

## **Ability versus vulnerability: Beliefs about men's and women's emotional behaviour**

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In the present research we investigated gender-specific beliefs about emotional behaviour. In Study 1, 180 respondents rated the extent to which they agreed with different types of beliefs (prescriptive, descriptive, stereotypical, and contra-stereotypical) regarding the emotional behaviour of men and women. As anticipated, respondents agreed more with descriptive than with prescriptive beliefs, and more with stereotypical than with contra-stereotypical beliefs. However, respondents agreed more with stereotypical beliefs about the emotional behaviour of women than with those about men. These results were replicated in Study 2 with a sample of 75 students and 80 nonstudents. In Study 3, a sample of 279 respondents rated the extent of agreement with the same items, this time with respect to their own emotional behaviour. A similar pattern of results was obtained, although agreement rates were higher than in Study 1 and 2.

There is evidence that social norms provide prescriptions for and regulate emotional experiences and behaviour (e.g., Baanders, 1997; Ekman & Friesen, 1969; Fischer & Jansz, 1995; Goffman, 1961; Harré & Parrott, 1996; Hochschild, 1983; Parkinson, 1991; Saarni, 1984). When an individual breaches these social norms, there is a chance that he/she will be negatively evaluated during social interaction (Forsyth, 1995). These emotion norms exist for the experience of emotions, that is, feeling rules (Hochschild, 1983; “you should not feel happy when someone has broken his leg”); however, they are more pronounced for expressive behaviour, that is, 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 behaviour. The robust finding that sex differences in emotions are more pronounced for emotional expressions than for

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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).

In addition, recent research also suggests that gender-specific norms and beliefs 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 retrospective self-reports about emotional incidents (Feldman Barrett, 1997; 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 one study for example, Feldman Barrett and colleagues showed that sex differences were found in retrospective, memory-based measures, but not in momentary ratings (Feldman Barrett, Robin, Pietromonaco, & Eyssel, 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).

In sum, 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 behaviour, for example, by showing that men and women are aware of the social sanctions that can be expected when deviating from gender-appropriate emotional behaviour. 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.

Studies on the differences in social reactions to negative emotional behaviour displayed by men or by women also suggest gender-specific norms. 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 are confronted with more rigid norms concerning their crying than girls. 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.

Most direct evidence for the differential role emotion norms play in the emotion regulation of men and women comes from a study 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 gender 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 believed to be more emotional, but they are also expected to 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, the extent to which they are culturally shared by men and/or women (Gordon, 1989), and the extent to which they are normative.

The first aim of the present research was to identify the *type* of beliefs. 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 behaviours in specific situations, and can be seen as a covert means of expressing prejudice. Applying this to gender stereotypes concerning 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 industrialised 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 programmes, in the popularity of the concept of ‘‘emotional intelligence’’ 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 nowadays 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 moralising in nature than prescriptive beliefs.

A second aim of this research was to study the *contents* of these beliefs. Do people still hold sex-stereotypical beliefs about the emotional behaviour of men and women or is there a shift towards less stereotypical or even contra-stereotypical views? The studies reviewed here have suggested that current stereotypical beliefs concerning gender differences in emotional behaviour are that women are more emotionally expressive than men (e.g., Fabes & Martin, 1991; Johnson & Shulman, 1988; Shields, 1984), especially that women are believed to smile more and to express more positive and communal feelings (Johnson & Shulman, 1988), but also more powerless emotions, such as fear, vulnerability, and sadness (Brody, 1997; Cornelius, 1982; Crester et al., 1982). Men, on the other hand, are believed to suppress their emotions, except in the case of powerful emotions (e.g., anger, aggression).

## Overview of the present studies

Below we present one pilot study and three main studies. In the pilot study we examined whether respondents differed in the extent to which they distinguish between items designed to tap beliefs about emotional behaviour that are prescriptive or descriptive in nature. The purpose of this pilot was to identify a set of prescriptive and descriptive beliefs for our further research. The aim of Study 1 was to test in a group of student respondents: (1) the extent of agreement with different type of beliefs about emotional behaviour: prescriptive and descriptive; and (2) the stereotypical content of emotion beliefs. Masculine stereotypes concerning emotions were assumed to consist of displaying powerful behaviour, having power-related preferences, hiding powerlessness, conceiving emotional display as dysfunctional at work, and having negative attitudes towards emotions. Feminine stereotypes concerning emotion were assumed to consist of displaying powerless behaviour, hiding powerful emotions, sharing emotions, sensitivity-based competence, and women being relatively more emotional than

men. The aim of Study 2 was to replicate Study 1, and, in addition, to compare a student sample and a nonstudent 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 behaviour.

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 behaviour. Our hypotheses regarding the type of emotion beliefs about men's and women's behaviour therefore had a tentative character: (1) respondents should agree more with descriptive beliefs than with prescriptive beliefs about emotional behaviour; (2) respondents should agree more with stereotypical beliefs about emotional behaviour than with contra-stereotypical beliefs about emotional behaviour. 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 behaviour 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 nonstudent respondents should agree more with both prescriptive and stereotypical beliefs about emotional behaviour than would student respondents.

## STUDY 1

Our first aim was to study type and content of 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 concerning men's and women's emotional reactions, and whether male respondents agreed more with stereotypical beliefs than female respondents (Hypotheses 2 and 3).

## Method

### *Participants and procedure*

A total of 180 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 (see Appendix). 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 behaviours (e.g., "It is because women are emotionally sensitive that they are capable of raising children"); statements reflecting negative attitudes towards stereotype inconsistent emotional behaviour (e.g., "I do not like men who want to discuss their feelings"); or statements about relative differences between men and women with respect to emotional behaviour (e.g., "Men are more direct than women in their display of anger"). These descriptive beliefs included statements that are stereotypical for men and for women.

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) vs. "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. 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). In other words, the second version of the questionnaire contained the same items as the first version, 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 the Appendix for 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. In the instructions, a blunt statement was defined as "the opposite of a subtle statement. A blunt statement is undifferentiated and direct". The reliability of both the prescriptive and descriptive scales was highly satisfactory (alphas = .92 and .93, respectively). Respondents rated the prescriptive

scale ( $M = 3.86$ ,  $SD = 0.78$ ) as significantly more blunt than the descriptive scale,  $M = 3.16$ ,  $SD = 0.56$ ,  $t(44) = 9.12$ ,  $p < .001$ . 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. We constructed two scales by separately summing the scores on the prescriptive and descriptive items of both versions of the questionnaire 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.

## Results

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

As expected, respondents agreed significantly more with the descriptive than with the prescriptive scale,  $t(169) = 22.16$ ,  $p < .001$  (see Table 1 for the means).

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 did women,  $F(1, 167) = 16.40$ ,  $p < .001$ . No significant difference was found on the descriptive subscale.

TABLE 1  
Mean amount of agreement (standard deviations in parentheses) with prescriptive and descriptive beliefs by males and females: Study 1

Beliefs	Sex of respondent		
	Male ( $N = 66$ )	Female ( $N = 114$ )	Total ( $N = 180$ )
Prescriptive	2.14 <sup>a</sup> (0.74)	1.69 <sup>b</sup> (0.80)	1.86 (0.73)
Descriptive	2.94 <sup>c</sup> (0.72)	2.86 <sup>c</sup> (0.63)	2.89 (0.66)

Note: Different superscripts refer to significant differences between groups.

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

*Prescriptive beliefs.* In order to test whether the stereotypical content of the prescriptive beliefs was seen as applying differently to women than to men, we constructed two subscales (see the Appendix for a full overview of the items used in the various scales).<sup>1</sup> One scale consisted of stereotypical masculine beliefs reflecting *intolerance of displays of powerlessness*. Examples of items in this scale are: “(Wo)men should not show their sadness; (Wo)men should not show their fear” ( $\alpha = .88$ ). The second scale consisted of stereotypical feminine beliefs reflecting “*intolerance of displays of power*”, containing, for example: “Women should not be aggressive” ( $\alpha = .58$ ). Multivariate analysis with sex of target and sex of respondent as the factors and the two subscales as dependent variables revealed a significant main effect,  $F(2, 173) = 10.31, p < .001$ . Univariate analyses showed that respondents did not apply the stereotypical masculine belief subscale differently to men than to women. However, the stereotypical feminine belief subscale was seen as more applicable to men than to women,  $F(1, 174) = 14.30, p < .001$  (see Table 2). No sex of respondent effects were found.

*Descriptive beliefs.* Eight subscales were constructed with reliabilities ranging from .50 to .73. Not all items of the questionnaires were included in the subscales,<sup>2</sup> for both statistical (i.e., alphas were too low) and practical reasons (in some cases a content domain was only represented by one item. The following four scales measured stereotypical masculine beliefs. *Displaying powerful emotions* included, for example, the following items: “Men are more direct in expressing anger than women”; “Men show their pride in their accomplishments more than women”. *Power-related preferences*, including, for example: “Men like action movies more than women, because they are more able to identify with that kind of movie”. *Negative attitudes towards emotional behaviour* comprised items like: “I do not like emotional men”; “I do not like to discuss my feelings with a man”. The fourth stereotypical masculine scale *Displaying emotions is dysfunctional at work*, included for example: “Occu-

<sup>1</sup> Three items (“Emotional (wo)men are not real women”, “(Wo)men who express their anger are weak”, and “aggressive (wo)men are not real women”) were deleted, because they decreased the reliabilities of the scales significantly.

<sup>2</sup> The following items were not included: “The difference between men and women in their emotionality is an invariable fact”; “(Wo)men who become angry quite often, better not choose a nursing job”; “It is hard to discuss with (wo)men because they get emotional so quickly”; “When (wo)men are together they speak about almost everything, except of their feelings”; “(Wo)men are more emotional than men”; “(Wo)men are less able than (wo)men to distinguish emotional arguments from rational arguments”; “(Wo)men love tearjerkers (movies)”; “(Wo)men who cry while watching a movie are sympathetic”; “(Wo)men are more sensitive than men”.



TABLE 2  
Mean (standard deviations in parentheses) amount of agreement with  
prescriptive and descriptive beliefs about men and women: Study 1

	<i>Sex of target</i>	
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
<i>Prescriptive subscales</i>		
Intolerance of power displays	3.17 (1.20)	2.48 (1.26)
Intolerance of powerlessness displays	1.70 (0.83)	1.60 (0.62)
<i>Descriptive subscales</i>		
<i>Stereotypical masculine:</i>		
Displaying powerful emotions	4.67 (1.08)	2.74 (0.93)
Power-related preferences	3.22 (1.37)	1.71 (0.76)
Negative attitudes towards emotional behaviour	2.42 (1.05)	2.91 (1.05)
Displaying emotions is dysfunctional at work	2.18 (0.92)	2.51 (1.06)
<i>Stereotypical feminine:</i>		
Displaying powerless emotions	2.28 (0.86)	3.97 (1.19)
Sharing emotions	2.78 (0.96)	3.40 (0.81)
Relative emotionality	2.86 (0.96)	3.66 (1.18)
Sensitivity-based competence	3.22 (1.35)	2.17 (0.91)

pations in which it is necessary to keep a cool head, like police officer, neurosurgeon or jet fighter pilot, are less suitable for women because they are not able to do this.”

The following four subscales reflected stereotypical feminine beliefs. *Displaying powerless emotions*, included items like “Women are more fearful by nature than men”; “Women need more support when they are sad than (wo)men”. *Social sharing of emotions* consisted of the following items: “When women are together, all they talk about is their feelings”. *General emotionality* contained items like: “Women are offended more easily than men”; “Women are emotionally more unstable than men”. *Sensitivity-based competence* contained items like “Because women are more sensitive than men, they are more suitable for nursing jobs”; “It is functional to have (wo)men in the board of directors, because women are sensitive for the needs of employers”.

Multivariate analysis of variance with sex of target and sex of respondent as the factors and the eight subscales as the dependent variables revealed a significant multivariate effect,  $F(7, 168) = 47.37$ ,  $p < .001$ . With respect to *stereotypical masculine beliefs*, the univariate analyses showed that the effects were significant for all four subscales. Respondents were more likely to believe that men display more powerful emotional behaviour than women,  $F(1, 175) = 159.75$ ,  $p < .001$ , and that men have more power-related preferences than

women,  $F(1, 175) = 80.55$ ,  $p < .001$ . However, they also believed that the dysfunctionality of displaying emotions at work is more applicable to women than to men,  $F(1, 175) = 4.70$ ,  $p < .05$ . Respondents also agreed more with negative attitudes towards emotional behaviour when the target was female than when the target was male,  $F(1, 175) = 10.82$ ,  $p < .01$  (see Table 2 for the means). No sex of respondent effects were found.

With respect to *stereotypical feminine beliefs* the univariate analyses also showed significant effects for all subscales. Respondents were more likely to believe that women are relatively more emotional than are men,  $F(1, 175) = 35.82$ ,  $p < .001$ , that women display more powerless emotional behaviour than do men,  $F(1, 175) = 118.69$ ,  $p < .001$ , and that women share their emotions more than do men,  $F(1, 175) = 21.19$ ,  $p < .001$ . In contrast with the expected stereotypes, however, sensitivity-based competence was endorsed more to men than to women,  $F(1, 175) = 37.38$ ,  $p < .001$ . Again, no sex of respondent effects were found.

Finally, in order to investigate the overall agreement with masculine and feminine stereotypes, we constructed four subscales, 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 analysed 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. Respondents agreed significantly more with stereotypical items about women ( $M = 3.32$ ,  $SD = 0.99$ ) than with stereotypical items about men,  $M = 2.66$ ,  $SD = 0.72$ ,  $t(92) = 10.89$ ,  $p < .001$ . No sex of respondent effects were found. Moreover, respondents agreed more with contra-stereotypical items about men ( $M = 2.59$ ,  $SD = 0.61$ ) than with contra-stereotypical items about women,  $M = 2.21$ ,  $SD = 0.69$ ,  $t(89) = 7.74$ ,  $p < .001$ . Again, no sex of respondent effects were found.

## Discussion

The first hypothesis was confirmed. Respondents agreed significantly more with descriptive beliefs than with prescriptive beliefs about emotional behaviour. The second hypothesis stated that respondents would agree more with stereotypical than with contra-stereotypical beliefs. This hypothesis was only partly confirmed. Participants seem to hold more stereotypical beliefs concerning the emotional behaviour of women than concerning the emotional behaviour of men. The analysis of the specific subscales showed that, in line with feminine stereotypes, women are seen as more emotional, they are expected to display more powerless emotional behaviour; to share their emotions more with others; and to be judged as more dysfunctional when display-

ing their emotions at work. Moreover, respondents' ratings also reflected more negative attitudes about emotional behaviour of women than of men. In contrast, beliefs about men's emotional behaviour were less negative and more diverse, in the sense that participants endorsed both stereotypical and contra-stereotypical beliefs about men. Thus, they believed more strongly that men (as compared to women) express powerful emotional behaviour, and that they have power-related preferences, but at the same time respondents were more likely to agree that men have a greater competence due to their sensitivity. Finally, with respect to our third hypothesis, we found that men agreed significantly more with prescriptive beliefs than did women. This implies that men take a more moralising stance with respect to the emotional feelings and behaviours that they believe to be appropriate for men and women. However, this did not apply to the stereotypical content of the belief items for which we did not find any sex of respondent effect. Thus, men may be less tolerant, but they do not differ from women in the contents of their beliefs concerning male and female emotions. In conclusion, these findings suggest that stereotypical views on women's emotions are more broadly endorsed, including a negative attitude towards their emotionality. Stereotypes about the emotions of men seem to be both more positive and more diverse, including even contra-stereotypical views, such as the idea that men are believed to be more sensitive than are women.

## 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 types 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 (Hypothesis 4).

### Method

A total of 75 students were recruited for the student subsample (39 men and 36 women, different majors, average age 23 years). Respondents in the nonstudent subsample, 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 ( $M = 3.15$ ,  $SD = 0.62$ ) than with the prescriptive scale,  $M = 1.99$ ,  $SD = 1.74$ ,  $t(143) = 24.65$ ,  $p < .001$ . 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.

### *Agreement with stereotypical vs. contra-stereotypical items*

We next constructed two scales, one based on stereotypical items ( $\alpha = .90$ ) and one based on contra-stereotypical items ( $\alpha = .88$ ). Respondents agreed more with the stereotypical scale ( $M = 3.19$ ,  $SD = 0.73$ ) than with the contra-stereotypical scale ( $M = 2.29$ ,  $SD = 0.61$ ),  $t(143) = 17.29$ ,  $p < .001$ . A multivariate analysis of variance with type of respondent (student vs. shop worker) and sex of respondent (male vs. female) as factors revealed no significant 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. Alphas of these subscales ranged from .77 to .86. We first analysed 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. Respondents agreed significantly more with stereotypical items about women ( $M = 3.70$ ;  $SD = 0.79$ ) than with stereotypical items about men,  $M = 2.69$ ;  $SD = 0.82$ ,  $t(145) = 18.61$ ,  $p < .001$ . However, in this study men ( $M = 2.93$ ;  $SD = 0.78$ ) agreed more with stereotypical items about men than did women,  $M = 2.49$ ,  $SD = 0.80$ ,  $t(150) = 3.46$ ,  $p < .001$ . Respondents also agreed more with contra-stereotypical items about men ( $M = 2.48$ ;  $SD = 0.64$ ) than with contra-stereotypical items about women,  $M = 1.95$ ;  $SD = 0.63$ ,  $t(151) = 13.00$ ,  $p < .001$ , but here no sex of respondent effect was 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, although they did agree more with stereotypical beliefs than did women. The findings with respect to the stereotypical or contra-stereotypical form of the beliefs were also replicated: There is more agreement on stereotypes concerning women's emotions than concerning men's emotions.

## STUDY 3

One frequent explanation for sex differences in emotional behaviour 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. Studies 1 and 2 have shown that stereotypical beliefs about the emotional behaviour of men and women 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), for example found that personal adherence to specific emotion beliefs influenced both the intensity and the display of emotion, whereas mere 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 emotion beliefs are endorsed will vary as a function of whether one is judging one's own behaviour versus that of a generalised other. Stereotypes are generalisations 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, 1986; 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 stereotypical beliefs (especially prescriptive ones) concerning emotional behaviour. 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. 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 gender 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 with contra-stereotypical beliefs about their emotional behaviour.

## Method

### *Participants and material*

A total of 279 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. This time, 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 equivalent to sex of target. We omitted the items concerned with negative feelings about the emotional behaviour 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 be translated into the first person form without sounding artificial. The questionnaire as used in the present study contained 48 items, of which 12 were 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).

We first 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. For our further analyses, we constructed two other scales, one based on items stereotypical for men ( $\alpha = .80$ ), the other based on items stereotypical for women ( $\alpha = .80$ ). We also constructed 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" ( $\alpha = .61$ ). Because some items had been omitted from the questionnaire, there were fewer subscales concerning the

descriptive beliefs than in Study 1. We constructed five subscales, with alphas ranging from .52 to .65.

## Results

### *Agreement with prescriptive vs. descriptive beliefs*

As expected, respondents endorsed the descriptive beliefs ( $M = 3.75$ ;  $SD = 0.46$ ) more strongly than the prescriptive beliefs,  $M = 3.02$ ;  $SD = 1.09$ ,  $t(266) = 12.18$ ,  $p < .001$ . A 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 vs. contra-stereotypical items*

*t*-Tests with the stereotypical masculine scale and the stereotypical feminine scale and sex of respondent as factor, showed that men were significantly more likely than women to endorse masculine stereotypical items,  $t(274) = 2.96$ ,  $p < .01$ . Similarly, women were significantly more likely than men to endorse feminine stereotypical items,  $t(270) = 3.11$ ,  $p < .01$ . Women's endorsement of the feminine stereotypical items was also significantly greater than their agreement with the masculine stereotypical items,  $t(195) = 8.39$ ,  $p < .001$ . However, men were no more likely to agree with the masculine stereotypical items than with the feminine stereotypical items (see Table 3 for the means).

*Prescriptive beliefs.* Multivariate analysis of variance with sex of respondent as factor and the two scales concerning intolerance of power and intolerance of powerlessness displays as the dependent variables revealed a marginally significant multivariate effect of sex of respondent,  $F(2, 276) = 2.81$ ,

TABLE 3  
Mean (standard deviations in parentheses) amount of agreement with masculine and feminine stereotypical beliefs as a function of sex of respondent: Study 3

	<i>Sex of respondents</i>	
	<i>Men</i> ( $N = 71$ )	<i>Women</i> ( $N = 208$ )
Masculine stereotypes	3.48 <sup>a</sup> (0.71)	3.19 <sup>b</sup> (0.77)
Feminine stereotypes	3.45 <sup>a</sup> (0.56)	3.72 <sup>c</sup> (0.53)

*Note:* Different superscripts refer to significant differences between groups.

$p < .07$ . Univariate analyses showed that men were more likely than women to agree with the belief that displaying powerful emotions, such as aggression, is unacceptable for themselves,  $F(1, 277) = 5.46$ ,  $p < .05$ . Male and female respondents did not differ with respect to the intolerance for the display of powerless emotions (see Table 4 for the means).

*Descriptive beliefs.* Multivariate analysis of variance with sex of respondent as factor and the five subscales as dependent variables revealed a significant multivariate main effect,  $F(5, 276) = 7.61$ ,  $p < .0001$ . Univariate analyses showed significant effects for three subscales (see Table 4 for the means). Men were more likely than women to agree that they display powerful emotional behaviour,  $F(1, 280) = 4.96$ ,  $p < .01$ ; women were more likely than men to judge their emotional displays as dysfunctional at work,  $F(1, 280) = 8.96$ ,  $p < .01$ ; and men were more likely than women to agree that they have power-related preferences,  $F(1, 280) = 12.41$ ,  $p < .001$ . Displaying powerful emotional behaviour and having a sensitivity-based competence was not judged to be differently applicable by 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, but in agreement with Study 2, there was no effect of

TABLE 4  
Mean (standard deviations in parentheses) amount of agreement  
with prescriptive and descriptive beliefs about one's own emotions:  
Study 3

	<i>Sex of respondents</i>	
	<i>Men</i> ( <i>N</i> = 71)	<i>Women</i> ( <i>N</i> = 208)
Prescriptive		
Intolerance of power displays	3.67 (1.22)	3.30 (1.23)
Intolerance of powerless displays	2.80 (1.10)	2.64 (1.27)
Descriptive		
Displaying powerless emotions	3.95 (0.82)	4.23 (0.95)
Displaying powerful emotions	4.02 (1.07)	3.44 (0.95)**
Emotions are dysfunctional at work	2.22 (0.83)	2.61 (0.99)**
Having power-related preferences	2.46 (1.52)	1.88 (1.06)***
Sensitivity-based competence	4.64 (1.21)	4.53 (1.15)

\*\*\* $p < .0001$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ .



sex of respondent on extent of agreement with prescriptive beliefs. Turning to agreement with stereotypical or contra-stereotypical contents of beliefs, the results are broadly consistent with those of Study 1, although the means were again much higher than in Study 1.

One important difference with Study 1 is that there is no difference between men and women in the extent to which they agree with items concerning stereotypical feminine emotions. Whereas the results of Study 1 showed that respondents believed that women display more powerless emotional behaviour than do men, the results of Study 3 do not confirm this expectation: No sex differences were found with respect to powerless emotion displays. Further, whereas respondents in Study 1 believed that men would be more suitable for jobs and roles that require emotional sensitivity, a sex difference in this direction was not found in Study 3. Overall, the present study shows that the beliefs people endorse about emotional behaviour of other men and other women do not differ greatly with respect to type or content from the beliefs people endorse about themselves. The largest difference between responding to belief statements about the emotional behaviour of others and the same belief statements concerning one's own emotional behaviour is the extent of agreement. Respondents gave higher ratings on items concerning their own emotional behaviour than did respondents in Study 1, who were asked to rate beliefs concerning the emotional behaviour 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 behaviours, 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 behaviour. 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 may have changed such that 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. Moreover, the rise of emotion television, and the increasing focus on the importance of expressing and communicating emotions in Western culture during the last decades may also have added to this effect. Second, the greater cultural awareness of the unacceptability of outgroup stereotyping has led many people in Western countries to be cautious in making generalisations 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) and this norm also seems to apply to the emotional life of men and women.

Our second hypothesis was that people would agree more with stereotypical beliefs than with contra-stereotypical beliefs about emotional behaviour. This hypothesis was also confirmed: Respondents in all studies agreed more with stereotypical beliefs than with contra-stereotypical beliefs. This is consistent with other findings that stereotypes concerning gender differences are still quite widely held (Brody, 1997; Fischer, 1993; LaFrance & Banaji, 1992). However, we also found that this greater endorsement of stereotypical beliefs was not symmetrical for male and female targets. Both male and female respondents generally held more stereotypical views about the emotions of women than of men. Thus, women are still seen as the emotional sex, whereas men are no longer seen as the unemotional sex. Women are expected to display powerless emotions, like sadness and disappointment, to talk a lot about emotions with others, and to show emotion at work such that it becomes dysfunctional. This emotional repertoire of women is not evaluated very positively, given that respondents have more negative attitudes towards women displaying emotions than towards men displaying emotions. Men on the other hand are not solely perceived from a stereotypical perspective. They are seen as displaying more powerful emotional behaviour, and having more power-related preferences, but they are also believed to have emotional sensitivity, even more than do women. This makes them suitable for stereotypically female roles, such as nursing, caring for children, *in addition to* stereotypical masculine roles and jobs. Thus, beliefs about women's emotional behaviour conform quite closely to the classic stereotype of the "emotional woman", whereas beliefs about men's emotional behaviour suggest a greater tolerance of departures from the stereotype of the "unemotional man".

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 behaviour can be seen as skilled behaviour rather than merely a display of irrationality or weakness. Goleman (1995) for example has argued that emotional competence is highly 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 and empathic style of communication, whereas in thinking about women who express their emotions, 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 remain linked to stereotypical femininity, that is, to their vulnerability, and thus to their loss of control and power.

Interestingly, this greater distancing from the male stereotype is not reflected in men's views concerning their own emotions and emotional behaviour.

Although they are less tolerant towards the expression of their own powerful emotions than are women, they still think that they display more powerful emotions than do women, and they do not believe to have a sensitivity-based competence to the same degree as do women. This discrepancy suggests that the stereotypes about men more strongly reflect changing cultural norms than the self-reported emotional behaviour justifies. Whereas the beliefs about men's emotions in general also reflect contra-stereotypical views, these are not found in men's judgements of their own emotional behaviour. In other words, men's own emotions seem to lag behind the changing cultural norms in Western culture. Furthermore, the mean levels of endorsement to stereotypical masculine or feminine beliefs were, as anticipated, markedly higher when applied to one's own emotions. We argued that this reflects the fact that respondents were less inclined to control for biased responses when answering questions about their own behaviour than when answering questions about the behaviour of a social group (especially an outgroup), 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 gender differences in self-reports of emotional behaviour (e.g., Grossman & Wood, 1993) have also reported stereotypes concerning the emotional behaviour of men and women. Indeed, LaFrance and Banaji (1992) noted that stereotypical gender differences are especially large in self-reports (as opposed to observations) of emotional behaviour.

There was some support for our third hypothesis that men are less tolerant and less progressive in their beliefs concerning emotional behaviour. We found that men agreed more with prescriptive beliefs concerning the emotional behaviour of others than did women, however, no differences were found for the descriptive beliefs. We also found in one study that men agreed more with stereotypical beliefs about men, albeit not about women. Thus, men have a slightly greater tendency than women to endorse more blatant and stereotypical views concerning emotional displays, especially with regard to their own sex.

Finally, 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 behaviour 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.

To our knowledge, this is the first empirical study of beliefs about the emotional behaviour of men and women. The finding that different beliefs are held as a function of the sex of the target person suggests that beliefs about emotion play an important role in the acquisition and practice of gender-coded emotional behaviour (Shields, 1995). Although we have not yet established that the different beliefs about the emotional behaviour of men and women actually lead to (as opposed to result from) differences in the actual emotional behaviour

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 behaviour. 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 behaviour of others, thereby influencing their current and future emotional behaviour. Because we have shown that these beliefs are held even more strongly in relation to one's own emotional behaviour, gender differences in emotional behaviour 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 behaviour of themselves and others, and thereby help to create and sustain gender differences in this behaviour.

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## APPENDIX A

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### *Stereotypical male beliefs (prescriptive)<sup>a</sup>*

- Men should not show their sadness.
- Men should not show their disappointment.
- Men should not show their fear.
- Men should not cry.
- Men should control their feelings.
- Men who express their fear are weak.
- Men who express their disappointment are weak.
- Men who express their emotions are weak.
- Men who express their sadness are weak.

### *Stereotypical female beliefs (prescriptive)*

- Women should not be aggressive.\*
- Women should not show their anger.
- I feel vulnerable when I show my anger (only used in Study 3)
- I feel vulnerable when I show my disappointment (only used in Study 3)
- I appear self-assured when I display my anger (only used in Study 3)
- It is good to show your emotions (only used in Study 3)
- It is healthy to express your emotions (only used in Study 3)

### *Stereotypical male beliefs (descriptive)*

#### *(1) Displaying powerful emotions*

- Men are more direct in expressing their anger than are women.
- Men show their pride about their accomplishments more than do women.\*
- Men are more able to hide their fear than do women.\*
- Men hide their fear by acting tough.
- I express my anger to show that I cannot be mocked.

#### *(2) Power-related preferences*

- Men like action movies more than women, because they are more able to identify with that kind of movie.<sup>b</sup>
- Martial arts are more suitable for men than for women, because they can express their aggression.

#### *(3) Negative attitudes towards emotional behaviour*

- I do not like emotional men.<sup>b,\*</sup>
- I do not like men who show their pride, because it is boasting behaviour.<sup>b,\*</sup>
- I do not like men who want to discuss their feelings.\*

I do not like jealous men.\*

When confronted with a crying man, I feel uncomfortable.\*

I do not like to discuss my feelings with a man.\*

Men who show too much that they are in love are too sentimental.<sup>b</sup>

I do not like men who cry easily, because I think it is manipulative behaviour.\*

I do not like men who respond with excessive enthusiasm, because it is too much.<sup>b,\*</sup>

Men bother other people with their feelings.\*

*(4) Dysfunctionality of emotions at work*

Emotional men are not functional in industrial life.<sup>b</sup>

Men who show their emotions at work are hard to take seriously.<sup>b</sup>

It is better that men who have a management position do not show their feelings

Occupations where it is necessary to keep a cool head, like police officers, surgeons, or jet fighter pilots are less suitable for women because they are not able to do this.<sup>b</sup>

When men become emotional easily, they are not suitable for management positions.<sup>b</sup>

It is not professional when a man cries at work.

*Stereotypical female beliefs (descriptive)*

*(1) Displaying powerless emotions*

Women need more support when they are sad than do men.

Women are more fearful by nature than men.

Women are warmer than men.<sup>b</sup>

Women do not dare to show their anger because they take into account other people's feelings.

*(2) Social sharing of emotions*

When women are together, all they talk about is their feelings.

Women talk more often about their emotions than men.

*(3) General emotionality*

Women fall more easily in love than men.

Women get jealous more easily than men.<sup>b,\*</sup>

Women are more emotionally unstable than men.<sup>b</sup>

Women are more sensitive than men.

Men are less complicated in their feelings than women.<sup>b</sup>

Women get angry more easily than men.<sup>b,\*</sup>

Women are offended more easily than men.<sup>b,\*</sup>

Women stay angry longer than men.

Women are more curious about their feelings than men.<sup>b</sup>

Women respond more enthusiastically than do men when you talk about something you like yourself.

*(4) Sensitivity-based competence/preferences*

Because women are more sensitive than men, they are more suitable for nursing jobs.

It is easier to talk with women about your feelings than with men.<sup>b</sup>

Because women are sensitive, they are capable of raising children.\*

It is functional to have a women in the board of directors, because they are sensitive for the needs of employees.

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<sup>a</sup> Contra-stereotypical items were created by changing "men" into "women" and vice versa.

<sup>b</sup> These items were deleted in the short version of the questionnaire used in Study 2; items signed with an asterisk (\*) were deleted in Study 3.

