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PERCEPTIONS OF OTHERS' EMOTIONAL EXPRESSIONS

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## **ABSTRACT**

How do perceptions of anger expressions differ for men and women? To investigate this question, I designed a 3 (emotional expression: open, PR, closed) x 2 (gender of protagonist) vignette study. Participants were 190 (95 men, 95 women) undergraduate students at the Pennsylvania State University. Participants were randomly assigned to a vignette condition, after which a brief questionnaire was completed. I predict perceptions of competence to be highest for female protagonists and for those displaying passionate restraint (PR) emotional expression as opposed to an open or closed display. Results did not support the research hypothesis. Instead, anger was found to confer competence equally for both women and men. No significant differences were found in perceptions of competence for different emotional expression types. Further research is necessary to investigate the relationship between gender, status and emotion expression type in relation to an observers' perceptions.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

In Western culture, there exists a troubling dichotomy surrounding emotional expression: are emotional displays typically perceived as signaling irrationality, or rather proof of the genuineness and authenticity that accompanies the human experience? Emotional expression is an essential part of the human experience, a quality signaling that we are not solely rational and cold-hearted beings, but have complex feelings and emotions. However, there is a widely held belief that emotion is the antithesis of rationality and productive behavior (Zawadzki, Warner & Shields, 2012). Thus when it comes to emotional displays, we are faced with a challenge. Display too little and we may be thought of as robotic or non-empathic, but display too much and we may be thought of as incapable. Our emotional expressions can help others in forming perceptions or inferences about us (Weisbuch & Adams, 2012). It is important to understand how these perceptions may impact others' perceptions of our competence.

The purpose of this research is to study perceptions about emotional display following an anger-inducing event. I aim to investigate if any one style of anger expression is perceived as signaling competence more so than other expression types. I also aim to study whether gender of the protagonist plays a role in these perceptions of competence.

I focus specifically on the emotion of anger because it presents an interesting aspect of the emotional expression dichotomy. When expressed, research has shown that anger expressions can be perceived as signaling power and dominance (Domagalski and Steelman, 2007). However, the expression of any emotion, particularly negative emotions such as anger, can be seen as a lack of self-control and thus lower others' perceptions of competence. Whether anger is perceived as

motivational or detrimental to productivity will likely also depend on the gender of the person experiencing the emotion. In western culture, anger expression is often seen as acceptable for males but unacceptable for females (Brody, 2000). Thus, anger expression provides a particularly interesting look into the relationship between emotional expression and perceptions of competence.

Below I review the literature on the importance of others' emotional regulation. Next, I discuss the emotional expression type that is of particular interest in this study: passionate restraint (PR). Lastly, I present a review of the literature on gender and anger. A review of these concepts will help to clarify the significance of this research.

**Emotional Expression of Others.** When interacting with others, we constantly form perceptions of others' behaviors and expressions. These perceptions help us to form assessments about others, according to McCrae, Costa, Martin et al. (2004). In fact, their research has shown that people are able to form accurate perceptions of others' personality traits based solely on a facial expression. Although we may not be aware of these processes, they can govern the choices we make in our social interactions. For example, how we decide if and when to interact with others can be rooted in the information gained from these perceptions. For example, if we see an acquaintance across the street while he or she is on the phone and speaking quietly while wearing a stern expression on his or her face, we may choose not to yell "hello."

Contextual information can also aid in our perceptions of others' emotional displays (Barrett, Mesquita & Gendron, 2011). For instance, if we witness an emotional display that we consider unwarranted or inappropriate for the setting, such as an open expression of anger at a nice restaurant, we may be more likely to form a negative perception. Regardless of the nature of the assessment we form, we often use visual expression cues from others to form ideas regarding our social interactions (Weisbuch & Adams, 2012). Thus, others' emotional expressions play a major role in our own cognitions about social interactions. It is important that we understand how

emotional expressions can alter an observer's perceptions and assessments, particularly those concerning competence.

**Passionate Restraint.** In particular, I am studying passionate restraint (PR), a specific type of emotional expression. The two defining features of PR are the presence of genuine emotional experience and control of the emotional expression. For instance, one example of PR is a single tear running down a person's cheek in reaction to a saddening stimulus, which expresses genuine emotion (sadness) in the tear, yet a controlled expression of that emotion given that there is only one tear (Vingerhoets, Cornelius, Van Heck, & Brecht, 2000).

A primary element of PR is control, or the regulation and containment of the full emotional experience from reaching expression. It is generally accepted in western cultures that emotional control is a desired trait. In fact, Warner and Shields (2007) found that emotional control was perceived to imply competence. However, control can be manifested in different ways. Sometimes control can be visible, such as a clenched jaw when experiencing anger or a quivering lip when experiencing sadness. Given the essence of emotional control, it can at times be invisible to others, and may be perceived instead as neutrality or even a lack of emotions.

Control can be shown through a restrained magnitude of emotional display, such as a single tear, or a short display of full emotional display followed by control and restraint of expression. In the present research, the latter method is used to signal control in the PR condition. PR involves practicing control so as to show that one is not overwhelmed by emotion, while still displaying some emotion so as to show connection with others. I predict that too much emotional control (i.e. closed condition) will be perceived as cold or detached, but that too little emotional control (i.e. open condition) will be perceived as unreliable or unproductive, all of which being factors that would decrease perceptions of competence.

Past research has operationally defined PR as a persisting subtle or muted emotional display (Zawadzki, Warner & Shields, 2012). However PR can also be described as fully visible



emotion which was expressed only briefly before returning to neutral. The definition may also vary depending on the emotion being expressed. In expressing sadness, a muted display is often more applicable given the nature of a sad experience. In expressing anger, a brief burst of emotional display followed by self-control may be more appropriate. This could be due to the passion that generally accompanies an angering experience or the lack of social acceptance of angry outbursts. In the present research, the latter definition was used to operationalize the PR emotional display condition.

I suggest that this method of displaying a PR expression, that is, a brief expression of emotion followed by the masking of the display, is a more realistic reaction to an unexpected emotional situation. Often when we truly experience a negative emotion, such as anger, we become occupied with the emotional experience and thus are unable to immediately dedicate attention to monitoring and controlling our outward reactions (Goldberg & Grandey, 2007). Simultaneously, when confronted by an emotion-inducing situation (whether it be anger, sadness, fear, etc.), there are often display rules governing how much emotional reaction is socially acceptable (Ekman & Friesen, 1975). Therefore, it may be difficult to completely mask or completely express an emotional reaction. An emotional expression may be perceived as more authentic and realistic if the emotion is displayed to its full magnitude, albeit briefly, before being masked and controlled.

In terms of the continuum of emotional expression, PR lays between the two extremes of a fully open/visible emotional expression and a completely closed/non-visible emotional expression. I will look at all three of these emotional display types. By studying these emotional displays which form the aforementioned social dichotomy (i.e. open and closed), we can gain more insight into the emotional display that we predict to be perceived as the ideal balance between the two in terms of competence (i.e., PR).

I predict perceptions of competence to be highest for protagonists displaying PR as opposed to those displaying open or closed expressions. I believe this will happen because PR involves visible use of self-control along with the presence of genuine (and thus easily-relatable) emotion. This creates a reaction that neither interferes with protagonists' ability to perform a task nor occupies too much of the protagonists' mental resources.

**Gender & Anger.** In western culture, the prevailing stereotype is that women are the more "emotional" sex (Timmers & Manstead, 2003). There also exist prevalent gender-specific beliefs about the social acceptability of anger. Anger and aggression are considered acceptable when displayed by a male, but less so when displayed by a female (Brody, 2000). Not only is it accepted, but anger is encouraged: aggressive boys, ages 4 to 6, were rated as more likable than non-aggressive boys (Hart, DeWolf & Burts, 1993). Hart and colleagues found the opposite relationship when aggressive girls, ages 4 to 6, were compared to non-aggressive girls. Since the social approval of anger and aggressive behaviors exists only for males, a display of anger by a male may result in a positive assessment by others whereas a display of anger by a female of the same social status would likely result in a negative assessment by others.

The way in which emotions are expressed also differs in social acceptability depending on gender. Anger expressions are tolerated from males, while females are expected to be somewhat passive in their emotional expression (Brody, 2000). However, social expectations of emotional displays may not be aligned with reality. In a study looking at anger in the workplace, Gianakos (2002) found that both men and women expressed their anger in similar ways. Thus, the same reaction and emotional expression, if displayed by both a male and a female, can result in drastically different perceptions by others (Hart, DeWolf & Burts, 1993). In this research I investigate how others' perceptions of those displaying emotional expressions are impacted by the social expectations surrounding gender and emotional expression type.

Due to research indicating that anger is socially unacceptable when displayed by females (Brody, 2000), I predict female protagonists to be perceived as less rational and less productive, leading to lower ratings of competence than male protagonists. I predict female protagonists to be rated as less emotionally authentic than male protagonists due to the generally accepted belief that females are the more emotional gender (Timmers & Manstead, 2003), thus emotional displays made by a woman are more likely to be expected and for this reason may be perceived as having less depth or sincerity than a male's emotional displays. I predict female protagonists to be perceived as having less emotional self-control than male protagonists because the belief that women are the more emotional sex may result in the belief that women are also less able to control their emotional experiences and emotional expressions.

**The Present Research.** In this study I used two short vignettes that describe a situation to participants. The study design is a between-subjects 3 (emotional expression: open, closed, PR) x 2 (gender of target) design. The dependent variables (DVs) of interest in this research are the protagonists' perceived competence, emotional authenticity and emotional self-control.

One independent variable was emotional display. At the end of the vignette, the protagonist displays one of three emotional displays: open, closed, or PR. This is of interest in order to examine whether degree of emotional expression impacted perceptions of competence. The second independent variable in this study is the gender of the protagonist. I am interested in examining how emotional expressions may be perceived differently depending on the gender of the person who displays them. The dependent variables of interest are perceptions of protagonists' competence, emotional authenticity and emotional self-control.

*Hypothesis 1:* Protagonists displaying PR will be perceived as more competent than protagonists described as displaying open and closed displays.

*Hypothesis 2:* Male protagonists will be perceived as more competent than female protagonists.

**Exploratory Hypotheses.** If these predictions are confirmed, I make predictions about potential mediating factors in this relationship. I predict that perceptions of authenticity will explain why male protagonists are rated more competent than female protagonists. Due to the generally accepted belief that females are the more emotional gender (Timmers & Manstead, 2003), emotional displays made by a woman are more likely to be expected and thus may be perceived as having less depth or sincerity than a male's emotional displays.

I also make predictions concerning the other dependent measures. I predict to find female protagonists rated as having less emotional self-control than male protagonists. The belief that women are the more emotional sex may result in the belief that women are also less able to control their emotional experiences and emotional expressions. I predict protagonists displaying PR to be perceived as having the most emotional authenticity due to the display of visibly genuine emotion, and the simultaneous adherence to social expectations and display rules governing expressions of negative emotions.

## Chapter 2

### Methods

#### Participants

Recruitment for participants was done through the online study participation system at the university. In total 190 undergraduate students completed the survey (95 women; 95 men). Responses from 8 participants were excluded from data analysis due to a lack of responses to survey questions (i.e. answering "0" for every scale and leaving text responses blank;  $n = 4$ ) or incorrectly answering the attention check ( $n = 4$ ). Participants self-identified as Caucasian ( $n = 143$ ), Asian ( $n = 15$ ), African-American ( $n = 10$ ), Latino/a or Hispanic ( $n = 8$ ), or as bi- or multi-racial ( $n = 11$ ).<sup>1</sup>

#### Materials

**Vignettes.** Each participant read a vignette (see Appendix A). Two storylines were created. One storyline described a student working on a group project whose group members show up late for the meeting. The second is about a student working at a restaurant who is supposed to train a new employee but the trainee shows up an hour late. I designed storylines that undergraduate students could relate to in order to optimize credibility of the feedback.

With the two different storylines and the 3 x 2 design, there were 6 different versions of each vignette. Gender of protagonist was manipulated by producing each version of the vignettes with both a male and a female protagonist, resulting in 12 vignette conditions in total. The other

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<sup>1</sup> An error by the researcher in setting up the survey resulted in some participants ( $n = 4$ ) taking the survey twice, thus the number of survey responses does not correspond exactly to the number of participants. Participants' identities were kept confidential, meaning there was no way to identify which participants completed the survey twice and therefore the extra responses were kept in the data pool.

independent variable, emotional display, was operationalized by producing 3 types of protagonist's emotional expressions at the end of the vignette: open, closed, and PR.

For the independent variable of emotion expression, I operationalized PR (Zawadzki, Warner & Shields, 2012) as a brief, unmasked expression of authentic emotion, followed by the use of self-control to revert the emotional display to neutral. The open emotional display condition was operationalized as fully visible emotional expressions that persisted throughout the interaction. The closed emotional display condition was operationalized as a completely neutral expression.

The protagonists' emotional expressions were described using solely facial movements. Facial expressions were described in the vignettes using concepts from the Facial Action Coding System (FACS; Ekman & Friesen, 1978), but altering the wording slightly so as to make the vignettes more relatable and understandable to undergraduate students. Facial expressions used in the open and PR conditions included a furrowed brow and tightly clenched jaw. In the open emotional display condition, these expressions were displayed and continued to appear after the emotional event was over. In the PR condition, the emotional displays were visible but then the facial expression resumed to neutral. The following is an excerpt from the group project vignette describing the target's reaction in the open condition:

*By the time they show up, Jack only has 10 minutes to prepare his group members before they all must go to the front of the class. Jack greets his teammates with his jaw tightly clenched and a furrowed brow. He continues to display that expression as he begins to prep his group members for their presentation.*

In the PR condition, the reaction was described as: *"Jack greets his teammates with his brow furrowed and his jaw slightly clenched. His expression returns to neutral and together they begin their presentation."* In the closed condition, the reaction was described as: *"Jack greets his teammates with a neutral expression and together they begin to prepare for the presentation."*

These emotional displays were the same for the restaurant employee scenario, each ending with the employee beginning the training session.

**Dependent Variables.** After reading the vignette, participants completed a questionnaire about their perceptions of the protagonist. Participants rated the protagonist on: degree of emotional experience (happiness, sadness, anger, fear); degree of emotional expression (happiness, sadness, anger, fear); emotional authenticity (4 items: authentic, deep feelings, genuine, and honest feelings;  $\alpha = 0.88$ ); emotional reaction level (open/visible, closed/not visible); competence in the delivery of the speech (using 8 items proposed by Fiske et al., 2002: capable, competent, confident, independent, intelligent, skillful, competitive, and efficient;  $\alpha = 0.87$ ); and emotional control (3 items: self-control, feelings kept “in check,” and composure;  $\alpha = 0.95$ ). Each question was answered on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much).

The scales of emotional experience and emotional expression were made by the researcher to measure participants’ perceptions of the scenario. I aim to study expressions of anger so I wanted to ensure that protagonists were perceived to experience this emotion more so than any other (i.e. happiness, sadness or fear). I created the emotional reaction level scale to ensure that the emotional expression types that we operationalized were being perceived by the participants. The remaining three scales (i.e. authenticity, competence and control) were adapted from a previous study on PR (Zawadzki, Warner & Shields, 2012).

Competence was the primary dependent measure in this research. There are many different ways and circumstances in which to evaluate a person’s competence. I chose to investigate perceptions of competence immediately following an anger-inducing event, and immediately before completing a task. The ratings were made immediately following the anger-inducing event to measure perceived effects of the event on the protagonist's competence. Ratings were made immediately before the protagonist completed a task. Rather than reveal our research hypothesis by asking participants if there was a perceived effect of anger expression on

competence, I inquired about this relationship indirectly using the protagonist's performance on a subsequent task.

**Attention Checks.** One attention check was also included in attempts to ensure that students had closely read the vignette and that the questionnaire responses were honest and thoughtful. This was the last question of the survey. Participants were asked a general question about the scenario they read. In the group project condition they were asked what the students were preparing for. In the restaurant employee condition they were asked what was coming up that the new employee was being trained for (lunch rush).



## Chapter 3

### Results

To determine if the two different scenarios presented in vignettes were comparable enough to be analyzed together, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was run for vignette condition for each of the dependent variables (competence, emotional self-control, and emotional authenticity). The differences between vignette conditions were not statistically significant for any of the dependent variables (authenticity:  $p = .32$ ; self-control:  $p = .49$ ; competence:  $p = .55$ ), meaning that the two vignettes were comparable. Therefore vignettes were combined for all further analyses.

Correlations between the dependent measures can be found in Table 1. There was a significant negative correlation between competence and emotional authenticity, and a significant positive correlation between competence and emotional self-control.

*Table 1. Correlations between Dependent Variables*

	Authenticity	Self-Control	Competence
Authenticity	1	.00	-0.25**
Self-Control	--	1	0.35**
Competence	--	--	1

\*\* Correlation significant at the .01 level.

Between-subjects ANOVAs were run for competence, emotional self-control and emotional authenticity. Results are discussed below. Means and standard deviations are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations for Emotional Authenticity, Emotional Self-Control, and Competence

		Authenticity	Self-Control	Competence
Expression Type	Gender of Protagonist			
Open	Male	14.18 (6.07)	10.64 (4.35)	37.55 (8.13)
	Female	18.45 (5.01)	10.32 (4.58)	38.45 (9.12)
PR	Male	12.31 (6.05)	15.03 (5.12)	40.31 (6.99)
	Female	12.85 (5.51)	13.97 (4.71)	38.39 (7.70)
Closed	Male	10.52 (5.00)	16.32 (4.69)	37.58 (9.57)
	Female	10.90 (5.42)	15.43 (3.92)	40.97 (5.80)

Note. Standard deviations in parentheses. Authenticity scale range: 4 to 28. Self-Control scale range: 3 to 21. Competence scale range: 8 to 56.

**Competence.** Hypothesis 1 predicted competence ratings for the PR condition to be higher than those for the open and closed conditions. However, the results revealed no significant differences in perceptions of competence between emotional expression conditions,  $F(2,181) = 0.57, p = 0.57$ .

In Hypothesis 2, I predicted that males would be perceived as more competent than females. I did not find any significant differences in perceptions of competence based on the gender of the protagonist  $F(1,181) = 0.46, p = 0.50$ .

Although there were no significant findings, the direction of the means is interesting given that men were rated as most competent when displaying PR ( $M = 40.31, SD = 6.99$ ) and women were rated as most competent when displaying a closed emotional expression ( $M = 40.97, SD = 5.80$ ). Mean scale total ratings of competence were above the total scale mean (i.e.  $> 28$ ), independent of protagonist gender or emotional expression.

independent of protagonist gender or emotional expression.

**Emotional Self-Control.** There was a main effect of emotional expression,  $F(2,181) = 23.65, p < .001, \eta^2 = .21$ . Bonferroni post hoc tests were used to compare means. The open condition ( $M = 10.48, SD = 4.43$ ) was rated as using less self-control than PR ( $M = 14.47, SD = 4.89$ ) and closed ( $M = 15.89, SD = 4.31$ ) conditions.

In exploratory hypotheses, I predicted female protagonists to be perceived as having less emotional self-control than male protagonists. An ANOVA run for gender of protagonist on each of the DVs showed this hypothesis was not confirmed by the research findings.

**Emotional Authenticity.** In the exploratory hypotheses, I predicted emotional authenticity would mediate the gender difference in perceptions of competence. This prediction became less relevant with the lack of significance in competence ratings. I expected perceptions of emotional authenticity to be lower for female protagonists than male protagonists. This prediction was not confirmed. There was a main effect of gender of the protagonist,  $F(1,181) = 4.58, p = 0.03, \eta^2 = .03$ , such that females were rated as more authentic ( $M = 14.07, SD = 6.15$ ) than males ( $M = 12.38, SD = 5.87$ ).

In the exploratory hypotheses, I predicted to find higher perceptions of emotional authenticity in the PR condition. This prediction was not supported. There was a main effect of emotional expression,  $F(2,181) = 16.75, p = 0.00, \eta^2 = .16$ . Bonferroni post hoc tests were used to compare means. The open condition ( $M = 16.25, SD = 5.94$ ) was rated as more authentic than PR ( $M = 12.60, SD = 5.73; p < .00$ ) and closed ( $M = 10.70, SD = 5.17; p < .00$ ) conditions.

Lastly, there was a marginally significant interaction between gender of the protagonist and emotional expression,  $F(2,181) = 2.50, p = 0.09, \eta^2 = .03$ . A pairwise comparisons test revealed a significant interaction between emotional expression and gender of the protagonist in the open condition,  $p < .01$ , indicating that female protagonists were perceived as more emotionally authentic than male protagonists in the open expression.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Discussion**

The goal of this research was to investigate the impact of different types of emotional expressions on others' perceptions of competence. In Hypothesis 1, I predicted that perceptions of competence would be higher in the PR emotional display condition. This prediction was not supported by my findings, in that competence ratings were not significantly impacted by emotional expression. Contrary to Hypothesis 2, which predicted perceptions of competence to be higher for male protagonists than female protagonists, I found no significant differences between perceptions of competence for male and female protagonists.

I hypothesized that participants' perceptions would differentiate PR from the other emotional expressions due to expectations that it would be perceived as the ideal type of emotional expression (Zawadzki, Warner & Shields, 2012). Instead, the open emotional expression differed most from the others, specifically in terms of emotional authenticity and emotional self-control. This condition received the lowest ratings of emotional self-control, which is reasonable due to the very nature of the open condition as using less control and restraint than the PR or closed conditions. The open condition also received the highest ratings of emotional authenticity. This could be due to the combination of the clearly visible emotional reaction and an empathic involvement of participants. Undergraduate student participants read about an undergraduate target in an anger-inducing situation. Thus, there is a degree of applicability of the vignettes to participants' own experiences. If participants are able to picture themselves in the protagonists' circumstances, they may be more likely to perceive an expression as honest and genuine when it coincides with the emotions they would expect to experience and/or express

themselves. Thus, in these highly applicable scenarios, participants' ratings of emotional authenticity of the protagonist may correlate to the participants' understanding and ability to relate to the feelings of anger. That these ratings were higher in the open condition may indicate a perception of justification of the protagonists' emotional displays, whereas the closed and PR emotional displays may have been perceived as being too muted for the situation. The perceptions of authenticity here could indicate a level of social justification for specific emotional expressions when the observer is able to relate and empathize with the scenario. Based on these findings, I propose that when participants can easily relate to the situation presented to them, their perceptions of the protagonists' emotional authenticity are indicative of participants' sense of justification for the protagonists' reaction.

Another interesting finding is that the average rating of competence across vignettes was above the scale mean (i.e. > 28), regardless of protagonist gender or emotional expression type. This may be due to the circumstances described in the vignettes. To emphasize the protagonists' competence I created situations in which their competence is at stake. In each vignette, the protagonist, more so than others, was given a responsibility. In the group project storyline, the protagonist was in charge of preparing his other group members for the group presentation in 15 minutes. In the restaurant storyline, the protagonist was in charge of training the new employee before the start of the afternoon lunch rush. Each protagonist was given an established level of credibility and competence in the vignette itself, and these were consistent among vignettes as opposed to the emotional displays which varied. Thus, ceiling effects with regards to competence could account for the lack of significant findings in competence perceptions across all conditions.

While the perceptions of competence were not significant as predicted, the results suggest that anger confers competence equally for men and women. This is contrary to the previously discussed research which describes anger as more socially acceptable among men than women (Brody, 2000). However, the present study differs from past research in that I have included an

established degree of competence, as discussed above. This degree of competence is created by putting the protagonist in a position of control and leadership in the completion of a task. Thus, this established degree of competence could also be considered a degree of status. These findings therefore suggest that when observers form perceptions of others' emotional expressions, the gender differences that we would typically expect to find could be negated when the person being observed is in a position of status.

My findings in emotional authenticity were not in line with my exploratory hypothesis which predicted male protagonists to be perceived as more emotionally authentic than female protagonists. I hypothesized that this finding, if confirmed, would be due to the common belief in western culture that emotionality signals inefficiency and incompetence (Zawadzki, Warner & Shields, 2012). Given that women are believed to be the more “emotional” sex (Timmers & Manstead, 2003), they may be more likely to receive this assessment from others. Instead, in the present research female protagonists were perceived to be more emotionally authentic than male protagonists. This could be related to Timmers and Manstead’s research (2003) because while females are perceived as the more emotional sex, males are perceived to be the less emotional sex. Research shows that males are believed to experience less intense emotions than females (Timmers & Manstead, 2003). These beliefs about gender differences in emotional experiences may generate a belief about gender differences in emotional expression. Given that males are believed to experience intense emotion than females, males' emotional expressions may be perceived as less intense as well. Males' emotional displays are less likely to be perceived as signaling a deep, genuine emotional experience than are females' emotional displays. Thus, lower perceptions in emotional authenticity of male protagonists' may be due to perceived (and to some degree, proven) gender differences in emotional experience.

**Limitations & Future Directions.** Future research on this topic is necessary to gain a more complete understanding of the effects of gender and emotion expression on perceptions of competence. One potential topic for future research involves the furthering of the concept of status. These findings found males and females to be perceived as equally competent when both in a position of moderate leadership, or status. Another approach for this research would be to look at an established level of competence as an independent variable. For instance, as the protagonists' status level increases, do perceptions of competence after anger expression for male and female protagonists increase simultaneously? Past research would suggest that when a woman has high status a woman has, anger expressions lead to more negative perceptions (Brescoll, 2006), which could suggest lower perceptions of competence. However, the present research findings challenge that. Another question is whether the field of status is a concern; for instance, if a man and woman have equal status in a male-dominated field, such as mathematics, how would this impact perceptions of the woman's competence when she expresses anger? How would perceptions differ for protagonists with status in a more gender neutral field such as social sciences? I would expect lower perceptions of competence for protagonists who are female, high status, and working in a male-dominated field. These variables regarding status would illuminate specific conditions under which gender differences are found in perceptions of competence, and thus further the understanding of the complex perceptions of others' emotional expressions.

Another line for future research would be a study of the intersections of different group identities (i.e. gender, race, social class, or sexual orientation) on perceptions of competence. A follow-up study could replicate the IVs and DVs of the present research with the inclusion of race as an IV. The present findings have revealed no significant gender differences in perceptions of competence, perhaps due to the established level of competence given to the protagonist. This research introduces an important question: in what other situations would this established level of competence cause perceptions of competence to be similar? For instance, if the protagonists

varied in ways other than gender (e.g., race), perhaps assigning the protagonist with a level of credibility would create similarities in observers' perceptions of competence. This creates a more complete understanding of the effects of anger expression on perceptions of competence for different groups and would be an interesting concept for further research.



## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusions**

The research findings did not support our hypotheses predicting higher perceptions of competence for the PR emotional display condition and for males. Nonetheless, the findings have proven very interesting. For instance, perceptions of competence were above the scale mean across all conditions, suggesting that anger confers competence for both males and females. This result could be due to the established level of competence used in both vignette storylines. Assigning a person a degree of leadership and status before the emotional expression may have contributed to the lack of gender differences in competence perceptions, which indicates a complex yet fascinating relationship between status, gender, emotional expression and perceived competence.

The results show that the emotional display that differed the most from the others was the open condition. Participants rated the open expression as most signaling emotional authenticity. This is intriguing because a) it was true for both males and females and b) visible displays of negative emotions are not generally accepted as being positive in western culture. The high ratings of emotional authenticity in the open condition could be due to the highly applicable nature of the vignettes to the participants' undergraduate experiences. I suggest that if the protagonists' situation is easily relatable to the participant, participants are likely to apply their own expectations of suitable emotional reactions. Participants are able to imagine themselves in the situation and thus are more understanding and justifying of the visible emotional expression (i.e. the open condition). These results suggest that perceptions of emotional authenticity could depend on how much we are able to relate to the protagonist and the scenario. The present

research has challenged beliefs about gender, emotional expression and perceived competence, and outlines directions for further research.

## Appendix A

### Vignette and Questionnaire Sample

Jack is on his way to class where he will be giving a group presentation that his group has been working on for weeks. His group has decided to meet 30 minutes before class to rehearse the presentation a few more times. When he arrives at the agreed upon time, his two group members are nowhere to be found. By the time they show up, Jack only has 10 minutes to prepare his group members before they all must go to the front of the class. Jack greets his teammates with his brow furrowed and his jaw tightly clenched. His expression returns to neutral and together they begin their presentation.

Imagine Jack just as his group members arrive.

In a few sentences describe Jack's feelings, thoughts, and expressions as he meets with his tardy group members.

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**Please rate the intensity with which Jack EXPERIENCES the following emotions during his reaction above:**

1. Happiness



## 3. Sadness

1    2    3    4    5    6  
 Not at all                      Neutral                      Very much

## 4. Fear

1    2    3    4    5    6  
 Not at all                      Neutral                      Very much

**How much does Jack show each of the following characteristics while he is prepping his group members:**

## 1. Authentic feelings

1    2    3    4    5    6  
 Not at all                      Neutral                      Very much

## 2. Deep feelings

1    2    3    4    5    6  
 Not at all                      Neutral                      Very much

## 3. Genuine feelings

1    2    3    4    5    6  
 Not at all                      Neutral                      Very much

## 4. Honest feelings

1      2      3      4      5      6

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Not at all                      Neutral                      Very much

5. Open (visible) emotional reaction

1      2      3      4      5      6

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Not at all                      Neutral                      Very much

6. Closed (invisible) emotional reaction

1      2      3      4      5      6

---

Not at all                      Neutral                      Very much

**Please rate the degree to which Jack has following characteristics while he is prepping his group members:**

1. Competent

1      2      3      4      5      6

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Not at all                      Neutral                      Very much

2. Capable

1      2      3      4      5      6

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Not at all                      Neutral                      Very much

3. Intelligent

1      2      3      4      5      6

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Not at all                      Neutral                      Very much

4. Efficient

1      2      3      4      5      6

Not at all                      Neutral                      Very much

5. Skillful

1      2      3      4      5      6

Not at all                      Neutral                      Very much

6. Independent

1      2      3      4      5      6

Not at all                      Neutral                      Very much

7. Competitive

1      2      3      4      5      6

Not at all                      Neutral                      Very much

8. Confident

1      2      3      4      5      6

Not at all                      Neutral                      Very much

9. Self-Control

1      2      3      4      5      6

Not at all                      Neutral                      Very much

10. Composure

1           2           3           4           5           6  
-----  
Not at all                      Neutral                      Very much

11. Keeps feelings “in-check”

1           2           3           4           5           6  
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Not at all                      Neutral                      Very much

**Please answer the following question about the scenario:**

1. What is happening today that the students are preparing for?

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# ACADEMIC VITA

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## Education

B.A., Psychology, 2013, Pennsylvania State University, State College, PA

## Honors and Awards

- The Michael Shurilla Memorial Scholarship, Delaware Chapter of the Penn State Alumni Association, March 2013
- President's Award for Educational Excellence, President Barak Obama, 2009
- AP Scholar Award, The College Board, 2009
- Sociedad Honoraria Hispanica Inductee, 2009
- National Honor Society Inductee, 2008
- Academic All Conference Award, Blue Hen Conference, 2006, 2007, 2008

## Association Memberships/Activities

- International Council of Psychologists

## Research Experience

- Research Assistant, Social psychology laboratory, Penn State University, Fall 2011
  - Assisted with cleaning and entering of data, checking references and developing scales for self-report data collection.
- Research Assistant, Delaware INBRE and Christiana Care Health System, Summer 2012

- Co-designed a survey on patient satisfaction, collected data, analyzed data, created poster for presentation at INBRE conference.
- Research Assistant, Social psychology laboratory, Penn State University, Fall 2012 & Spring 2013
  - Assisted graduate students with the cleaning and entering of data, conducted literary searches, and awarded credit to student participants.

### **Research Interests**

I have broad interests in psychology, with particular interest in the fields of social and family psychology as they concern the impact of marital satisfaction on family functioning and child development.