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### 3. Men's and women's lay theories of emotion

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#### The function and contents of lay theories of emotion

What we believe about the social world, that is, how we conceptualize it, and how we feel towards it, contributes to shape how we deal with it. In turn, the information that results from our transactions with the social world serves to construct, modify, enlarge, or update our knowledge (e.g., Nisbett & Ross, 1980; Fiske & Taylor, 1991). The focus of this chapter is people's lay theories of emotion, specifically in relation to gender roles and identities. A lay theory can be defined as a (more or less coherent, rich, and structured) set of beliefs in relation to a given domain or object of our social world, ourselves included. The richness of a lay theory is expected to be related to the (culturally based) subjective salience of the object(s) it focuses upon, a hypothesis that has been verified in relation to other kinds of knowledge schemata, such as the self-concept (e.g., Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Lay theories of emotion are likely to be salient as well as extensive, because emotional experiences pervade our entire life, both directly and indirectly. The occasions to learn about emotion(s) are countless. We learn both from our own experiences, and from others' reaction to them, and by observing how, when and why (fictitious) others experience emotions, such as when a friend shares with us her emotional experience, or when we get to know emotional stories by reading a novel or watching a movie. Moreover, we are motivated to become emotionally competent, because, as most of us discover quite early in life, emotional incompetence is likely to result in social rejection, loneliness, greater stress, and so forth (e.g., Saarni, 1990).

Lay theories may include different types of emotion beliefs. *Aspecific emotion beliefs* focus on aspects of the superordinate category, such as, what conditions are likely to trigger an emotion in general (e.g., You get emotional if an event is important to you), or what it means to feel it (e.g., It is difficult to conceal an intense emotion). *Specific emotion beliefs* instead describe specific members of the category, such as, what kind of experience anger is (e.g., Anger is typically an intense, but short-lasting emotion), or what event types trigger jealousy. Finally, beliefs may be *context-free*, that is, general descriptions that hold independently of a specific emotion transaction, or *context-bound*. Examples of context-bound beliefs are: At work you need to control your anger, or It might be useful to let your partner know that you are angry with him). In general these beliefs are expected to be congruent with culturally based norms about the meaning, adequacy, and legitimacy of emotions (see also Camras & Allison, 1989; Conway & Bekerian, 1987; Fehr & Russell, 1984; Shaver, Schwartz, Kirson & O'Connor, 1987).

When individuals interpret, judge or predict an emotional transaction, the gender of the protagonist may be crucial for the contents of lay theories on emotion. In most cultures gender

roles and identities are associated with descriptive and prescriptive norms about almost every aspect of a person's life, emotional experiences included. To borrow a term from Levy (1984), we may argue that social categorization based on biological sex is 'hypercognized'. According to gender norms, women are expected to be nurturant, caring for others, interested in interpersonal relationships, in other words, to fulfill social roles that require a communal, expressive, and somewhat passive orientation. This orientation to a great extent presupposes emotionality. Men instead are expected to be active agents who give priority to impersonal goals and are capable of mastering their world, that is, to fulfill instrumental, agentic roles that require rationality (see, for instance, Brody & Hall, 1993; Deaux, 1985; Fabes & Martin, 1991; Wood, Christensen, Hebl & Rothgerber, 1997). In sum, gender role profiles imply different ways of dealing with the world, and the dichotomy emotionality-rationality is at their very core. We may therefore expect lay theories to include emotion beliefs that are gendered according to the implications of this dichotomy.

Note, however, that 'emotionality' is an ambiguous concept both in itself, and in its opposition to rationality, because it may imply quite different beliefs about the nature, significance, causes, and consequences of emotional experiences. If women are expected to be more emotional than men, does this mean that, in comparison with men, they have more intense emotions, longer-lasting emotions, more frequent emotions, emotions that occur in a larger variety of contexts, or in reaction to stimuli of lesser magnitude? Does 'emotionality' imply greater competence in emotion-related behaviors, such as expressing one's emotions and understanding others, or, does it instead imply emotional incompetence?

Furthermore, we need to consider how gender prescriptions in emotion beliefs are related to the *rationality norm*, a norm originally formulated by Greek philosophers about two millennia ago, whose "truth" has been stressed to date - for example, the norm is expressed in treatises on human conduct dating back to the "dark ages" (Calhoun & Solomon, 1984; Ruozi, 1994). The rationality norm stems from a conceptual opposition between two essential faculties of human beings, that is, reason and emotion, mind and heart. On the one hand, emotions are acknowledged as intrinsic to human nature in its transactions with the world; on the other hand, they are conceived as bad, irrational forces that bias people's appraisals, choices and behaviors. People, both men and women, should therefore appraise the world and act in/upon it according to their reason rather than their emotions. Given the long-standing salience of the rationality norm in Western culture, we might expect it to play a prominent role in people's lay theories of emotion.

In sum, lay theories of emotion may be expected to contain both ungendered and gendered beliefs. The latter are at least partially based on the fact that gender roles imply that men and women typically encounter, with a different frequency, events of a different nature (e.g., impersonal vs. interpersonal) that are associated with different emotional demands and consequences for men and women (see Deaux, 1984; Fischer, 1993; LaFrance and Banaji, 1992; Rosario, Shinn, March, & Huckabee, 1988; Shields, 1991; Wharton & Erickson 1993; Wood, *et al.* 1997). We thus need to ask when gender plays a crucial role in lay theories, as well as to what extent both men and women endorse the rationality norm, and to what extent does this norm colour or override gendered beliefs. We may expect people to invoke gendered beliefs mostly at the contextual level, namely, when specific features of emotional

transactions raise a concern more relevant for men rather than for women (or vice versa). Ungendered beliefs on the other hand are expected to play a prominent role either if gender is simply not salient, or when it is less salient than other variables.

The present chapter addresses these issues in terms of two questions. First, to what extent, and in relation to which aspects of emotion, do lay theories of emotion(s) comprise beliefs that are coherent with gendered norms? Second, do “theorists”, that is, men and women, hold similar or dissimilar (un/gendered) beliefs? In the next sections, I will address these questions by reporting various studies on lay theories of emotion, collected from Italian subjects.

## Studies of lay theories about the nature and adequacy of emotion

### *General aims and method*

Lay theories were investigated in two types of questionnaire studies that will be referred to as *open-answer* and *closed-answer* studies. Subjects, female and male university students at various faculties in Northern Italy, judged either one event (in six parallel open-answer studies) or several events (in a closed-answer study). The event was typical of a specific emotion type, namely Jealousy, Envy, Sadness, Pride, Joy, and (in the open-answer studies only) Anger. Events were described in a vignette format, as a personal narrative (for example: 'Paul and I are both employed by a local newspaper; we work on different issues, but both manage to be quite successful because of our writing style. The other day, while I was working at a column, Paul was called by the director. About an hour later he came back to our office and told me that he had been promoted chief-editor.'). The events within each emotion type differed in terms of their expected subjective salience, nature and adequacy of the reactions they elicited (see Table 1; for details and results, see Zammuner, 1994, 1995a-c, 1966a-b, 1998a-d; Zammuner & Frijda, 1994; Zammuner & Massai, 1998; Zammuner & Seminati, 1996).

**Table 3.1. Events prototypical of six Emotion types**

| Emotion  | Event label   | Event gist  |
|----------|---------------|---|
| Jealousy | Kiss          | P sees his/her partner kiss someone else  |
|          | Flirt         | P sees his/her partner flirt with someone else, in a public situation                         |
| Envy     | Equal skill   | P's colleague, as capable as P, tells P that s/he has just been promoted to a higher position |
|          | Greater skill | P's colleague, more capable ... promoted to a higher position                                 |
| Anger    | Break-up      | P's relationship breaks up: P is unjustly accused of 'unfaithfulness'                         |
|          | Holiday       | P's planned holiday cancelled because friend F changes his/her mind                           |
| Sadness  | Grandfather   | P's grandfather, with whom P grew up, dies  |
|          | Dog           | P's dog dies  |
| Pride    | Job           | P is selected for an important job among many applicants                                      |
|          | Partner       | P is congratulated by friends for his/her new partner   |
| Joy      | Lottery       | P wins a big amount of money on a lottery   |
|          | Trip          | P spends a pleasant day with friends at the seaside   |

Note: P is the event protagonist, the person who experiences the event

In each study, subjects answered several questions, such as, what are the emotional reactions to an event, what is their intensity, to what degree do emotions induce conflict and uncertainty in the experiencer, whether emotions are shared with others. Subjects were asked to make both 'typical' and 'adequate' attributions. Typical or descriptive beliefs were measured by asking people to describe how *in general* the protagonist of the described event would react. Next, participants were asked which reaction would be most adequate. This question was assumed to tap subjects' normative beliefs. The protagonists's sex either matched subjects' sex (in all the open-answer studies, and for half of the closed-answer subjects), or was of the opposite sex (for half of the closed-answer subjects).

In the open-answer studies, subjects were asked two questions: (a) 'What reactions would the protagonist in this vignette have?', and (b) 'What reactions would be adequate in this situation, in order to face it in the best way?'. In the closed-answer study, subjects answered four checklist questions two times, first in relation to 'typical' reactions, and then in relation to 'adequate' ones. In the open-answer studies answers were coded in four major categories: 1. *Emotions*: verbal labels that specify emotions, 2. *Cognitions*: thoughts, appraisals, and action tendencies the protagonist might experience in response to the event, 3. *Behaviors*: actual actions the protagonist would implement, and 4. *Physiological, visceral and expressive reactions*, such as fainting, blushing, feeling paralyzed, crying, and smiling. In the closed answer study, subjects could choose as many options as they wished from this list (see also the closed-answer study section , and Table 4). Answers to these questions, in both formats, were expected to provide information on the contents of subjects's lay theories.

### **The open-answer studies: Typical emotional reactions attributed by men and women to same-sex event protagonists**

The main results concerning men's and women's (N total = 1176<sup>1</sup>) lay theories of emotion elicited by events prototypical of six emotion types are summarized in Table 3; see Table 2 for examples of actual answers. To facilitate comparison across emotion types, as well as across open- and closed-answer studies, the (large number of) categories that were originally developed to code subjects' answers<sup>2</sup> were *recoded* into the answer categories used in the closed-answer study.

I will first report the general trends as regards both the richness and the contents of subjects' theories, as these trends provide a necessary background in evaluating the size and nature of gendered beliefs. On average, subjects mentioned about three typical reactions in answer to the question what reactions the protagonist in this vignette would typically have. Negative emotion types, especially sadness, jealousy, and envy events, elicited more answers than positive ones (Mean = 3.1, *vs.* 2.7). The answers referred to various emotion components (see also the examples in Table 2).

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### **Table 3.2. Examples of (partial) answers given by subjects in the open-answer studies**

### “Typical” Reactions

- 1 (...) After the *anger* [E] and the *jealousy* [E] perhaps one feels *indifference* [E], which is surely just a way to overcome the crisis [JEALOUSY: KISS]
- 2 After I saw it [the partner's flirt], I would feel *cold* towards him [E] and I would *take on an attitude of behavioural rigidity* [B] until I would be able to *get an explanation of the fact from him* [B]; *with the girl I would be detached* [B, E] but *I would not avoid her* [B], moreover *I would not hide from others my annoyance* [B, E] [B] and my *embarrassment* “ [E] [JEALOUSY: FLIRT]
- 3 Initially the protagonist would feel a diffuse sensation of *interior pain* [E], then she would *try and understand if she has misinterpreted the situation* [C]. If she cannot explain to herself her husband's behaviour she would feel *insecure* [E] and feel a *sense of inferiority* [E]. Afterwards, she would try to react [to the situation] by *attempting*, by means of verbal but mainly of nonverbal behaviours, *to make her husband feel the same sensation by her getting close to another man*” [B] [JEALOUSY: FLIRT]

### “Adequate” Reactions

- 1 I think the best is to *go away* [B] and later *ask him for explanations* [B] [about the event] *without making a scene* [B] [JEALOUSY: KISS]
- 2 *Interfer in the conversation between the two of them* [B] in order to make her pay attention to him [the protagonist] and to *make her understand that he is jealous* [E] [JEALOUSY: FLIRT]
- 3 After a first moment of discomfort [E], she helps her parents organize the funeral [B] ... [SADNESS: GRANDFATHER]

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Concepts expressed in each answer, here italicized, were coded as: E: Emotion; B: Behavior; C: Cognition. The judged Emotion type and event type are shown in square brackets at the end of each answer (see Table 1).

On average, *Emotions* were the most frequently mentioned category, whereas *Physiological, visceral, and expressive reactions* were the least frequent. The frequency of *Cognitions* and *Behaviors* varied according to the valence and nature of the events (see Table 3). For example, *Behaviors* were much more salient for Jealousy than for Sadness, whereas *Cognitions* were quite unfrequent on average, except for Sadness (Sadness events also elicited most answers in terms of *Physiological, visceral, and expressive changes*). Moreover, the number of answers also varied significantly according to the specific event, both across and within emotion types. For instance, more answers were supplied for Sadness than for Anger events (for other results about event differences, see Zammuner 1988a, 1988b).

The fact that subjects' lay theories vary as a function of type of emotion and emotional event is best illustrated by a few examples. Emotion labels like *jealousy, envy, and resignation* are mentioned only in response to specific emotion types, whereas *sadness, anger* and *anxiety* are more likely to be mentioned whenever the event elicits an overall negatively valenced experience. In relation to Behaviors and Cognitions *controlling the expression of one's own emotions, trying to control one's own emotional reaction itself, and*

having difficulties in controlling one's emotional reaction are relevant responses mostly when the experience is negatively valenced, whereas *sincerely showing one's own emotions* and *talking about one's emotions* usually characterize positively valenced events (see Table 3).

**Table 3.3. Percentage frequencies, and means (in italics)<sup>a</sup> of Emotions, Cognitions, Behaviors, and Physiological, visceral, and expressive reactions attributed by women (F) and men (M) to same-sex event protagonists (open-answer studies).**

| Emotion type            | Joy         |             | Pride       |             | Sadness     |             | Jealousy    |             | Envy        |             | Anger       |             | All         |             |
|-------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Subjects/protagonist    | F           | M           | F           | M           | F           | M           | F           | M           | F           | M           | F           | M           | F           | M           |
| N subjects              | 120         | 120         | 107         | 88          | 120         | 120         | 173         | 128         | 60          | 60          | 40          | 40          | 620         | 556         |
| Mean N concepts         | <i>2.90</i> | <i>2.49</i> | <i>2.73</i> | <i>2.49</i> | <i>3.66</i> | <i>3.25</i> | <i>3.40</i> | <i>2.65</i> | <i>3.31</i> | <i>2.75</i> | <i>3.17</i> | <i>2.20</i> | <i>3.19</i> | <i>2.70</i> |
| <b>Emotions</b>         | <i>2.02</i> | <i>1.70</i> | <i>1.61</i> | <i>1.53</i> | <i>1.77</i> | <i>1.55</i> | <i>1.53</i> | <i>1.18</i> | <i>2.17</i> | <i>1.93</i> | <i>1.97</i> | <i>1.35</i> | <i>1.77</i> | <i>1.52</i> |
| Anger                   | ----        | -----       | ----        | -----       | 28          | 21          | 50          | 33          | 48          | 32          | 75          | 53          | 29          | 19          |
| Disappointment          | ----        | -----       | ----        | -----       | ----        | -----       | 23          | 23          | 8           | 13          | 37          | 25          | 9           | 8           |
| Surprise                | 18          | 12          | 12          | 16          | 9           | 7           | 21          | 21          | 15          | 23          | 15          | 15          | 15          | 15          |
| Joy                     | 112         | 96          | 69          | 53          | ----        | -----       | ----        | -----       | ----        | -----       | ----        | -----       | 37          | 34          |
| Gladness                | 27          | 25          | 51          | 50          | ----        | -----       | ----        | -----       | ----        | -----       | ----        | -----       | 14          | 13          |
| Insecurity              | 9           | 6           | 28          | 34          | ----        | -----       | 21          | 13          | ----        | -----       | 7           | 10          | 13          | 10          |
| Anxiety                 | 20          | 14          | ----        | -----       | 15          | 11          | 10          | 7           | 12          | 12          | 5           | 12          | 11          | 9           |
| Sadness                 | 5           | 6           | ----        | -----       | 112         | 110         | 13          | 4           | 37          | 15          | 57          | 20          | 33          | 29          |
| Resignation             | ----        | -----       | ----        | -----       | 10          | 5           | ----        | -----       | ----        | -----       | ----        | -----       | 1           | 1           |
| Jealousy/Envy           | ----        | -----       | ----        | -----       | ----        | -----       | 11          | 15          | 57          | 50          | ----        | -----       | 9           | 9           |
| <b>Cognitions</b>       | <i>0.32</i> | <i>0.35</i> | <i>0.33</i> | <i>0.38</i> | <i>1.06</i> | <i>1.07</i> | <i>0.45</i> | <i>0.37</i> | <i>0.48</i> | <i>0.32</i> | <i>0.27</i> | <i>0.40</i> | <i>0.51</i> | <i>0.51</i> |
| Control oneself         | ----        | -----       | 2           | 5           | 3           | 1           | 9           | 5           | 23          | 15          | 5           | 5           | 6           | 4           |
| Rationalize             | ----        | 3           | ----        | -----       | 4           | 8           | ----        | -----       | 2           | 2           | ----        | -----       | 1           | 3           |
| Reflect                 | 18          | 22          | 31          | 33          | 7           | 17          | 20          | 17          | 18          | 12          | 10          | 22          | 18          | 20          |
| Difficulty of control   | 12          | 6           | ----        | -----       | 76          | 59          | 16          | 15          | ----        | 2           | ----        | -----       | 21          | 18          |
| <b>Behaviors</b>        | <i>0.44</i> | <i>0.36</i> | <i>0.48</i> | <i>0.41</i> | <i>0.39</i> | <i>0.33</i> | <i>1.24</i> | <i>1.06</i> | <i>0.67</i> | <i>0.50</i> | <i>0.72</i> | <i>0.45</i> | <i>0.70</i> | <i>0.54</i> |
| Control expression      | ----        | -----       | ----        | 3           | 6           | 3           | 34          | 35          | 60          | 30          | 12          | 2           | 17          | 13          |
| Intervene               | 4           | 2           | ----        | 11          | 16          | 13          | 47          | 41          | 2           | 12          | 35          | 17          | 20          | 17          |
| Talk about emotions     | 26          | 22          | 30          | 15          | 8           | 12          | 16          | 13          | ----        | -----       | 17          | 7           | 17          | 13          |
| Show emotions           | 11          | 12          | 18          | 11          | ----        | -----       | 1           | 3           | ----        | -----       | ----        | -----       | 5           | 5           |
| Isolate oneself         | ----        | -----       | ----        | -----       | 9           | 5           | ----        | -----       | ----        | -----       | 7           | 17          | 2           | 2           |
| Leave situation         | ----        | -----       | ----        | -----       | ----        | -----       | 21          | 12          | ----        | -----       | ----        | -----       | 5           | 3           |
| <b>Physiological...</b> | <i>0.15</i> | <i>0.07</i> | <i>0.31</i> | <i>0.17</i> | <i>0.43</i> | <i>0.30</i> | <i>0.19</i> | <i>0.05</i> | <i>0.00</i> | <i>0.00</i> | <i>0.20</i> | <i>0.00</i> | <i>0.23</i> | <i>0.12</i> |

<sup>a</sup> The table does not report the frequency with which subjects supplied concepts that were originally categorized as «Other» due to their heterogeneity and low frequency of mention. The categories here listed are *not* the original categories that, within each Emotion type, were used to code subjects' answers.

In other words, lay theories conceptualize emotions (and even event) types in terms of specific “emotion profiles”. This is in line with previously reported studies on emotion-specific knowledge structures (e.g., Shaver et al., 1987; Frijda, Kuipers & ter Schure, 1989). The (culturally based) salience of a given emotion transaction type defines how articulated or rich is the knowledge people have about it (e.g., Mesquita & Frijda, 1992; Averill, 1980).

However, subjects' answers also reflect some aspecific-emotion beliefs (see examples in Table 2), for instance that an emotional reaction typically includes an appraisal, the experience of one or more emotions of varying intensity and duration, as well as the (wish to) enact certain behaviors, and the attempt to regulate one's emotions.

### *Gender differences*

Women generally supplied more answers than did men (on average 3.2 answers, vs. 2.7), both for positive and negative emotion types. This difference is due the fact that women expressed a greater number of answers that referred to the categories *Emotions*, *Behaviors*, and *Physiological, visceral and expressive* reactions (see Table 3). As regards the number of answers that were coded as *Cognitions*, men's answers outnumbered women's for Joy, Pride and Anger, whereas the reverse pattern was obtained for Jealousy and Envy. Thus, women appear to have richer emotion theories than men, which can be interpreted as reflecting the gender-congruent norm of women's greater emotionality, at least if we take the norm to mean that women have greater emotional expertise, possibly because they learn to be more sensitive towards their own and others' emotions.

Factorial analyses, performed on the original categories in which subjects' answers were coded, as well as analyses performed on the recoded data shown in Table 3, confirmed that beliefs varied substantially as a function of event and emotion type. For example, two factors, the first differentiating positive from negative emotion types, the second distinguishing Sadness from Jealousy, Anger, and Envy, explained about 70% of the variance. Subjects' sex, instead, significantly influenced beliefs only to a small extent: In the original data, subjects' sex explained roughly between 5% and 20% of the variance. In other words, overall lay theories seem ungendered<sup>3</sup> in that men and women attribute similar reactions to male and female event protagonists. However, subjects also expressed gendered beliefs, both gender-congruent and gender-incongruent.

### *Gender congruency and incongruency of emotion lay theories*

Women on average more often mentioned *anxiety*, *insecurity*, and *sadness*. They also more often mentioned the positively toned emotions *joy* and *gladness* - the latter only when the event focussed on interpersonal relationships, such as spending a day with friends, or getting their "approval" of one's new romantic partner. Incongruent with gender norms was men's greater mention of *anxiety* in relation to Anger events, and of *joy* when an equally capable colleague was promoted, and of *gladness* when the event implied a focus on the self, as in getting a job. Further, *anger*, a stereotypically male emotion, was always listed more frequently by women than by men. Counter-stereotypical was also the result that neither *jealousy* nor *envy* were mentioned more frequently by women than by men.

As regards Behaviors, women mentioned *talking about*, and *showing, one's emotions* either somewhat more frequently than men (for instance, when winning money in a lottery, or getting a new job), or as frequently (Partner event). Subjects' belief that women express their emotions more than do men is also reflected in the finding that women mentioned more often



expressive reactions such as crying and smiling. Men on the other hand, mentioned the behaviors *showing, and talking about, one's emotions* somewhat more often than did women, but only in situations in which emotional expressions implying powerlessness are legitimate for both sexes, for example in reaction to the Kiss event, in which the protagonist faces a serious threat to his romantic relationship.

Gender-congruent beliefs were also found in relation to Cognitions. Men mentioned somewhat more often attempts to *rationalize* the event, and to *reflect* on it, whereas women more often mentioned *having difficulty in controlling their reactions to the event* (e.g., not being able to remain calm, feeling confused), a response that suggests a difficulty in mastering one's own emotions. However, women mentioned cognitive *attempts at emotional control* either as frequently as men did, or more frequently, in the case of Envy and Jealousy. Further, *intervening in/on* the situation, a behavior that suggests an agentic orientation, was mentioned more often by men when events were positive, but by women when they were negative. These latter results seem to be more inconsistent with gender stereotypical norms. However, overall the *type of cognitive beliefs* men and women hold (in contrast with their overall *frequency*, as earlier reported) is gender-congruent.

To create a more precise measure of gender-(in)congruency, each individual answer was recoded according to whether it was *gender-congruent* or *gender-incongruent* (neutral statements were coded as well; see Zammuner, 1998a). The coding schema, on the basis of which answers were categorized as stereotypical male or female, was developed on the basis of existing research literature. For example, anger, physically aggressive behaviors, instrumental coping, and emotional control were defined as stereotypical male reactions, whereas intra-punitive emotions, crying, and other expressions of emotion were coded as stereotypical female reactions (e.g., Brody & Hall, 1993; Cross & Madson, 1997; Eagly & Wood, 1991; Fabes & Martin, 1991; Fischer, 1993; Leaper, 1995; LaFrance & Banaji, 1992; Heise & Calhan, 1995; Ricciardelli & Williams, 1995; Shields, 1991; Whissell, 1996). Within and across each reaction macro-category gender-congruency scores were then summed and transformed into proportions. Within emotion types<sup>4</sup> scores were submitted to analyses of variance within and across categories.

The results (for details, see Zammuner, 1998a) showed that in reaction to Jealousy, Envy, and Pride men's and women's lay theories typically included gender-congruent and incongruent beliefs to a similar extent. For Sadness and Joy, instead, women expressed beliefs congruent with their own gender profile more frequently than men did, whereas men expressed gender-incongruent beliefs more frequently than women did. In other words, for Sadness and Joy women 'stick' to the female gender profile more than they do when judging other emotion types, whereas men 'cross-over' more than they do when judging other emotion types. The observed difference therefore implies a 'theoretical convergence' between men and women in that both sexes express a female-congruent emotion profile. This result can be accounted for by the fact that the emotional experience elicited by Sadness and Joy events is overall quite legitimate for both men and women. To illustrate, when someone dies, sadness, or numbness are normal, and it is perfectly appropriate to show them. By reporting that one would typically be sad, or cry, women express beliefs congruent with their own gender profile, whereas men express gender-incongruent beliefs.

These overall trends can be further specified by considering the extent to which subjects held stereotypical beliefs in relation to the specific emotion components (except for Physiological, visceral and expressive reaction beliefs, as they were both very infrequent, and etherogeneous). As regards *Emotions*, women expressed gender-congruent beliefs more frequently than men, for all emotion types except Pride - for the latter men mentioned more often stereotypical male emotions such as pride and triumph. Gender-incongruent beliefs were usually mentioned more frequently by men, except for Pride, in the case of which the sexes did not differ. With respect to *Cognitions*, men listed more often gender-congruent beliefs in relation to Jealousy and Pride events, and women in relation to Sadness; gender-incongruent beliefs on Emotions showed the opposite trend. The sexes did not differ in the type of Cognitions they assumed typical in the case of Envy and Joy. Gender-congruent beliefs concerning typical *Behavior* were listed more often by men for Jealousy and Envy, but by women for Joy; gender-incongruent beliefs on Jealousy showed the opposite trend. Men's gender-incongruent beliefs concerning Pride were more frequent than women's, whereas no gender differences were observed for Envy and Joy. Sadness, finally, did not elicit any gender difference in stereotypical or counter-stereotypical beliefs concerning typical behaviors. These analyses, furthermore, confirmed that the frequency of gender-congruent and gender-incongruent beliefs significantly varied as a function of emotion type - for example, Joy elicited gender-congruent lay theories the least, Sadness the most.

In sum, the results obtained in the open-answer studies show that young adults generally possess rich lay theories about typical emotional reactions to events, and conceptualize emotional reactions in terms of various components. Overall, men and women hold similar theories, and the majority of their emotion beliefs is ungendered. Gendered beliefs, both gender-congruent and gender-incongruent, were however reported. As I argued earlier on, gender-incongruent beliefs can be explained by a "cross-over" process. Women are likely to invoke gender-congruent (rather than incongruent) reaction profiles when feelings are involved, and to "cross over", that is, to adhere to the opposite gender profile, when cognitions or behaviors are involved. Men, in contrast, are much more likely to "cross-over" when feelings, rather than cognitions or behaviors, are concerned. When subjects cross over, they appropriate reactions that stereotypically define the opposite sex, thereby enriching one's own sex's repertoire of available reactions. However, the extent to which men's and women's beliefs are gender-(in)congruent, as well as the types of beliefs they report, is very much influenced by relevant emotion- and context-specific features.

### **The closed-answer study: Typical emotional reactions attributed by men and women to same-sex and cross-sex event protagonists**

Open-answer studies tell us how people conceptualize emotions in their own terms, rather than by choosing a pre-defined answer from a list. However, the flexibility of this format also constitutes its limit. Open answers might be biased by incomplete or slanted memory search (e.g., due to little motivation to comply with the task, unavailability in memory of the sought information, or low subjective relevance of this information), and by the extent to which subjects are able to verbalize their thoughts (e.g., Fowler, 1995; Zammuner, 1998d).

The method used in the closed-answer study allows us to verify the results obtained in the open-answer studies. Because subjects were asked to report typical reactions both for same-sex and for other-sex persons, it also allows us to specify to what extent theories about opposite-sex event protagonists resemble those about same-sex protagonists. Subjects (N=184) answered four checklist questions, one for each of the four macro-categories. Each answer category included various reactions, constructed on the basis of results obtained in the open-answer studies. For example, *joy* included happiness, euphoria, pride, and cheerfulness; *anxiety* included fear, anguish, dread. Each subject judged 5 events, one for each of the mentioned emotion types, Anger excluded (see Table 1). Within each sex (N=92), subjects made either same-sex or cross-sex attributions.

The results (see the 'Typical' columns of table 4) showed that subjects' answers on average comprised about 6 reactions, which is twice as many answers as had been reported by subjects in the open-answer studies (see Table 3). However, although the closed-answer format influenced the quantity of reported beliefs, it generally did not affect the contents of the beliefs<sup>5</sup>. Lay theories were in fact quite similar in their contents, and proportionally in their richness, to those reported by subjects in the open-answer studies.

#### *Gender differences and gender stereotyping*

On average, men and women expressed similar emotion beliefs in same- and cross-sex attributions (for details, see Zammuner, 1988c). However, gender-congruent beliefs were at times expressed. Men more frequently listed reactions that imply regulation attempts, such as *cognitive control of one's reactions*, *reflecting on the event*, and *controlling the behavioral expression of emotions* than did women. Women on the other hand more frequently listed *insecurity*, *sadness*, *disappointment*, *difficulty in facing the event*, *showing one's emotions*, *leaving the situation*, and various *physiological, visceral, and expressive changes*. As regards the event protagonist, males were attributed slightly more frequently than females *anger* and *surprise*, most cognitive reactions, and both *controlling the expression of emotions*, and *intervening* in the situation. Females on the other hand were attributed more often than males most emotions, especially *envy*, and *talking about*, and *showing, one's own emotions*, *isolating oneself*, and, most conspicuously, *difficulty in facing the event*, a reaction that was defined in the questionnaire as including *feeling confused, not being able to keep calm, being incredulous toward the event, or bewildered by it..* The only gender-incongruent results were that *insecurity* and *anxiety* were more frequently listed for male than for female protagonists, and the fact that women listed more often than men *anger*, and *intervening in the situation*.

In a few cases an interaction between subjects' and protagonists' sex was observed too. Women more than men characterized males as likely to both *leave the situation* and *intervene in it*, whereas men more than women attributed to males both *cognitive* and *behavioral control* reactions. Note, however, that men attributed these reactions more often than did women to female protagonists as well. In other words, men's emphasis on control reflects a *own-gender congruent bias*, that is, the tendency to attribute to the other sex reactions that are stereotypical for one's own sex. A own-gender congruent bias was evident in women's attributions too in that women more often mentioned emotions, *talking about emotions with others*, and the powerless tendency of *abandoning the field*. than did men for both male and

female protagonists. The bias did not apply for all beliefs, however - for instance, women attributed *anger* to females more often than men did.

In sum, (a) men and women hold similar rather than dissimilar theories about typical emotional reactions. (b) Subjects' theories overall are ungendered, quite similarly to the results obtained in the open-answer studies. (c) When men's and women's beliefs are gendered (rather than ungendered), they are influenced both by gender-congruent norms, and by an *own-gender* congruent bias. (d) The core of gendered beliefs seems to be defined by the control-non control, or rationality-emotionality dichotomy: Most typical of males is the wish or attempt to control emotional experiences and their expression, whereas most typical of females is a felt difficulty in rationally coping with the event. (e) Women's lay theories are somewhat richer than men's. However, the fact that this sex difference is proportionally much smaller in the closed-answer format than in the open-answer format leads us to hypothesize that motivational factors, rather than competence, play an important role in defining the richness of subjects' lay theories on emotions (see also Zammuner, 1998c).

### **Men's and women's normative beliefs about emotional reactions**

As I argued earlier on, people's descriptive lay theories may sometimes be in conflict with the prescriptive beliefs they hold. In particular, the attribution of emotionality to women is in conflict with the '*rationality norm*' that prescribes that people interact with the world according to their reason. The existence of conflicts between normative and descriptive lay theories can be assessed by analysing if there are discrepancies between "adequate" emotional reactions, the normative beliefs, and "typical" reactions, the descriptive beliefs (the latter might be hypothesized to reflect immediate, natural, or relatively unchecked emotional reactions). Because results from closed-answer studies have a more standardized format, and thus are more easily reported and interpreted than the open-answer results, I will only discuss the "adequate" beliefs that subjects reported in the closed-answer study -- when they answered 4 checklist questions identical to those from which they had selected "typical" reactions.

The results (see the 'Adequate' columns of table 4), showed that *physiological, visceral, and expressive reactions*, all negatively valenced emotions (e.g., *anger, disappointment, jealousy*), and the helpless, non-agentic behaviors *isolating oneself* and *leaving the situation* were less frequent than they had been as "typical" reactions. In other words, they were judged inadequate. Instead, positively valenced emotions, *talking about felt emotions* and *showing them, cognitively controlling oneself, rationalizing the event, and reflecting on it* were on the average more frequently than they had been as "typical" reactions. Overall, the results showed that subjects clearly distinguished "adequate" reactions from "typical" ones (significant multivariate Discrepancy effects were obtained for all Emotion types, and in relation to most emotion components). This differentiation is in line with the rationality norm: an adequate way of reacting to an emotional event is less emotional and more rational than typically is the case. This suggests that subjects believe that emotions ought to be regulated.

Table 3.4. Mean and percentage frequencies of “typical” and “adequate” reactions to an emotional event attributed by Male and Female subjects (M = 92; F= 92) to male (m) and female (f) protagonists (closed-answer study)<sup>a</sup>.

| REACTIONS                     | TYPICAL     |             |             |             | ADEQUATE    |             |             |             |
|-------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
|                               | F           | M           | F           | M           | F           | M           | F           | M           |
| Subjects                      |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |             |
| Event protagonists            | <b>f</b>    | <b>m</b>    | <b>m</b>    | <b>f</b>    | <b>f</b>    | <b>m</b>    | <b>m</b>    | <b>f</b>    |
| N Subjects <sup>b</sup>       | 460         | 460         | 460         | 460         | 460         | 460         | 460         | 460         |
| Mean N answers                | <i>6.30</i> | <i>6.19</i> | <i>6.43</i> | <i>6.30</i> | <i>5.95</i> | <i>6.01</i> | <i>6.04</i> | <i>5.94</i> |
| <b>Emotions</b>               | <i>2.24</i> | <i>2.17</i> | <i>2.34</i> | <i>2.23</i> | <i>1.93</i> | <i>1.92</i> | <i>2.02</i> | <i>1.87</i> |
| Anger                         | 18          | 19          | 20          | 15          | 11          | 9           | 15          | 10          |
| Disappointment                | 18          | 15          | 17          | 15          | 9           | 9           | 11          | 8           |
| Surprise                      | 26          | 25          | 28          | 24          | 24          | 23          | 26          | 20          |
| Joy                           | 39          | 40          | 45          | 46          | 44          | 40          | 43          | 42          |
| Gladness                      | 29          | 30          | 30          | 30          | 36          | 37          | 37          | 37          |
| Insecurity                    | 13          | 11          | 14          | 10          | 8           | 8           | 8           | 7           |
| Anxiety                       | 10          | 10          | 11          | 9           | 7           | 8           | 7           | 8           |
| Sadness                       | 30          | 28          | 30          | 29          | 23          | 26          | 26          | 23          |
| Resignation                   | 10          | 11          | 11          | 12          | 17          | 15          | 16          | 16          |
| Jealousy/Envy                 | 30          | 28          | 28          | 31          | 13          | 17          | 13          | 16          |
| <b>Cognitions</b>             | <i>1.27</i> | <i>1.33</i> | <i>1.24</i> | <i>1.32</i> | <i>1.46</i> | <i>1.46</i> | <i>1.40</i> | <i>1.52</i> |
| Control oneself               | 31          | 38          | 31          | 37          | 42          | 47          | 42          | 47          |
| Rationalize event             | 18          | 22          | 21          | 19          | 44          | 35          | 36          | 43          |
| Reflect on the event          | 33          | 36          | 33          | 35          | 50          | 47          | 46          | 51          |
| Minimize (Other)              | 6           | 9           | 8           | 7           | 5           | 6           | 7           | 4           |
| Difficulty in facing event    | 40          | 29          | 31          | 34          | 5           | 11          | 10          | 7           |
| <b>Behaviors</b>              | <i>1.41</i> | <i>1.38</i> | <i>1.48</i> | <i>1.45</i> | <i>1.40</i> | <i>1.38</i> | <i>1.39</i> | <i>1.37</i> |
| Control expression of emotion | 27          | 33          | 29          | 32          | 26          | 33          | 30          | 30          |
| Intervene to modify situation | 9           | 7           | 13          | 8           | 8           | 6           | 5           | 8           |
| Talk about emotions           | 34          | 35          | 35          | 38          | 49          | 44          | 47          | 46          |
| Show emotions                 | 46          | 43          | 45          | 45          | 52          | 46          | 48          | 50          |
| Isolating oneself             | 11          | 10          | 10          | 12          | 1           | 3           | 3           | 1           |
| Leave situation (Other)       | 14          | 10          | 15          | 11          | 3           | 4           | 5           | 2           |
| <b>Physiological..</b>        | <i>1.37</i> | <i>1.30</i> | <i>1.38</i> | <i>1.29</i> | <i>1.15</i> | <i>1.22</i> | <i>1.22</i> | <i>1.17</i> |

<sup>a</sup> The mean number of concepts supplied for the entire category is reported in Italics.

<sup>b</sup> The reported number of subjects is spurious, as in reality each subject judged 5 events in total, one for each Emotion type, within a repeated measure design.

Did men and women differ in what they considered as adequate reactions for their own versus the opposite sex, especially in the extent to which they endorsed the rationality norm? Overall, the answer is negative: normative beliefs were even more egalitarian than descriptive beliefs (similar results were obtained in the open-answer studies; see Zammuner 1988a). However, there was also evidence of gendered beliefs. The frequency and nature of gendered beliefs was a function of whether subjects made same-sex or cross-sex attributions. For example, *anger*, *disappointment*, *surprise*, *minimizing the event's seriousness*, and *leaving the situation* were characterized as male reactions more frequently than as female reactions only in cross-sex attributions by women. In other words, women more than men judged these emotions and behaviors more appropriate for males than for females. Further, *joy*, *controlling the expression of emotions*, *talking about*, and *showing emotions* differed in same-sex attributions more than they did in cross-sex ones. For example, men thought control to be an adequate reaction for other men, but less so for women, whereas women thought talking about emotions more appropriate for women than for men.

The most interesting result as regards gendered beliefs, however, is the fact that they often implied a violation of stereotypical gender-norms, especially for male protagonists. Both sexes more frequently mentioned *Physiological*, *visceral*, and *expressive reactions*, *sadness*, *cognitive difficulty in facing events*, and both the powerless behaviors of *isolating oneself* and *leaving the situation*. as adequate reactions for males than for females (*control of emotion expression* was the only gender-congruent behavior that was judged appropriate for males more often than for females). Both sexes, furthermore, judged *rationalizing the event* (more often attributed to males as a "typical" reaction), *reflecting on it*, and *intervening* in the situation (women had judged this as a "typical" male reaction) more often as adequate reactions for females than for males (*showing emotions* was the only gender-congruent adequate reaction for women).

In sum, on the whole subjects believe that rationalizing and controlling emotions are more adequate ways of reacting to emotion-inducing events than being and acting emotional. However, irrationality (that is, emotionality, non-control) seems to be excused more for men than for women. Women are in fact expected to be sensitive and thoughtful about how they emotionally react to events, in particular to be more 'in control', less emotional than they 'typically' are - note that in all studies, female protagonists were expected to feel more conflict over felt emotions, due to such causes as a reason-emotion opposition than male protagonists (see Zammuner, 1995b, 1998a, 1998d). Men are instead expected to be less rational, and less emotionally controlled than they 'typically' are, that is, they are allowed a greater "emotional freedom", or non-control, than they 'typically' display.

## **Conclusion**

The results obtained in the two sets of studies here reported help us gain a better understanding of how people conceptualize emotion(s). To summarize briefly, the results showed that young adults have articulate lay theories of emotion(s) that include beliefs that specify the nature of the emotional experience in terms of several components - such as, feelings, cognitions, behaviors, physiological and expressive changes, and regulation processes. Lay theories also specify how variations in emotion types or emotional events are

associated with variations in the components, as regards the duration and intensity of the emotional experience, the need to regulate it, and so forth. In other words, lay models include both aspecific-emotion knowledge about the superordinate category 'emotion', and emotion-specific context-bound knowledge, that is, beliefs about contextually defined instances of the category.

In contrast to results generally derived from studies on stereotypes, male and female participants in these studies generally did not differ in the richness of their emotion knowledge, nor in its actual contents. In other words, Italian men and women have similar lay theories that are largely composed of ungendered beliefs. This applied both for their descriptive and prescriptive beliefs. It is still an open question whether this egalitarian nature of subjects' beliefs is due to the specific population (and culture) that was studied, to the historical moment, to the method employed in the reported studies, to an interaction among these variables, or to yet other factors.

Gendered beliefs, however, did occur at a context-specific level, though more or less occasionally, and usually to a small extent. These gendered beliefs were often congruent with gender-norms; for example, *cognitive emotion-control* was more often attributed to men than to women, whereas *a difficulty in emotionally facing events* was attributed more often to women than to men. However, subjects also held gender-incongruent beliefs. When beliefs were about "typical" reactions, gender-incongruency often reflected an own-gender bias, that is, the tendency to attribute to both male and female protagonists those reactions that stereotypically characterize one's own sex. For example, men attributed *cognitive emotion-control* to females more often than did women, and women more often attributed *insecurity* to males than did men. When "adequate" reactions were at stake, gender-incongruent beliefs mostly reflected one of the following two processes: (a) adherence to the "rationality" norm, implying that both sexes more often selected "rational" than "emotional" reactions; (b) "gender cross-over", that is, the endorsement of reactions stereotypical for the opposite sex.

From a more general viewpoint, the results just reported suggest, I believe, that gender differences and similarities in lay theories can be discussed more meaningfully if we do not disregard the fact that emotional transactions are conceptualized according to both emotion specific and emotion aspecific beliefs, and according to beliefs that are to a great extent context-bound. In other words, we need to measure gendered beliefs by relying on theoretical approaches that take into account the structural and conceptual complexity of lay theories about emotions, especially the impact of "contextual" variations. Last but not least, the validity of the results and conclusions obtained in any given study needs to be assessed taking into account what population was tested, and with what method (e.g., question format; kind of experimental stimuli, answer categories, instructions, etc. offered to subjects) because these aspects crucially influence the comparability of measures across studies, and therefore the extent to which we can reach a real understanding of the issues at stake.

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## Notes

1. For “economy” reasons, the results reported in this chapter do not include data about all the Anger and Envy events.
2. Subjects typically gave “rich” answers to the two questions. Each meaningful answer segment was coded into an appropriate category using mostly a data-driven content analysis method - e.g., within each Emotion type, subjects' statements and labels were initially used to form categories. Most categories were later grouped together on the basis of their conceptual similarity (for examples of answers and coding categories see Zammuner 1995a-c, 1994). Inter-rater coding agreement was, on the average, above 0.75. All categories were then coded as instances of one of the 4 macro-categories (Emotions, Behaviors, etc.). Frequencies of each micro- and macro-category were computed, within each Emotion type and for each level of the independent variables. The influence of the independent variables was analyzed by subjecting micro-category raw frequencies to the Correspondence analysis factorial method (Lebart, Morineau & Fenelon, 1982). The richness of lay theories was assessed by recoding individual answers into binary scores and submitting them to analyses of variance - the score 1 indicated that a subject had supplied one concept within a given macro-category; for instance, an *Emotion* score of 3 indicated the mention of 3 emotions in total.
3. Similar results were obtained in cross-cultural replications of the open-answer studies (Carrera Levillain, Zammuner & Sanchez Colodron 1994; Zammuner & Fischer 1995; Zammuner, Arduino & Fischer 1996; Zammuner & Camerone 1998; Zammuner, Lo Manto & Maffei 1996), in self-attributions (Zammuner 1995a), and in self-reports of Jealousy events (Zammuner & Pellinghelli 1994; Zammuner & Scandroglio 1995).
4. Anger excluded, as the data were at the time not available.
5. A theoretically important exception is the much higher frequency with which subjects in this study attributed reactions of the *Physiological* category to the event protagonist. The fact that subjects are much more likely to mention Physiological, visceral and expressive reactions in a recognition (closed-answer) rather than in a production task



(open-answer), might be interpreted as showing that these reactions are not typically very salient elements in the conceptualization of emotional experiences.

6. The strategic nature of "adequate reactions" was supported by results obtained both in replication studies, and in the analysis of subjects' answers to other open questions that asked them to list causes for this or that behavior, cognition, feeling (e.g., Zammuner, 1994, 1996b; Zammuner & Camerone 1998; Zammuner, Arduino & Fischer, 1996)

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