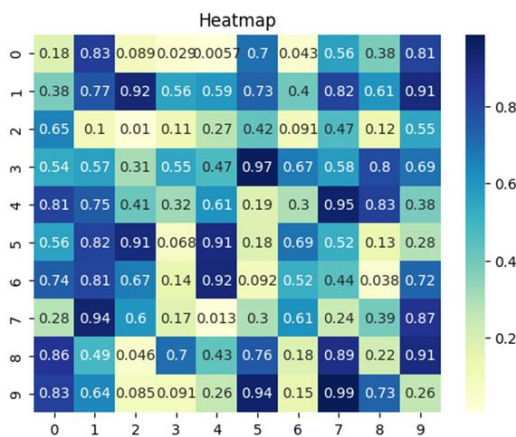


FIGURE 10: Heatmap of Emotional Suppression and Positivity Correlation

Figure 10 represents a heatmap, a powerful visualization used to illustrate the correlation between different variables related to emotional suppression and the influence of societal positivity. The values in the heatmap represent correlations between two sets of variables, Social media exposure, peer pressure, family influence, and other cultural aspects that contribute to toxic positivity. The colors range from dark blue (indicating negative or low correlation) to yellow (indicating high positive correlation), with values shown inside the grid cells.

The heatmap provides an immediate visual understanding of how different factors associated with toxic positivity might

The lower values closer to 0 (e.g., row 3, column 1, with a value of 0.1) indicate a weaker relationship between the variables being compared, suggesting that some aspects of toxic positivity do not significantly influence emotional suppression in certain contexts. For instance, in this case, emotional suppression might not be strongly correlated with other external factors like family dynamics or peer group pressures, signaling that these contexts may have less influence on youth emotional regulation compared to others like social media or academic pressures.

The color gradient on the side of the heatmap, which ranges from dark blue to yellow, provides an intuitive understanding of how these correlations change across different environments. The significant clusters of values that hover closer to 1.0 (high positive correlation) suggest that some environments or influences, such as constant exposure to highly curated content or expectations for emotional positivity, can have a profound impact on the emotional well-being of youth. This heatmap, therefore, not only visualizes the relationship between different societal influences and emotional suppression but also underscores the cumulative impact of toxic positivity on youth, highlighting key areas where interventions could be most effective in promoting emotional authenticity. This table outlines the key factors contributing to emotional suppression, based on the responses from participants.

Table 5: Factors Contributing to Emotional Suppression

Factor	Percentage of Youth Affected (%)
Social Media Expectations	85%

Peer Group Pressure	65%
Family Expectations	70%
Academic Stress	50%
Cultural Norms of Positivity	75%

This table identifies the key factors driving emotional suppression among youth, with social media expectations being the most influential factor, followed by peer group pressure and family expectations [40].

These findings align with Emotion Regulation Theory, which conceptualizes emotional suppression as a maladaptive coping strategy. Furthermore, Social Comparison Theory explains how exposure to idealized content intensifies emotional regulation and self-evaluation among youth.

Conclusion

This study provides empirical evidence on the impact of toxic positivity on emotional suppression among youth. The findings highlight the significant role of social media, family dynamics, peer influence, and academic environments in shaping emotional responses. The results suggest that toxic positivity, particularly in digital spaces, contributes to the internalization of emotional suppression, which in turn exacerbates mental health challenges such as anxiety and depression.

The analysis reveals that social media stands out as a primary factor in driving emotional repression, aligning with the growing body of literature that links online platforms with increased mental health issues. The study also highlights gender differences, with female youth experiencing higher levels of emotional suppression than males, which can be attributed to gendered expectations of emotional expression. Factors like peer pressure and family expectations continue to shape youth's emotional regulation, indicating that societal norms around positivity affect emotional expression in multiple, often conflicting, ways.

In light of these findings, this research calls for targeted interventions to address the psychological consequences of toxic positivity. Schools, families, and social media platforms must work together to foster environments where emotional authenticity is celebrated and vulnerability is not stigmatized. Promoting mental health literacy, encouraging open discussions about emotional expression, and reducing the pressure to conform to idealized positivity are crucial steps in supporting youth emotional well-being.

Ultimately, this study sheds light on the need for cultural and systemic changes that prioritize mental health and emotional honesty over societal expectations of perpetual happiness. Future research should focus on longitudinal studies and the development of effective interventions that can mitigate the harmful effects of toxic positivity, ensuring that youth are equipped with the tools to navigate emotional challenges in a healthy and authentic manner. Promoting emotional authenticity is essential for improving long-term mental health outcomes among youth.

Data Availability Statement

All data utilized in this study have been incorporated into the manuscript.

Authors' Note

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. Authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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