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### Sex differences in emotion expression

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**Chapter 4**  
**Ability versus vulnerability:**  
**Beliefs about men's and women's emotional behavior<sup>b</sup>**

There is evidence that social norms provide prescriptions for and regulate emotional experiences and behavior (e.g., Baanders, 1997; Ekman & Friesen, 1969; Fischer & Jansz, 1995; Goffman, 1961; Harré, 1996; Hochschild, 1983; Parkinson, 1991; Saarni, 1984). When an individual breaches these social norms, there is a chance that he or she will be negatively evaluated during social interaction (Forsyth, 1995). These emotion norms exist for the experience of emotions, i.e., feeling rules (Hochschild, 1983; 'you should not feel happy when someone else has broken his leg'); however, they are more pronounced for expressive behavior, i.e., display rules (Ekman & Friesen, 1969; 'you should not burst into tears if a colleague spills coffee over your new blouse').

Regulation processes based on emotion norms are acknowledged to be a source for sex differences in emotional behavior. The robust finding that sex differences in emotions are more pronounced for emotional expressions than for emotional experiences (e.g., Brody & Hall, 1993; Kring & Gordon, 1998; LaFrance & Banaji, 1992) is generally explained by the existence of gender-specific emotion norms that apply differentially to men and women. There is broad consensus that these different social norms are related to gender roles (e.g., Brody & Hall, 1993; Fischer, 1993; Shields, 1987). For example, Shields (1987) suggests that, because women's emotions are more salient in social evaluations than are those of men, there may be different standards of emotional appropriateness for men and women. Eagly and Steffen (1986) argue that the tendency for men to be more aggressive than women might be a function of perceived consequences of aggression that are learned as aspects of gender roles. LaFrance and Banaji (1992) suggest that the correspondence between observations and self-reports of greater expressivity on the part of females might be due to self-presentational conformity with prescribed gender roles. Further, they argue that the observation that women show more facial expressivity than men might be the result of gender based display rules, specifying which feelings should be shown and with what intensity.

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In addition, recent research also suggests that gender-specific norms may play a role in sex differences in emotion recall or in the accessibility of emotion knowledge. This could account for the finding that gender differences are especially large in self-reports about emotional incidents (LaFrance & Banaji, 1992). Feldman Barrett (1997) has shown that retrospective reports about emotional incidents were influenced in the direction of the beliefs respondents had about their emotional lives. In another study Feldman Barrett and colleagues showed that sex differences were found in retrospective, memory-based measures, but not in momentary ratings (Feldman Barrett, Robin, Pietromonaco, & Eyssele, 1998). One explanation for this discrepancy was that "participants' own descriptions may have been influenced by their beliefs about men's and women's emotionality more generally" (Feldman Barrett et al., 1998, p. 572).

Although there seems to be a general consensus that sex differences in emotions could be explained in terms of differences in gender-specific norms, no studies have directly addressed this issue. Some studies have provided indirect evidence by focusing on the (expected) consequences of emotional behavior, for example, by showing that men and women are aware of the social sanctions that can be expected when deviating from gender-appropriate emotional behavior. For example, Graham, Gentry, and Green (1981) found that the expression of positive emotion is more prescribed for women than for men: Women expected more negative social sanctions when they failed to express positive emotions. This is especially the case when these positive emotions are other-oriented: Stoppard and Gunn Gruchy (1993) found that women expected negative consequences for themselves if they failed to express positive emotions directed toward others. By contrast, men did not expect negative consequences if they failed to express positive emotions; they only expected positive consequences when they did express positive emotions, independent of whether these emotions were self- or other-oriented. This latter study suggests that men and women hold different beliefs concerning the appropriateness of their emotional response. However, it is not clear on which specific beliefs these expected social sanctions are based. Thus, it may be that the belief that one should be supportive of other people is held more strongly by women than by men, but it could also be that women believe more strongly than men that it is important to be liked by others, and that expressing positive emotions is a means of achieving this goal.

Other studies have shown differences in reactions to emotional behavior displayed by men or by women. For example, Crester, Lombardo, Lombardo, and Mathis (1982) found that respondents were less accepting of crying by men than by women, consistent with everyday knowledge that boys and girls are raised with different norms concerning crying. Cornelius (1982) also found that women's crying resulted in more positive consequences than the crying of men. However, Labott, Martin, Eason, and Berkey's (1991) study of social reactions to crying showed that men who cried were liked *more* than women who cried. They suggested that gender role expectations regarding crying may have changed in recent years, in the sense that both men and women now find it more appropriate for men to weep. Whether respondents actually believed this, was not measured, however.

A final study worth mentioning is one by Grossman and Wood (1993). They showed that when explicit instructions were given to both men and women to enhance or attenuate their emotions for reasons of health, thereby manipulating expectations about emotional response, no sex differences in self-reported intensity of emotional experience were observed. In contrast, when no instructions were given concerning appropriate emotional response, women reported more intense emotions to both negative and positive stimuli than did men. These findings led the researchers to conclude that a general gender stereotypical norm was reflected in the observed sex differences in the no-instruction condition, whereby women are allowed to display their emotions to a greater extent than are men. However, such a generic norm does not account for the fact that men express anger more often and with greater intensity, at least when the more aggressive form of this emotion is considered (Eagly & Steffen, 1986; Frodi, Macaulay, & Thome, 1977); neither does it explain why men express pride more than do women (Brody & Hall, 1993). More importantly, there was no measure of such a gender-stereotypical norm in the Grossman and Wood study.

In sum, there is evidence that norms and beliefs concerning men's and women's emotionality differ: Women are not only seen as more emotional, but they should express their positive emotions, and they are allowed to express negative emotions as long as these expressions do not hurt others. Men, on the other hand are considered less emotional, and are less permitted to display negative, powerless emotions, although they are allowed to

display powerful emotions. To date, however, no studies have directly measured such beliefs, with the result that there is a lack of evidence concerning the contents of these beliefs and norms, and the extent to which they are culturally shared by men and/or women (Gordon, 1989).

The first aim of the present research was to identify the *type* of the beliefs to which people adhere. Pettigrew and Meertens (1995) have shown that in recent decades more subtle forms of prejudice have come to preserve racial, ethnic and religious stratification: Western European countries have developed a norm against blatant (racial) prejudice. Blatant prejudice involves rejection of an outgroup and includes a belief in the inferiority of the outgroup, whereas subtle prejudice refers to rejection of specific groups of people, or specific behaviors in specific situations, and can be seen as a covert means of expressing prejudice. Applying this to men, women, and emotion, we assume that people still hold stereotypical beliefs about men and women, but that these beliefs are subtle rather than blatant. This is also visible in the popular culture in industrialized countries, which has undergone some marked changes with respect to ideals of manhood and notions of emotionality (see Pollack & Levant, 1998; Wouters, 1990). This change is apparent for example in the increasing numbers of men displaying their emotions in various television programs, in the popularity of the concept of "emotional intelligence" (Goleman, 1995) as an attribute in both women and men, and in the growing demand for social and emotional skills for male managers (Fineman, 1997). These changes suggest that emotional expressions by males are tolerated to a greater extent and may even be equally permitted for men and women. This leads us to expect that, especially among higher educated people (Wouters, 1990), people subscribe more to subtle, or descriptive, beliefs than to blatant, or prescriptive, beliefs about men's and women's emotions, descriptive beliefs being less demanding and less moralizing in nature than prescriptive beliefs.

A second aim of this research was to study the *contents* of these stereotypical beliefs. Do people still hold stereotypical beliefs about the emotional behavior of men and women or is there a shift towards less stereotypical or even contra-stereotypical views? The current stereotypical belief concerning sex differences in emotional behavior is that women are more emotionally expressive than men (e.g., Fabes & Martin, 1991; Johnson & Shulman, 1988; Shields, 1984). More specifically, Brody (1997) has shown that women

are believed to smile more and to express more fear, vulnerability and sadness than men do, whereas men are believed to be more aggressive and to express more anger than women. However, Johnson and Shulman (1988) have also shown that people believe that the emotional behavior of females is affected more by considerations of social desirability than is the emotional behavior of males. In other words, women are believed to display more communal feelings and less self-oriented feelings than do males. In short, according to stereotypical beliefs, women are more emotionally expressive, especially with regard to emotions of powerlessness (e.g., fear), whereas men are believed to suppress their emotions, except in the case of powerful emotions (e.g., anger).

#### *Overview of the present studies*

Below we present three studies and a pilot study. In the pilot study we examined whether respondents differed in the extent to which they distinguish between items designed to tap beliefs about emotional behavior that are prescriptive or descriptive in nature. The purpose of this pilot was to identify a set of prescriptive and descriptive norms for our further research. The aim of Study 1 was to test in a group of student respondents the extent of agreement with different type of beliefs about emotional behavior: prescriptive and descriptive, stereotypical and contra-stereotypical. Because we studied several beliefs which were prescriptive, descriptive, stereotypical or contra-stereotypical in nature, we also had the opportunity to examine the content of these beliefs. This enabled us to explore whether it is believed that powerful emotional behavior, such as expressing anger or displaying aggression, is more acceptable for men than for women; that women like to talk about their feelings more than men do; that women have a particular aptitude for domestic activities because of their emotional sensitivity; or that being emotional means being irrational. The aim of Study 2 was to replicate Study 1, and, in addition, to compare a student sample and a non-student sample with respect to adherence to the different beliefs about emotionality of men and women. The aim of Study 3 was to test the extent of agreement with these same beliefs, this time with reference to one's own emotional behavior.

Because of the lack of research on gender-specific beliefs, the extent to which people endorse such beliefs is far from clear. It is not clear whether there are differences

between emotion beliefs about other people or about one's own behavior. Our hypotheses regarding the *type* of emotion beliefs about men's and women's behavior therefore had a tentative character: (1) Respondents should agree more with descriptive beliefs than with prescriptive beliefs about emotional behavior; (2) respondents should agree more with stereotypical beliefs about emotional behavior than with contra-stereotypical beliefs about emotional behavior. There is some evidence that men are less tolerant and less progressive in their beliefs concerning cross-gender activities for both men and women (Brody, Lovas & Hay, 1995). For example, fathers tend to differentiate more than mothers between boys and girls in their childrearing strategies (Lytton & Romney, 1991). Therefore we also predicted (3) that male respondents should agree more with both prescriptive and stereotypical beliefs about emotional behavior than would female respondents. Finally, there is some evidence that there is less adherence to prescriptive and stereotypical beliefs on the part of higher educated people than among less highly educated people (Wouters, 1990). We therefore expected (4) that non-student respondents should agree more with both prescriptive and stereotypical beliefs about emotional behavior than would student respondents.

### Study 1

Our first aim was to study different emotion beliefs in order to see whether respondents agreed (a) more with descriptive beliefs than with prescriptive beliefs concerning men's and women's emotional reactions, and whether male respondents agreed more with prescriptive beliefs than female respondents (hypotheses 1 and 3); (b) more with stereotypical items than with contra-stereotypical items, and whether male respondents agreed more with stereotypical beliefs than female respondents (hypotheses 2 and 3); (c) more with stereotypical items about women's emotional behavior than with those about men's emotional behavior. Our second aim was to explore whether the beliefs are seen as differently applicable to men and women as a function of their content.

## Method

### *Participants and procedure*

One hundred and eighty psychology students (average age 24 years, 114 females, 66 males) at the University of Amsterdam participated in this study. Respondents completed a questionnaire in classroom settings, and received course credit for participation.

### *Materials*

A questionnaire consisting of 14 prescriptive and 52 descriptive beliefs about the emotional reactions of men and women was developed, designed on theoretical (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995) and face-validity grounds. The 14 prescriptive beliefs consisted of negative evaluations of contra-stereotypical emotional reactions of men and women (e.g., "Men who express fear are weak"). Endorsement of these items reflected intolerance of displays of powerlessness for men, and intolerance of power for women. The 52 descriptive beliefs were more subtle (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995). They consisted of statements about specific aspects of emotional behaviors (e.g., "It is because women are emotionally sensitive that they are capable of raising children"); statements reflecting negative evaluations of men and women who express emotions in specifically stereotype-inconsistent ways (e.g., "I do not like men who want to discuss their feelings"); or statements about differences between men and women with respect to emotional behavior (e.g., "Men are more direct than women in their display of anger"). These descriptive beliefs included statements concerning displays of powerless and powerful emotional behavior; statements concerning the suitability of emotional displays in the workplace; statements describing the sharing of emotions; statements about the relation between aggressiveness and stereotypically male activities and about the relation between being sensitive and stereotypically feminine abilities; statements concerning differences between men and women with regard to the experience or expression of emotions; and statements reflecting negative beliefs about emotional behavior.

In order to be able to compare beliefs about women with those about men, every item was formulated once with men as the target, and again with women as the target. Thus every item had both a gender-stereotypical and gender contra-stereotypical

version (e.g., “Men should not cry” [stereotypical] versus “Women should not cry” [contra-stereotypical]). In order to avoid encouraging response sets by constructing one questionnaire solely about males and another solely about females, we decided to construct two versions of the questionnaire in such a way that each version contained items referring to men and items referring to women (see Table 4.1).

*Table 4.1 Construction of the two Questionnaires: Number of different Types of Beliefs (Study 1)*

Questionnaire 1	<i>n</i>	Questionnaire 2	<i>n</i>
Prescr. stereot. about men	6	Prescr. contrast. about women	6
Prescr. stereot. about women	2	Prescr. contrast. about men	2
Prescr. contrast. about men	1	Prescr. stereot. about women	1
Prescr. contrast. about women	5	Prescr. stereot. about men	5
Descr. stereot. about men	11	Descr. contrast. about women	11
Descr. stereot. about women	17	Descr. contrast. about men	17
Descr. contrast. about men	14	Descr. stereot. about women	14
Descr. contrast. about women	10	Descr. stereot. about men	10
Total number of items	66	Total number of items	66

The first version of the questionnaire contained 14 prescriptive and 52 descriptive items, of which 36 were stereotypical and 30 contra-stereotypical (17 stereotypical and 15 contra-stereotypical items with men as targets; and 19 stereotypical and 15 contra-stereotypical with women as targets). The second version of the questionnaire contained the same items except for the fact that sex of target was reversed, such that items that were stereotypical for men in version 1 became contra-stereotypical for women in version 2 (see Table 1 for details of how the items were distributed across the two versions, and Appendix B for the content of the items). The mean scores on the two versions of the questionnaire did not differ significantly.

In order to establish whether our distinction between prescriptive and descriptive beliefs was valid, we conducted a pilot study in which 46 students at the University of Amsterdam (24 females, 22 males, average age 22 years) were asked to indicate on a 5-point scale how blunt (1= not at all blunt; 5 = very blunt) a particular item was. We defined a blunt statement as the opposite of a subtle statement. A blunt statement is undifferentiated and not nuanced. The reliability of both the prescriptive and descriptive

scales was highly satisfactory (alphas = .92 and .93, respectively). Respondents rated the prescriptive scale ( $M = 3.86$ ,  $SD = .78$ ) as significantly more blunt than the descriptive scale ( $M = 3.16$ ,  $SD = .56$ ),  $t(44) = 9.12$ ,  $p < .001$ . Further, a comparison of the means of the two scales with the midpoint (i.e., 3) showed that the mean score on the prescriptive items differed significantly from the scale midpoint,  $t(46) = 7.78$ ,  $p < .001$ , whereas the mean score on the descriptive scale did not.

Because the questionnaire distinguished satisfactorily between prescriptive and descriptive beliefs, the same 66 items were used in Study 1. We again used both versions of the questionnaire. The only change from the pilot version of the questionnaire was the response scale: Respondents in Study 1 had to indicate on a 7-point Likert-type scale the extent to which they *agreed* (1 = not at all; 7 = totally) with each item.

## Results

### *Extent of agreement with prescriptive and descriptive beliefs*

We first constructed two scales by separately summing the scores on the prescriptive and descriptive items and dividing them by the total number of items of each type. Cronbach's alpha was .88 for the prescriptive belief scale and .91 for the descriptive belief scale. As expected, respondents agreed significantly more with the descriptive than with the prescriptive scale,  $t(169) = 22.16$ ,  $p < .001$  (see Table 4.2 for the means).

*Table 4.2 Means (standard deviations in parentheses) Amount of Agreement with Prescriptive and Descriptive Beliefs by Males and Females (Study 1)*

Beliefs	Sex of respondent		
	Total <i>n</i> =180	Male <i>n</i> =66	Female <i>n</i> =114
<b>Prescriptive</b>	1.86 (.73)	2.14 (.74)	1.69 (.80)
<b>Descriptive</b>	2.89 (.66)	2.94 (.72)	2.86 (.63)

Multivariate analysis of variance with sex of respondent as the factor and the means on descriptive and prescriptive scales as the dependent variables revealed a significant multivariate effect,  $F(2,166) = 10.77$ ,  $p < .001$ . Univariate analyses revealed, as expected, that men agreed significantly more with the prescriptive scale than women did,

$F(1,167) = 16.40, p < .001$ . No significant difference was found on the descriptive subscale (see Table 4.2 for the means).

#### *Agreement with stereotypical versus contra-stereotypical items*

A second issue is whether respondents agreed more with stereotypical items than with contra-stereotypical items. We constructed two scales, one based on stereotypical items ( $\alpha = .80$ ), the other based on contra-stereotypical items ( $\alpha = .88$ ). Because each version of the questionnaire contained both stereotypical and contra-stereotypical beliefs, we compared the means on these two scales within questionnaires. As expected, respondents agreed more with the stereotypical scale ( $M = 2.92, SD = .72$ ) than with contra-stereotypical scale ( $M = 2.54, SD = .61, t(88) = 8.12, p < .001$  (*version 1*)). The same was true of *version 2*: stereotypical scale:  $M = 3.00, SD = .75$ ; contra-stereotypical scale:  $M = 2.23, SD = .59; t(80) = 13.75, p < .001$ ). There were no sex of respondent effects.

#### *Agreement with stereotypical and contra-stereotypical items about men and women*

Four subscales were constructed, one based on stereotypical items about men, one based on stereotypical items about women, one based on contra-stereotypical items about men and one based on contra-stereotypical items about women. Cronbach's alphas of these scales ranged from .80 to .88.

We first analyzed whether respondents agreed more with stereotypical items about *women* than with stereotypical items about *men*, and whether respondents agreed more with contra-stereotypical items about *men* than with contra-stereotypical items about *women*. Analyses were conducted within each version of the questionnaire. Respondents agreed significantly more with stereotypical items about *women* than with stereotypical items about *men*,  $t(92) = 10.89, p < .001$ . No sex of respondent effects were found. Moreover, respondents agreed more with contra-stereotypical items about *men* than with contra-stereotypical items about *women*,  $t(89) = 7.74, p < .001$  (see Table 4.3). No sex of respondent effects were found.

We next compared *stereotypical* items about women with *contra-stereotypical* items about women and then did the same for the items concerning men. The analyses

were again conducted within questionnaires. Respondents agreed more with *stereotypical* items about women than with *contra-stereotypical* items about women,  $t(89) = 14.07$ ,  $p < .001$  and (albeit, only for one version of the questionnaire), more with *contra-stereotypical* items about men than with *stereotypical* items about men,  $t(89) = 3.64$ ,  $p < .001$  (see Table 4.3 for the means). Again, no sex of respondent effects were found.

Table 4.3 Means (standard deviations in parentheses) of amount of agreement with stereotypical and contra-stereotypical beliefs by males and females (Study 1)

Version 1		Sex of respondent	
Beliefs	Male <i>n</i> = 33	Female <i>n</i> = 59	
Stereotypical about men (17 items)	2.72 (.64)	2.45 (.58)	
Contra-stereotypical about men (15 items)	2.69 (.65)	2.95 (.62)	
Stereotypical about women (19 items)	3.28 (1.03)	3.22 (.83)	
Contra-stereotypical about women (15 items)	2.35 (.72)	2.22 (.75)	

  

Version 2		Sex of Respondent	
Beliefs	Male <i>n</i> = 33	Female <i>n</i> = 59	
Stereotypical about men (15 items)	3.14 (.98)	2.32 (.56)	
Contra-stereotypical about men (19 items)	2.38 (.56)	2.35 (.62)	
Stereotypical items about women (15 items)	3.40 (.95)	3.36 (.76)	
Contra-stereotypical items about women (17 items)	2.27 (.75)	2.02 (.55)	

#### *Agreement with different beliefs as a function of content*

*Prescriptive beliefs.* We wanted to know whether the content of the prescriptive beliefs was seen as applying differently to women than to men. We therefore constructed two subscales based on prescriptive beliefs, one concerning beliefs reflecting 'intolerance of displays of powerlessness' ( $\alpha = .88$ ) and another concerning beliefs reflecting 'intolerance of displays of power' ( $\alpha = .58$ ). Table 4.4 shows which beliefs were included in these subscales. Multivariate analysis with sex of target as the factor and the two subscales as dependent variables revealed a significant effect,  $F(2, 173) = 10.31$ ,  $p < .001$ . Univariate analyses showed that respondents did not differ with respect to intolerance of displays of powerlessness by men and women. However, they were less

tolerant of displays of powerfulness by men than by women,  $F(1, 174) = 14.30, p < .001$  (see Table 4.4).

*Table 4.4 Mean (standard deviations in parentheses) Amount of Agreement with Prescriptive and Descriptive Beliefs about Men and Women (Study 1)*

Prescriptive Subscales	Sex of Target	
	Male	Female
Intolerance of Display of Power	3.17(1.20)	2.48(1.26)
Intolerance of Display of Powerlessness	1.70 (.83)	1.60 (.62)

  

Descriptive Subscales	Sex of target	
	Male	Female
Display of Powerful Emotional Behavior	4.67(1.08)	2.74(.93)
Display of Powerless Emotional Behavior	2.28(.86)	3.97(1.19)
Displaying Emotions is not Functional in Working Life	2.18(.92)	2.51(1.06)
Sharing Emotions	2.78(.96)	3.40(.81)
Aggressiveness leads to a Preference for Particular Activities	3.22 (1.37)	1.71(.76)
Negative Feelings towards Emotional Behavior	2.42(1.05)	2.91(1.05)
Experience and Express Emotions	2.86(.96)	3.66(1.18)
Being Sensitive leads to Stereotypically Feminine Abilities	3.22(1.35)	2.17(.91)

*Descriptive beliefs.* Eight subscales were constructed to examine whether the contents of the descriptive beliefs were seen as applying differentially to men and women (see Table 5). Not all items of the questionnaires were included in the subscales, for both statistical (i.e., alphas were too low) and practical reasons (in some cases a content domain was only represented by one item).

Reliabilities of the subscales ranged from .50 to .73. Multivariate analysis of variance with sex of target as the factor and the eight subscales as the dependent variables revealed a significant multivariate effect,  $F(8, 168) = 47.37, p < .001$ . Univariate analyses showed that respondents were more likely to believe that women 'display more powerless emotional behavior' than men,  $F(1, 175) = 118.69, p < .001$ , and that men 'display more powerful emotional behavior' than women,  $F(1, 175) = 159.75, p < .001$ . Further, respondents were more likely to believe that a person who 'displays emotions is not functional' in industrial life when this was a women rather than a man,  $F(1, 175) = 4.70, p$

<.05, and that women want to 'share emotions' more than men do,  $F(1, 175) = 21.19, p <.001$ . Further, respondents had higher agreement scores on the subscale 'aggressiveness leads to a preference for particular activities' when it referred to men than when it referred to women,  $F(1, 175) = 80.55, p <.001$ . Also, respondents had higher agreement scores on the subscale 'negative feelings towards emotional behavior' when the target was a female women than when it was a male,  $F(1, 175) = 10.82, p <.01$ . Finally, respondents believed that women 'experience and express emotions' more than men do,  $F(1, 175) = 35.82, p <.001$ , and the belief that 'being sensitive leads to particular, stereotypical feminine, abilities' was endorsed more when it referred to men than to women,  $F(1, 175) = 37.38, p <.001$  (see Table 4.4).

### Discussion

The first and second hypotheses were confirmed: Respondents agreed significantly more with descriptive and stereotypical beliefs than with prescriptive and contra-stereotypical beliefs about emotional behavior. However, when sex of target was taken into account, it appeared that this pattern only applied to women. Respondents agreed more with stereotypical beliefs than with contra-stereotypical beliefs about women. For men, the reverse applied: Respondents agreed more with contra-stereotypical beliefs than with stereotypical items about men. Consistent with these findings, respondents agreed 'more with stereotypical items about women than with stereotypical items about men'; and they agreed more with contra-stereotypical items about men than with contra-stereotypical items about women. With respect to our third hypothesis, we found that men agreed significantly more with prescriptive beliefs than did women. However, the second part of hypothesis 3 was not confirmed: Men did not agree more with stereotypical beliefs than did women.

Turning now to the *content* of the items, several significant results were found. Consistent with other findings, participants held more stereotypical beliefs concerning the emotional behavior of women than concerning the emotional behavior of men. Thus they were more inclined to believe that women (as compared with men) display powerless emotional behavior; share their emotions with others; and are unsuited to industrial life if they display their emotions. Beliefs about men's emotional behavior were more diverse, in

the sense that participants endorsed both stereotypical and contra-stereotypical beliefs about men. Thus, respondents believed more strongly that men (as compared to women) express powerful emotional behavior, and that they have a preference for activities related to aggression because of their emotional disposition. At the same time respondents were more likely to agree that sensitivity leads to stereotypically feminine abilities in men than in women. Finally, respondents' ratings reflected more negative feelings towards women than towards men. In conclusion, these findings suggest that there is an internally consistent stereotype about women that is broadly endorsed, whereas beliefs about men's emotional behavior are more diverse, reflecting a lower degree of consensus.

### **Study 2**

The aim of our second study was to replicate the findings of Study 1 (with respect to the amount of agreement with different type of beliefs) and to investigate whether the tendency to agree more with prescriptive and stereotypical beliefs varies as a function of educational level, such that less well educated persons are more likely to endorse these beliefs.

### **Method**

Seventy-five students were recruited for the student sub-sample (39 men and 36 women, different majors, average age 23 years). Respondents in the non-student sub-sample, were 80 shop-workers (34 men and 46 women, average age 32 years). Respondents completed the questionnaire individually, and received a small gift as a token of appreciation for their cooperation.

For this study the two versions of the questionnaire used in Study 1 were combined into one questionnaire. In order to limit the length of the integrated questionnaire, items referring to the same content domain as other items were dropped, resulting in a 76-item questionnaire. Again, respondents were asked to indicate the extent of their agreement with each item on a 7-point scale (1 = not at all; 7 = totally).

## Results

### *Agreement with prescriptive versus descriptive scales*

We constructed two scales by averaging the scores on the prescriptive and descriptive items. Cronbach's alpha was .90 for the prescriptive scale and .89 for the descriptive scale. Consistent with the results of Study 1, respondents agreed significantly more with the descriptive than with the prescriptive scale  $t(143) = 24.65, p < .001$  (see Table 4.5).

*Table 4.5 Mean (standard deviations in parentheses) Amount of Agreement with Prescriptive and Descriptive Beliefs by Males and Females (Study 2)*

Beliefs	Sex of respondent		
	Total <i>n</i> = 143	Male <i>n</i> = 69	Female <i>n</i> = 79
<b>Prescriptive</b>	1.99 (.74)	2.08 (.79)	1.88 (.66)
<b>Descriptive</b>	3.15 (.62)	3.27 (.65)	3.08 (.58)

In order to compare the responses of students and shop-workers, a multivariate analysis of variance with type of respondent (student vs. shop-worker) and sex of respondent (male vs. female) as factors and the two belief scales as the dependent variables was conducted. No significant effects were found (see Table 4.6).

*Table 4.6. Mean (standard deviations in parentheses) for Amount of Agreement with Prescriptive and Descriptive Beliefs as a Function of Sex and Occupation (Study 2)*

Beliefs	Shop Workers		Students	
	Sex of Respondent		Sex of Respondent	
	Male <i>n</i> = 32	Female <i>n</i> = 42	Male <i>n</i> = 34	Female <i>n</i> = 35
<b>Prescriptive</b>	2.15 (.77)	1.91 (.72)	1.12(.86)	1.85 (.61)
<b>Descriptive</b>	3.26 (.73)	3.16 (.58)	3.25 (.58)	2.96 (.56)

### *Agreement with stereotypical versus contra-stereotypical items*

We then constructed two scales, one based on stereotypical items ( $\alpha = .90$ ) and one based on contra-stereotypical items ( $\alpha = .88$ ). Consistent with the results of Study 1, respondents agreed more with the stereotypical scale ( $M = 3.19, SD = .73$ ) than with the contra-stereotypical scale ( $M = 2.29, SD = .61$ ),  $t(143) = 17.29, p < .001$ .

A multivariate analysis of variance with type of respondent (student vs. shop-worker) and sex of the respondent (male vs. female) as factors revealed no significant effects (see Table 4.7).

*Table 4.7 Mean (standard deviations in parentheses) Amount of Agreement with Stereotypical and Contra-stereotypical Beliefs as a Function of Sex and Occupation (Study 2)*

Sex and occupation of respondent	Stereotypical Beliefs	Contra-stereotypical Beliefs	<i>n</i>
Male			
Shop worker	3.32 (.77)	2.41 (.78)	32
Student	3.34 (.69)	2.35 (.65)	34
Female			
Shop worker	3.16 (.77)	2.27(.53)	42
Student	2.97 (.64)	2.16 (.46)	35

#### *Agreement with stereotypical and contra-stereotypical items about men and women*

Four subscales were constructed, one based on stereotypical items about men, one based on stereotypical items about women, one based on contra-stereotypical items about men, and one based on contra-stereotypical items about women. Alphas of these subscales ranged from .77 to .86.

We first analyzed whether respondents agreed more with stereotypical items about women than with stereotypical items about men, and whether respondents agreed more with contra-stereotypical items about men than with contra-stereotypical items about women. As in Study 1, respondents agreed significantly more with stereotypical items about women ( $M = 2.69$ ;  $SD = .82$ ) than with stereotypical items about men ( $M = 3.70$ ;  $SD = .79$ ),  $t(145) = 18.61$ ,  $p < .001$ . However, in this study men ( $M = 2.93$ ;  $SD = .78$ ) agreed more with stereotypical items about men than did women ( $M = 2.49$ ,  $SD = .80$ ),  $t(150) = 3.46$ ,  $p < .001$ . No other sex of respondent effects were found. Also consistent with Study 1, respondents agreed more with contra-stereotypical items about men ( $M = 2.48$ ;  $SD = .64$ ) than with contra-stereotypical items about women ( $M = 1.95$ ;  $SD = .63$ ,  $t(151) = 13.00$ ,  $p < .001$ ). No sex of respondent effects were found. We next compared stereotypical with contra-stereotypical items about women, and then did the same for items concerning men. As in Study 1, respondents agreed more with stereotypical items about women ( $M =$

3.80,  $SD = .79$ ) than with contra-stereotypical items about women ( $M = 1.96$ ,  $SD = .64$ ),  $t(147) = 27.93$ ,  $p < .001$ . However, in contrast with Study 1, respondents agreed more with *stereotypical* items about men ( $M = 2.70$ ;  $SD = .82$ ) than with *contra-stereotypical* items about men ( $M = 2.48$ ,  $SD = .64$ ),  $t(151) = 3.64$ ,  $p < .001$ . No sex of respondent effects were found.

### Discussion

The prediction that less well educated respondents would agree more with prescriptive and stereotypical beliefs than would student respondents was not confirmed: No significant differences in extent of agreement with prescriptive and stereotypical beliefs (or indeed with descriptive or contra-stereotypical beliefs) were found as a function of education. The findings from Study 1 with respect to the prescriptive and descriptive type of the beliefs were replicated, with one exception: Men were not more likely than women to agree with prescriptive beliefs. The findings with respect to the stereotypical or contra-stereotypical form of the beliefs were also replicated with one exception: In the present study respondents reported that they agreed more with stereotypical beliefs than with contra-stereotypical beliefs about men, whereas the reverse was the case in Study 1. The differences in findings between the two studies may be due to the different samples involved and/or to differences in the form of the questionnaire used.

### Study 3

One determinant of social behavior, and emotional behavior is no exception, is an individual's beliefs, norms and values. These belief systems are social in nature, in that they have been developed in the context of cultural practices. We submit that the same applies to emotional belief systems. Studies 1 and 2 show that beliefs about the emotional behavior of the typical man and woman differ, and that there are different norms concerning the extent to which men and women should experience and express emotions. An important question that remains is whether these beliefs and norms are applied to one's own emotional reactions. Baanders (1997) found that personal adherence to specific emotion beliefs influenced both the intensity of an experienced emotion and the display of

this emotion, whereas knowledge of specific emotion beliefs, without personal adherence to this norm, only affected the display of the emotion.

There are reasons for thinking that the extent to which stereotypical versus contra-stereotypical emotional beliefs are endorsed will vary as a function of whether one is judging one's own behavior versus that of a generalized other. Stereotypes are generalizations about the qualities and characteristics of the members of a particular group: They are typically biased in the sense that they are too simplistic, too extreme and too uniform (Miller, 1982). Some researchers have argued that stereotypes are discarded when people are able to access a relevant database of specific concrete experiences (Eagly & Steffen, 1984; LaFrance & Banaji, 1992). We should therefore expect commonly-held stereotypes to be less influential in case of the context-specific, descriptive beliefs, because people have access to their own specific, concrete emotional experiences.

As noted earlier, one problem in studying beliefs is that people probably try to avoid reporting "politically incorrect" beliefs (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995), and are therefore reluctant to express or endorse beliefs (especially prescriptive ones) concerning emotional behavior. We suggest that this problem is more likely to play a role when expressing attitudes or beliefs about social groups, because one is then more likely to be guarding against biased judgements. In general, stereotypes about outgroups are biased: They are homogeneous and extreme, and more so than stereotypes about one's own group. Furthermore, when asking people about personal attributes, they are quick to distinguish oneself from fellow group members (Tesser & Paulhus, 1983). This tendency to see oneself as unique is likely to result in a lesser tendency to ascribe stereotypes to oneself than to others. It follows that the desire to control one's stereotyping should be weaker when describing oneself, as opposed to others. Observed sex differences in the self-descriptions are therefore more likely to reflect actual rather than "adjusted" differences.

The aims of this study were to explore (a) whether respondents agreed more with descriptive or prescriptive beliefs concerning their own emotional reactions, (b) whether male respondents agreed more with prescriptive beliefs than did female respondents, and (c) whether respondents agreed more with stereotypical beliefs than contra-stereotypical beliefs about their emotional behavior. A last aim was to explore whether the endorsement

of these beliefs by male and female respondents in relation to their own behavior varies as a function of belief content.

## Method

### *Participants and material*

Two hundred and seventy-nine psychology students (208 females, 71 males, average age 22 years) at the University of Amsterdam participated. They received course credit for participation. The basis for the questionnaire used in the present study was the questionnaire used in Study 1. However, the items were formulated in the first person. For example, the item "Men should not cry" was rephrased as "In general, I should not cry." A necessary consequence of this change is that sex of respondent is the same variable as sex of target, thus only one version of the questionnaire was needed. We also omitted items concerned with negative feelings about the emotional behavior of others, and the items concerning assumed differences between men and women with respect to the experience and expression of emotions, because they could not easily be translated into the first person form. The questionnaire as used in the present study contained 48 items, 12 prescriptive and 36 descriptive. Twenty-two were stereotypical for men (i.e., contra-stereotypical for women) and 26 were stereotypical for women (i.e. contra-stereotypical for men). Respondents indicated their agreement or disagreement with each item on a 7-point scale (1= not at all; 7= totally).

## Results

### *Agreement with prescriptive versus descriptive beliefs*

We constructed two scales by averaging scores on the descriptive and prescriptive items. Cronbach's alpha was .88 for the prescriptive scale and .78 for the descriptive scale. As expected, respondents endorsed the descriptive beliefs ( $M = 3.75$ ;  $SD = .46$ ) more strongly than the prescriptive beliefs ( $M = 3.02$ ;  $SD = 1.09$ ),  $t(266) = 12.18$ ,  $p < .001$ . However, and in contrast to the results of Study 1, multivariate analysis of variance using sex of respondent as the factor and the means for the descriptive and prescriptive beliefs as dependent variables revealed no significant effect.

*Agreement of men and women with stereotypical versus contra-stereotypical items*

We constructed two scales, one based on items stereotypical for men ( $\alpha = .80$ ), the other based on items stereotypical for women ( $\alpha = .80$ ). Men ( $M = 3.48$ ,  $SD = .71$ ) were significantly more likely than women ( $M = 3.19$ ,  $SD = .70$ ) to endorse male stereotypical items,  $t(274) = 2.96$ ,  $p < .01$ . Similarly, women ( $M = 3.72$ ,  $SD = .65$ ) were significantly more likely than men ( $M = 3.45$ ,  $SD = .56$ ) to endorse female stereotypical items,  $t(270) = 3.11$ ,  $p < .01$ . Women's endorsement of the female stereotypical items ( $M = 3.72$ ,  $SD = .65$ ) was significantly greater than their endorsement of the male stereotypical items ( $M = 3.19$ ,  $SD = .70$ ),  $t(195) = 8.39$ ,  $p < .001$ . However, men were no more likely to endorse the male stereotypical items ( $M = 3.48$ ,  $SD = .71$ ) than the female stereotypical items ( $M = 3.45$ ,  $SD = .56$ ), ns.

*Agreement with different beliefs as a function of content*

*Prescriptive beliefs.* As in Study 1, we created two subscales concerning prescriptive beliefs, one based on beliefs reflecting 'intolerance for displaying powerlessness' ( $\alpha = .90$ ) and one based on beliefs reflecting 'intolerance for displaying power' ( $\alpha = .61$ ). Multivariate analysis of variance with sex of respondent as the factor and the two subscales as the dependent variables revealed a marginally significant multivariate effect of sex of respondent,  $F(2, 276) = 2.81$ ,  $p < .10$ . Univariate analyses showed that men ( $M = 3.67$ ;  $SD = 1.22$ ) were more likely than women ( $M = 3.30$ ;  $SD = 1.23$ ) to endorse beliefs that displaying aggression/power is unacceptable,  $F(1, 277) = 5.46$ ,  $p < .05$ . Male and female respondents did not differ with respect to tolerance for the display of powerless emotions.

*Descriptive beliefs.* Because some items had been omitted from the questionnaire (see above), there were fewer subscales than in Study 1. Alpha's for the five subscales ranged from .52 to .65. Multivariate analysis of variance with sex of respondent as the factor and the five subscales as dependent variables revealed a significant multivariate effect of sex of respondent,  $F(5, 276) = 5.23$ ,  $p < .001$ . Univariate analyses showed that women ( $M = 4.23$ ,  $SD = .95$ ) were more likely than men ( $M = 3.95$ ,  $SD = .82$ ) to agree that they *display powerless emotional behavior*,  $F(1, 280) = 4.96$ ,  $p < .01$ ; that women ( $M = 2.61$ ,  $SD = .99$ ) were more likely than men ( $M = 2.22$ ,  $SD = .83$ ) to agree that they *are too*

*emotional to function in industrial life*,  $F(1, 280) = 8.96$ ,  $p < .01$ ; and that men ( $M = 2.46$ ,  $SD = 1.52$ ) were more likely women ( $M = 1.88$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ) to agree that they have a preference for activities related to aggressiveness,  $F(1, 280) = 12.41$ ,  $p < .001$ . Endorsement of the subscales describing *display of powerful emotional behavior* and *being sensitive leads to particular stereotypical feminine abilities* did not differ between male and female respondents.

### Discussion

As in Study 1, respondents agreed more with descriptive than with prescriptive beliefs. However, it is worth noting that the mean scores, especially in the case of prescriptive beliefs, were higher than those observed in Study 1. In contrast with the results of Study 1, there was no effect of sex of respondent on extent of agreement with prescriptive beliefs. Turning to agreement with stereotypical or contra-stereotypical beliefs, the results are consistent with those of Study 1, although the means were again much higher than in that study. Very much the same points apply to the pattern of agreement with beliefs as a function of their content: Here, too, the findings were broadly consistent with those of Study 1, although the means were much higher.

Overall, the present study shows that the beliefs people endorse about emotional behavior of other men and other women do not differ greatly with respect to form or content from the beliefs people endorse about themselves. The largest difference between responding to belief statements about the emotional behavior of others and the same belief statements concerning one's own emotional behavior is the extent of agreement. Respondents gave higher ratings on items concerning their own emotional behavior than did respondents in Study 1, who were asked to rate beliefs concerning the emotional behavior of men or women in general. It is not possible to determine whether this difference arose from the tendency of Study 1 participants to correct for stereotype bias, or from the greater accessibility of participants in Study 2 of their own experiences and behaviors, or from a combination of these and/or still other factors.

### General Discussion

Our first hypothesis was that respondents would agree more with descriptive than with prescriptive beliefs about emotional behavior. This hypothesis was confirmed in all three studies. We interpret this as reflecting the operation of two complementary processes. First, gender roles and ideals of manhood and womanhood have changed such that it is now more permissible for men to express emotions other than anger, and for women to be more assertive. As a consequence, norms and prescriptive beliefs about the display of emotions may have become less rigid and less bound to gender codes, allowing greater variability of emotional displays for men and women. Second, the greater cultural awareness of the unacceptability of outgroup stereotyping has led many people in Western countries to be cautious in making generalizations about members of an outgroup. There is a norm against the expression of blatant prejudice, both in North America (Wilson, 1996) and in Western European countries (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995).

Our second hypothesis was that people would agree more with stereotypical beliefs than with contra-stereotypical beliefs about emotional behavior. This hypothesis was confirmed: Respondents in all studies agreed more with stereotypical beliefs than with contra-stereotypical beliefs. This is consistent with other findings that stereotypes concerning sex differences are still quite widely held (Brody, 1997; Fischer, 1993; LaFrance & Banaji, 1992). Interestingly, there was some evidence that this greater endorsement of stereotypical beliefs was not symmetrical for male and female targets: Whereas adherence to stereotypical beliefs about women's emotional behavior was greater than to contra-stereotypical beliefs, this was not true of beliefs about men's emotional behavior. Examining the contents of the beliefs that were differentially held for men and women helps to illustrate this point. Displaying powerless emotions, sharing emotions with others, being vulnerable because of emotional expression, and functioning less well at work because of emotionality, were beliefs endorsed more for women than for men. Respondents were also more likely to agree with items reflecting negative feelings about emotional displays in the case of women than in the case of men. By contrast, the belief that being emotional sensitive leads to typically feminine abilities was endorsed more strongly for men than for women. Thus, beliefs about women's emotional behavior conform quite closely to the classic stereotype of the "emotional woman," whereas beliefs

about men's emotional behavior suggest a greater tolerance of departures from the stereotype of the "unemotional man." This connects to the study of Zammuner (2000) who found a violation of stereotypical gender beliefs for male protagonists.

The finding that expressing emotion was evaluated more positively in the case of men than in the case of women may reflect changing cultural views of emotionality (Wouters, 1990). Depending on how it is framed, emotional behavior can be seen as skilled rather than merely irrational. Goleman (1995) has argued that emotional skills are functional, and even indispensable, in working life. In thinking about men who express emotions at work, respondents may have imagined men who have an open style of communication, whereas in thinking about women who express their emotions at work, they may have imagined women who burst into tears in the middle of a meeting. Thus, the more positive evaluation of men's emotions compared to women's emotions may be due to the different interpretation of emotionality in the context of male and female behavior. For men, emotions still seem to be more associated with ability, with good social and emotional skills, whereas for women emotions seem to be related with their vulnerability, and thus with their loss of control and powerlessness.

There was some support for our third hypothesis that men are less tolerant and less progressive in their beliefs concerning emotional behavior. We found that men agreed more with prescriptive beliefs concerning the emotional behavior of others than did women, however, no differences were found for the descriptive beliefs. In the case of stereotypical beliefs there were no differences between male and female respondents either. Thus, men have a greater tendency than women to endorse more blatant views concerning emotional displays of men and women, but these views are not more stereotypical than those endorsed by women. The fourth hypothesis had to be rejected. The notion that level of educational attainment would account for differences in beliefs about men's and women's emotional behavior was not borne out by the findings, although it has to be acknowledged that the student versus shop-worker comparison used to test this hypothesis does not sample the extremes of the continuum of educational attainment.

Although the beliefs participants endorsed concerning the emotional behavior of others did not differ in form or content from the beliefs they endorsed in relation to themselves, the mean levels of endorsement were, as anticipated, markedly higher in the

latter case. We argued that this reflects the fact that respondents were less inclined to control for biased responses when answering questions about their own behavior than when answering questions about the behavior of a social group (especially an outgroup), and the fact that concrete examples of their own emotional behavior are available to them, thereby reducing their awareness of the need to rely on stereotypes and the corresponding need to control the use of this stereotype information. Other studies of sex differences in self-reports of emotional behavior (e.g., Grossman and Wood, 1993) have also found stereotypical results for the emotional behavior of men and women. Indeed, LaFrance and Banaji (1992) noted that stereotypical sex differences are especially large in self-reports (as opposed to observations) of emotional behavior.

To our knowledge this is one of the first empirical studies of beliefs (for an exception see Zammuner, 2000) about the emotional behavior of men and women. The finding that different beliefs are held as a function of the sex of the target person suggest that beliefs about emotion play an important role in the acquisition and practice of gender coded emotional behavior (Shields, 1995). Although we have not yet established that the different beliefs about the emotional behavior of men and women actually lead to (as opposed to result from) differences in the actual emotional behavior of men and women, the mere existence of these belief differences is likely at the very least to contribute to the maintenance of differences at the level of actual behavior. It is well established that beliefs have the potential to be self-fulfilling (Snyder, 1984), and that the tendency for the targets of beliefs to behave in a way that confirms these beliefs applies to beliefs about gender as well as to beliefs about race or intelligence. On these grounds it seems very likely that stereotypical emotion beliefs shape one's interpretations of and reactions to the emotional behavior of others, thereby influencing their current and future emotional behavior. Since we have shown that these beliefs are held even more strongly in relation to one's own emotional behavior, sex differences in emotional behavior may also be sustained by differences in men's and women's beliefs about their own emotions. The fact that men and women report different motives for regulating emotional expressions (Timmers, Fischer & Manstead, 1998) may be one consequence of these belief differences. The next step for research in this domain is to demonstrate that differences in beliefs about emotion do indeed have an impact on the way in which people judge and respond to the emotional

behavior of themselves and others, and thereby help to create and sustain sex differences in this behavior.

