

Feeling Bad About Being Sad: The Role of Social Expectancies in Amplifying Negative Mood

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Our perception of how others expect us to feel has significant implications for our emotional functioning. Across 4 studies the authors demonstrate that when people think others expect them not to feel negative emotions (i.e., sadness) they experience more negative emotion and reduced well-being. The authors show that perceived social expectancies predict these differences in emotion and well-being both more consistently than—and independently of—personal expectancies and that they do so by promoting negative self-evaluation when experiencing negative emotion. We find evidence for these effects within Australia (Studies 1 and 2) as well as Japan (Study 2), although the effects of social expectancies are especially evident in the former (Studies 1 and 2). We also find experimental evidence for the causal role of social expectancies in negative emotional responses to negative emotional events (Studies 3 and 4). In short, when people perceive that others think they should feel happy, and not sad, this leads them to feel sad more frequently and intensely.

Keywords: social appraisal, expectancies, emotion norms, ruminative self-focus, culture

Emotions are fundamentally social phenomena (Fischer & Manstead, in press; Frijda & Mesquita, 1994; Manstead & Fischer, 2001); they are most often experienced and expressed in social situations, and their consequences are understood within social and cultural contexts (Eid & Diener, 2001; Ekman & Friesen, 1969; Izard, 1980; Hochschild, 1983). Not every emotion is created equal in the social world, however, and some emotions are considered more socially desirable than others.

In the current research, we focus on the link between social norms for emotional experience and people's own emotional functioning. We argue that when people believe that others expect them not to feel certain kinds of emotion, this perceived social pressure leads them to experience those unwanted emotions more frequently and more intensely. Specifically, we focus on the belief

that others expect us not to feel negative emotions such as sadness or anxiety.

Salient cultural norms clearly communicate that people are expected to strive for happiness and not to feel sad or stressed. Happiness has been enthusiastically promoted as important for personal well-being and a meaningful life and even as a measure of national prosperity (White, 2007). On the flip side, however, even common malaise is often diagnosed as an illness (Wakefield & First, 2003) and considered to be detrimental to our own and others' health (Ehrenreich, 2009). We argue that in contexts where these norms are especially salient, rather than promoting happiness, they have the potential to make people feel more negative emotions more of the time. Furthermore, we argue that this process has implications for our well-being, and when people feel social pressures not to feel bad this reduces their satisfaction with life and increases levels of depression.

In developing these hypotheses, we draw on recent work that highlights the importance of others' opinions in the production of our own emotional experiences. That people are sensitive to how others expect them to react emotionally is reflected in work on social appraisals (Manstead & Fischer, 2001). Social appraisal theory has highlighted the fact that in forming our appraisal of events we regularly rely on the responses of those around us (Fischer, Rotteveel, Evers, & Manstead, 2004; Manstead & Fischer, 2001). It is important to note that emotions themselves may be the focus of such appraisals (Mayer & Gaschke, 1988; Mayer & Stevens, 1994), and the ways in which we think others might

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respond to our emotions plays an important role in emotional expression (Evers, Fischer, Mosquera, & Manstead, 2005). We aim to highlight that people hold generalized social appraisals of how others are likely to respond to their emotional experiences and that these appraisals are informed by salient social norms. We focus on the extent to which social norms communicate expectations in regard to how people should feel.

We use this perspective to extend research in regard to maladaptive responses to emotional experience. Reacting to negative moods with self-focused rumination has negative outcomes for well-being (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2000; Nolen-Hoeksema, Wisco, & Lyubomirsky, 2008; Watkins, 2008). We argue that perceptions that others expect us not to experience negative emotions (such as sadness or anxiety) may play a role in these kinds of maladaptive responses. Others' expectations set up reference values for emotional states (cf. Carver & Scheier, 1982, 1990), and when we fail to meet those expectations we feel that we have failed, leading to negative self-focused reflection. It is important to note that reflecting negatively on the self in response to negative emotional experiences has been shown to further aggravate those same emotions (Moberly & Watkins, 2008; Nolen-Hoeksema, 2000).

Generalized Social Expectancies

Previous work on social appraisals has focused on specific contexts; however, we argue that people may hold general beliefs about how others evaluate the experience of certain kinds of emotion (e.g., negative vs. positive) and how acceptable it is to experience those emotions. Work on social norms (Eid & Diener, 2001), display rules (Ekman & Friesen, 1969; Izard, 1980), or feeling rules (Hochschild, 1983) makes it very clear that people are aware of—and hold beliefs about—how socially appropriate or desirable it is to experience or express certain kinds of emotion (e.g., Stearns, 1994; Stearns & Lewis, 1998).

One does not need to look far to see which emotions are socially valued and more normative than others. Daily we are reminded of the value of happiness, from TV advertising that highlights the hedonic pleasures of consumption, to national campaigns designed to improve happiness and well-being. Meanwhile, commonplace emotional experiences such as sadness, depression, or anxiety are pathologized and medicalized, viewed as deviant from the desired norm (Haslam, 2005). Negative emotions are touted as bad for our health (Ehrenreich, 2009), have been shown to impact negatively on those around us (Parkinson & Simons, 2009), and can be “cured” with a wide array of drugs and interventions designed to quickly and efficiently return us to normality. On the other hand, the many benefits of negative emotions, such as their creative potential (Wilson, 2008), importance for interpersonal relations (Averill, 1983; Fischer & Manstead, *in press*; McNulty, 2010), and role in achieving a rich and meaningful life (Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 1999) are rarely prominent in current social discourse.

Social norms and expectations have been shown to have implications for the extent to which emotions are experienced. Using data from China, Taiwan, Australia, and the United States, Eid and Diener (2001) found that differences in norms for experiencing emotions were related to differences in the norm consistent frequency and intensity with which those emotions were experienced. However, Eid and Diener's work focused on how appropriate or desirable people themselves think each emotion is. Our percep-

tions of how others, or society more generally, expects us to feel may have different implications. Social expectancies may have a different function from personal standards. Rather than guiding and directing desired emotional experiences, they may aggravate unwanted emotions by communicating their undesirability and unacceptability, leading to negative self-appraisals when experiencing normatively discrepant emotions.

Effects of Social Expectancies

There is a large body of work that demonstrates that reacting to undesirable emotional experiences with negative self-reflection has a range of detrimental outcomes (Nolen-Hoeksema, Wisco, & Lyubomirsky, 2008; Watkins, 2008), including the amplification of unwanted emotion (Moberly & Watkins, 2008; Nolen-Hoeksema, 2000). According to a control theory account of negative self-focused thinking (Carver & Scheier, 1982, 1990), people tend to reflect negatively on the self when they perceive a discrepancy between how they actually are and salient reference values for important and meaningful goals. We argue that perceived social expectancies in regard to our emotional experiences provide salient reference values for how we should feel. Failing to meet these perceived expectations leads people to reflect negatively on the self, leading to the amplification of unwanted emotions. That is, when we feel sad but think others expect us to be happy, this makes us feel worse.

Traditional approaches to ruminative self-focus have highlighted people's tendency to become concerned about their experience of negative moods (e.g., Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991). However, from a social appraisal point of view we are interested in how people think about themselves as the objects of social evaluation (Manstead & Fischer, 2001). To this extent our approach to measuring negative self-reflection focuses specifically on derogatory self-related thoughts (e.g., feel bad, dislike the self) when experiencing emotions that are considered socially undesirable (e.g., feeling sad, anxious, etc.).

Cultural Differences in Social Expectancies

Although striving for happiness and avoiding sadness is a salient norm in many modern societies, cultural differences exist. Previous work has demonstrated that experiencing positive emotions, and avoiding negative emotions, may be particularly emphasized in Western individualistic cultures (Elliot, Chirkov, Kim, & Sheldon, 2001; Kuppens, Realo, & Diener, 2008). In these cultures, feeling happy is considered a basic value, and positive feelings about the self are a primary determinant of life satisfaction (Diener & Diener, 1995). However, the importance placed on happiness and the devaluation of sadness is not as apparent in Asian cultures. In Japan, acceptance, emotional balance, and even hardship are highly valued, and the pursuit of happiness often has “immoral” connotations (Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999). East Asian people are quite hesitant to dwell on positive feelings and tend to report lower scores on subjective well-being and happiness compared to their Western counterparts (Diener, Suh, Smith, & Shao, 1995).

In short, feeling and expressing positive affect is less desirable within East Asian cultures than it is in Western cultures. This suggests that East Asian persons may be less affected by apparent

social expectations to feel happy and not to feel sad. Whereas social expectancies not to feel sad may be salient within Western cultures, they may be less apparent within East Asian cultures and people from these cultures may be less inclined to reflect negatively on the self when experiencing negative emotional states.

The Present Research

In this research we explore the importance of both *personal* (how do I think I should feel) and *social* (how do others think I should feel) expectancies for the experience of emotion. Specifically, we focus on what we think is the prevailing hedonistic norm for experiencing emotions, namely to feel happy and not to experience negative emotions. We focus on both high arousal (anxious, stressed) and low arousal (depressed, sad) negative emotions. Of course there are many other negative emotions (e.g., anger, contempt, disgust), however, we wish to restrict our analysis to those negative emotions that are commonly used to describe negative mood, rather than more transient emotional states. Across four studies, we examine the effects of social expectancies on emotional functioning and well-being, their cross-cultural variation (Studies 1 and 2), and their causal role in emotion amplification (Studies 3 and 4).

We Make Five Predictions

1. Perceived social expectations for the experience of negative emotion will lead to negative self-evaluation when experiencing negative emotion.
2. Social expectancies will lead to increases in frequency and intensity of unwanted emotion, and decreases in well-being, and will do so via their role in promoting negative self-evaluation.
3. Social expectancies will predict emotional functioning and well-being more consistently than, and independently of, personal expectancies.
4. The effect of social expectancies on negative emotion will be stronger for individuals from cultural contexts where positive emotions are highly valued.
5. Social expectancies have a causal role in amplifying unwanted emotions in response to negative emotional events.

Study 1

Our first study tests the first, third, and fourth hypotheses above. First, we aimed to establish the expected relationship between perceived social expectancies not to experience negative emotion states and negative self-evaluation when experiencing those states. Second, we aimed to establish these associations independent of personal expectancies in regard to the experience of negative emotion. Third, we recruited both Australian and East Asian participants who live in Australia to determine whether culture is a moderator of these relationships.

Method

Participants. Participants were 123 undergraduates (73 women, 50 men; $M_{\text{age}} = 21.06$) who participated in the study for course credit or for \$10. It was specified that participants must either identify as Anglo-European Australian ($n = 54$) or East Asian ($n = 69$) to participate.

Materials. Participants were provided with a questionnaire that asked them to respond to a number of questions relating to a range of negative emotions (depressed, sad, anxious, stressed). Participants were asked to indicate their self-evaluation when experiencing each emotion (2 items: “Feeling_____ makes me dislike myself”; “When I feel_____ I feel like a bad person”: $\alpha = .83$), their personal expectancies regarding each emotion (5 items: “It is very important to me not to feel_____”; “I would always try to avoid feeling_____”; “I shouldn’t feel_____”; “Feeling_____ is normal (reversed)”; “Feeling_____ is an important part of life (reversed)”; $\alpha = .77$), and perceived social expectancies regarding each emotion (5 items: “It is important that others don’t see me as a_____ person”; “Other people expect me not to feel_____”; “People like me less when I feel_____”; “I think society accepts people who feel_____ (reversed)”; “I think it is socially acceptable to feel_____ (reversed)”; “Society generally expects people not to feel_____”; $\alpha = .72$). All responses were made on a scale that ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 9 (*strongly agree*). Responses were combined for all emotions for each measure.

Results and Discussion

Inspection of the means across the two cultural samples (see Table 1) highlighted no differences in personal expectancies, $t(121) = 1.40$, $p = .164$, and no differences in negative self-evaluation, $t(121) = 1.02$, $p = .309$. However, there was a significant difference in social expectancies with social expectancies not to feel negative emotions higher for European Australian persons, $t(121) = 2.77$, $p = .007$.

Table 1
Means and Correlations Among All Measures: Study 1

Measure	<i>M (SD)</i>		Correlation			
	Australian	Asian	1	2	3	4
1. Personal expectancies	5.53 (1.06)	5.28 (0.94)	—			
2. Social expectancies	5.49 (0.72)	5.09 (0.84)	.30***	—		
3. Self-evaluation	4.81 (1.74)	4.52 (1.41)	.31***	.45***	—	
4. Culture (Australian = 0, Asian = 1)			.13	.24**	.09	—

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Correlations among the measures are presented in Table 1. Personal and social expectancies were significantly correlated. To determine the relative contribution of personal and social expectancies on self-evaluation when experiencing negative emotion we used regression models. In addition, we included culture (coded European Australian = 0, East Asian = 1) as a potential moderator of these relationships. The model was significant, $F(5, 117) = 9.18, p < .001$, with social ($\beta = .45, p < .001$) and personal ($\beta = .21, p = .014$) expectancies significantly associated with increases in negative self-evaluation. There was no main effect of culture ($\beta = .08, p = .530$), and the interaction between culture and personal expectancies was not significant ($\beta = -.08, p = .496$). However, the interaction between culture and social expectancies was significant ($\beta = .23, p = .007$). Simple slope analysis revealed that the association between social expectancies and negative self-evaluation was larger for Anglo-European Australian ($\beta = .72, p < .001$) than for East Asian individuals ($\beta = .30, p = .005$), although both were significant.

The findings of Study 1 provide initial evidence for distinct, but related, measures of personal and social expectancies of negative emotion states. We also find support for Hypotheses 1 and 3 in regard to the importance of social expectancies for negative self-evaluation when experiencing normatively discrepant emotions. Although both personal and social expectancies predicted negative self-evaluation, the predictive power of social expectancies was stronger. Consistent with Hypothesis 4, the relationship with social, but not personal, expectancies was moderated by culture, in that the self-evaluation of European Australian individuals was more negatively associated with the perceived social expectancy not to experience negative emotions than it was for East Asian individuals. Moreover, mean levels of social expectancies were higher for European Australians indicating that such expectations are more salient for this group.

Study 2

Study 1 provided support for the importance of social expectancies for negative self-evaluation when experiencing negative emotions. In Study 2, we aim to demonstrate that social expectancies also have implications for emotional functioning and well-being (Hypothesis 2). That is, perceived social expectancies not to feel negative emotions are associated with increased frequency and intensity of negative emotion, reduced satisfaction with life, and increased depression. We extended our cultural analysis of these associations by collecting two separate samples: one sample of European Australian persons and another sample from Japanese individuals. We chose Japan specifically as it is known to vary from Australia in the emphasis placed on relational and collectivistic values (Hofstede, 2001) and because Japanese culture tends to deemphasize the importance of positive feelings about the self (Heine et al., 1999).

Method

Participants. Our Australian sample consisted of 122 undergraduates (88 women, 34 men; $M_{\text{age}} = 18.98$) who participated in the study for course credit. They were recruited on the basis they had lived in Australia for more than 10 years. Our Japanese sample consisted of 100 undergraduates (49 women, 51 men; $M_{\text{age}} =$

19.78) who participated in the study for course credit at a large University in Kyoto.

Materials. Participants in both countries were provided with the same questionnaire. The questionnaire used in Japan was translated by using back-translation procedures by a professional translator. Before completing the measures of personal and social expectancies and self-evaluation (identical to Study 1) participants were asked to indicate the frequency ("How often have you felt _____ in the last month?": 1 = *none of the time*; 9 = *all of the time*) and intensity ("When you feel _____ what is your experience of it like?": 1 = *very mild*; 9 = *very intense*) of their experience of the same list of emotions used in Study 1. Responses were combined for all emotions for each question, providing reliable measures of the intensity (Australia, $\alpha = .84$; Japan, $\alpha = .76$) and frequency (Australia, $\alpha = .78$; Japan, $\alpha = .68$) of experienced negative emotion, self-evaluation when experiencing negative emotions (Australia, $\alpha = .93$; Japan, $\alpha = .76$), and personal (Australia, $\alpha = .58$; Japan, $\alpha = .72$) and social expectancies (Australia, $\alpha = .72$; Japan, $\alpha = .71$) of negative emotion. In this study, we also included measures of global well-being. This included the Satisfaction With Life Scale (Australia, $\alpha = .82$; Japan, $\alpha = .80$; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) and the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression scale (CES-D; Australia, $\alpha = .91$; Japan, $\alpha = .87$; Radloff, 1977).

Results

Correlations between the various measures and means are presented in Table 2. We first investigated whether there were any differences between the Australian and Japanese samples. This revealed that Australian participants reported more personal, $t(220) = 10.49, p < .001$, and social, $t(220) = 4.13, p < .001$, expectations not to experience negative emotion compared to Japanese participants. It is interesting to note that this difference extended to negative self-evaluation when experiencing negative emotion, with Australian individuals feeling worse about themselves than Japanese individuals, $t(220) = 3.61, p < .001$. There were no differences across culture in the frequency, $t(220) = 0.28, p = .778$, and intensity, $t(220) = 0.61, p = .543$, of negative emotions. There were also no differences in reported levels of depression, $t(220) = 0.97, p = .332$. However, consistent with previous research (Diener et al., 1995), Japanese reported lower levels of satisfaction with life, $t(220) = 2.19, p = .030$.

To determine the relative impact of personal and social expectancies and culture on negative self-evaluation, we regressed negative self-evaluation onto personal expectancies, social expectancies, sample (coded Australian = 0, Japan = 1) and the interaction of sample with each kind of expectancy. This revealed a significant model, $F(5, 216) = 22.16, p < .001$. As predicted, social expectancies ($\beta = .61, p < .001$) were associated with increased negative self-evaluation. There was no comparable association between personal expectancies and negative self-evaluation ($\beta = .11, p = .229$). Sample did not predict negative self-evaluation ($\beta = -.04, p < .001$), and there was no significant interaction with personal expectancies ($\beta = .02, p = .843$). However, consistent with Hypothesis 4 and with Study 1, culture did interact with social expectancies ($\beta = -.18, p = .023$), with social expectancies predicting more negative self-evaluation in the Aus-

Table 2
Means and Correlations Between All Measures: Study 2

Measure	<i>M (SD)</i>		Correlation								
	Australia	Japan	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
1. Personal expectancies	5.39 (1.01)	5.04 (0.89)	—								
2. Social expectancies	5.51 (0.85)	5.06 (0.78)	.39***	—							
3. Self-evaluation	5.15 (1.72)	4.40 (1.30)	.35***	.55***	—						
4. Emotion frequency	4.50 (1.59)	4.56 (1.50)	-.03	.30***	.38***	—					
5. Emotion intensity	4.72 (1.80)	4.57 (1.66)	.03	.31***	.42***	.76***	—				
6. SWL Life satisfaction	4.96 (1.22)	4.62 (1.10)	.15*	-.18	-.21**	-.38***	-.27***	—			
7. CES-D Depression	1.84 (0.54)	1.91 (0.51)	.03	.48***	.46***	.74***	.64***	-.44***	—		
8. Sample (Australia = 0, Japan = 1)			-.58*	-.27***	-.24***	.02	-.04	-.15*	.07	—	

Note. SWL = Satisfaction With Life scale; CES-D = Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression scale.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

tralian sample ($\beta = .79, p < .001$) compared to the Japanese sample ($\beta = .50, p < .001$).

Intensity and frequency of negative emotion. We conducted the same analysis focusing on frequency and intensity of negative emotion. This revealed a significant model for frequency, $F(5, 216) = 5.84, p < .001$, with social expectancies ($\beta = .39, p < .001$) significantly associated with increased frequency as predicted. Again, we did not find any comparable association between personal expectancies and emotion frequency ($\beta = -.16, p = .141$). Sample did not predict frequency ($\beta = .02, p = .797$) and did not interact with personal expectancies ($\beta = -.01, p = .934$) or social expectancies ($\beta = -.03, p = .736$). For emotion intensity, the model was also significant, $F(5, 216) = 6.20, p < .001$, with social expectancies ($\beta = .47, p < .001$) associated with increased intensity as predicted, and again no comparable association between personal expectancies and intensity ($\beta = -.11, p = .303$). Sample did not predict intensity ($\beta = -.04, p = .610$) and did not interact with personal expectancies ($\beta = -.04, p = .723$). However, as predicted, sample did interact with social expectan-

cies ($\beta = -.18, p = .043$; see Figure 1). Social expectancies predicted greater intensity of negative emotion in the Australian sample ($\beta = .57, p < .001$) compared to the Japanese sample ($\beta = .30, p < .001$).

Well-being. We next turned our focus to measures of well-being. We first used the same model as reported above to predict satisfaction with life. This revealed a significant model, $F(5, 216) = 5.33, p < .001$, with social expectancies ($\beta = -.28, p = .003$) associated with reduced satisfaction as predicted. This time personal expectancies were significantly related to increased satisfaction with life ($\beta = .31, p = .005$) such that higher expectations not to experience negative emotions were associated with higher reported life satisfaction. Sample was marginally associated with satisfaction with life ($\beta = -.14, p = .088$) consistent with t tests presented above. Sample did not interact with personal expectancies ($\beta = -.17, p = .102$) or social expectancies ($\beta = -.02, p = .792$).

The model for depression was also significant, $F(5, 216) = 16.29, p < .001$, with social expectancies ($\beta = .56, p < .001$)



Figure 1. Moderation effect of culture on relationship between social expectancies and emotion intensity: Study 2.

associated with increased depression as predicted, but no association between personal expectancies and depression ($\beta = -.10$, $p = .294$). There was a significant association between sample and depression ($\beta = -.16$, $p = .031$), with higher levels of depression reported in Australia, but sample did not interact with personal expectancies ($\beta = .01$, $p = .942$) or social expectancies ($\beta = -.01$, $p = .943$).

Mediation analyses. Finally, we investigated whether negative self-evaluation mediated the association between social expectancies and emotion functioning and well-being. Given that social expectancies significantly predicted emotionally functioning and well-being in both samples we conducted our mediation analysis after collapsing Australian and Japanese participants together. For intensity of negative emotion, social expectancies were a significant predictor ($\beta = .31$, $p < .001$). When entered alongside negative self-evaluation, self-evaluation was a significant predictor ($\beta = .36$, $p < .001$), and the predictive contribution of social expectancies became nonsignificant ($\beta = .11$, $p = .131$) consistent with full mediation. A Sobel test indicated that this was a significant model, $Z = 4.38$, $p < .001$, also confirmed by a bootstrapped 95% confidence interval that did not include zero (0.23, 0.61).

For frequency of negative emotion the same analyses revealed that social expectancies were a significant predictor ($\beta = .30$, $p < .001$). When entered alongside negative self-evaluation, self-evaluation was a significant predictor ($\beta = .30$, $p < .001$), and the predictive contribution of social expectancies became nonsignificant ($\beta = .14$, $p = .064$) consistent with full mediation. A Sobel test indicated that this was a significant model, $Z = 3.70$, $p < .001$, also confirmed by a bootstrapped 95% confidence interval that did not include zero (0.12, 0.49).

For satisfaction with life, social expectancies were a significant predictor ($\beta = -.18$, $p = .007$). When entered alongside negative self-evaluation, self-evaluation was a significant predictor ($\beta = -.16$, $p = .047$), and the predictive contribution of social expectancies became nonsignificant ($\beta = -.09$, $p = .239$) consistent with full mediation. A Sobel test indicated that this was a marginal model, $Z = -1.95$, $p = .051$, confirmed by a bootstrapped 95% confidence interval that included zero (-0.24, 0.01).

For depression, social expectancies were a significant predictor ($\beta = .48$, $p = .007$). When entered alongside negative self-evaluation, self-evaluation was a significant predictor ($\beta = .29$, $p = .047$), and the predictive contribution of social expectancies was reduced ($\beta = .32$, $p < .001$) consistent with partial mediation. A Sobel test indicated that this was a significant model, $Z = 3.80$, $p < .001$. This was confirmed by a bootstrapped 95% confidence interval that did not include zero (0.04, 0.15).

Moderating effects of depression. We show that social expectancies predict increased negative emotion, reduced satisfaction with life, and depression. Of course, Studies 1 and 2 are correlational, and therefore the predicted causal path (social expectancies lead to more negative mood and reduced wellbeing) cannot be demonstrated. It is plausible that a reverse causal path could occur; that people who themselves feel more than average amounts of negative emotion will encounter others who are critical of them in this regard and convey to them that they ought to feel less of these emotions. Although we cannot rule out this possibility within our correlational design, we did explore whether our predicted associations would differ depending on the extent of de-

pression reported. That is, we investigated whether self-reported depression may moderate the association of social expectancies with negative self-evaluation and negative emotionality. If the reverse causal path is evident, then we might see a particularly close relationship between social expectancies, negative self-evaluation, and negative emotion among those who feel chronically high levels of negative mood (i.e., those high in depression). To achieve this, we regressed our dependent variables onto personal expectancies, social expectancies, CES-D scores, and the interaction of each kind of expectancy and CES-D. This revealed that CES-D did not interact with social expectancies in predicting negative self-evaluation ($\beta = -.05$, $p < .446$), frequency of negative emotion ($\beta = -.10$, $p = .078$), or intensity of negative emotions ($\beta = -.09$, $p = .163$).

Discussion

The findings of Study 2 were consistent with our predictions and supported the findings of Study 1. Social expectancies predicted negative self-evaluation when experiencing negative emotion, and this association was stronger in Australia than in Japan. Moreover, mean differences between the two samples highlight that in Australia, compared to Japan, there are higher expectations (both personal and social) not to experience negative emotion, and these are associated with more negative self-evaluations. It is important to note that we also extend these findings to demonstrate that social expectancies may be important determinants of our emotional experiences. Perceived social expectancies not to experience negative emotion were consistently associated with increased frequency and intensity of negative emotion. The relationship between social expectancies and emotion intensity was stronger in Australia than in Japan. Moreover, the relationship between social expectancies and amplification of unwanted emotion was mediated by negative self-evaluation.

The findings of Study 2 also extend beyond emotional experience to demonstrate a role for social expectancies in well-being. We found that perceived social expectations not to feel negative emotions are related to reduced satisfaction with life and increased depression, and these relationships are consistent across both Australian and Japanese samples. This association with well-being was again largely mediated by negative self-evaluation, providing additional evidence that social expectations not to experience negative emotions are associated with aggravation of those emotions, for the most part via their negative influence on self-evaluative processes.

Of note is the positive relationship between personal expectancies and satisfaction with life. Although we did not make any predictions in regard to the role of personal expectancies, our findings are consistent with previous work, suggesting that personal expectancies may guide and direct desired emotional experiences (Eid & Diener, 2001; Mitmansgruber, Beck, Hofer, & Schubler, 2009). As such, personal expectations not to feel negative emotions may actually increase life satisfaction. It is important to note that we do not find any relationship between personal expectancies and frequency or intensity of negative emotions. Moreover, we do find a relationship between personal expectancies and negative self-evaluation in both Studies 1 and 2, although this association disappears when controlling for social expectancies in Study 2. In sum, the predictions of personal expectancies

are mixed, whereas those of social expectancies are both consistent and independent of personal expectancies.

Finally, we also explored whether our predicted associations might be particularly prevalent for individuals high in depression. As noted earlier, one might expect that people who routinely experience high levels of negative emotion are more likely to be aware of, and affected by, perceived social expectancies not to feel negative emotion. However, our data do not indicate that self-reported depression significantly moderates any of the predicted associations of social expectancies. We note caution in interpreting these results, and they do not rule out alternative explanations, however they do suggest that the predicted associations of social expectancies are equivalent across varying levels of self-reported depression. Supportive of this interpretation is that our sample was overall quite low in self-reported depression, indicating that the observed associations are evident within a sample that is not significantly depressed. Furthermore, self-reported depression as well as frequency and intensity of negative emotion was equivalent across both Australian and Japanese samples, however the predictive contribution of social expectancies varied, suggesting it is the salience of social norms rather than differences in emotional functioning that are responsible for the observed cultural differences.

Study 3

Studies 1 and 2 provide correlational evidence that perceived social expectations not to feel negative emotions are associated with more negative emotions. However, it is not possible to derive evidence from these studies as to the causal nature of these relationships. In Study 3, we use an experimental approach with the aim of demonstrating that communicating social expectancies can have the effect of increasing people's negative emotional responses to emotional events compared to communicating the social acceptability of negative emotions (Hypothesis 5).

One way in which social expectancies may be communicated is by highlighting the social cost of negative emotions. When people feel that their negative emotions have detrimental social consequences this would be likely to increase perceived social expectations not to experience those emotions. These kinds of media communications are widespread (Ehrenreich, 2009) and although designed to promote the benefits of positive emotion, they may lead people to feel social pressures associated with social expectancies. In this study, we provided people with mock research articles, describing negative emotions as unpleasant; however, we varied the extent to which the harmful consequences of negative emotions either do or do not spread through social networks and affect others. In this way, rather than directly manipulating perceived attitudes, we communicated social expectancies by increasing people's concerns over the harmful effects of their negative emotions for others. That is, in the high social expectancy condition, by highlighting the potential damaging effects of our negative emotions for others health and well-being, we communicated to participants that other people and society more generally expect them not to experience negative emotions. On the other hand, in the low social expectancy condition, by highlighting that negative emotions do not spread to others and therefore do not have harmful effects, we communicated to participants that other people are not concerned by their experience of negative emotions. Consistent

with Studies 1 and 2, we predict that being given information, which indicates it is better for others if we don't experience negative emotion, may increase experiences of negative emotion compared to being told that negative emotions have no consequences for others.

Method

Participants. Participants were 55 undergraduates (34 women, 21 men; $M_{\text{age}} = 24.20$) who were recruited as part of a larger study and participated for course credit. Participants were only recruited if they identified as Australian.

Materials. Participants were administered the questionnaire as part of a larger study. They were first provided the 20-item Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988) and asked to indicate their current mood. They were then required to complete some other tasks unrelated to this study, which took approximately 30 min. Once they had completed these tasks they were provided with a news article presented as if it has been printed from the website of *The Australian*, a popular and reputable newspaper in Australia. The articles were developed based on actual Internet reports of research by Fowler and Christakis (2008) published in the *British Medical Journal* on the dynamic spread of happiness in large social networks. We developed two versions of the article, focusing on negative emotions. The high expectancy version ("Negative Emotions are Contagious in Harvard Study") described research showing that negative emotions spread to others in one's social network and have deleterious effects. The article highlighted that "feeling unhappy, sad or anxious has a significant and negative impact on those around you." The low expectancy version ("Negative Emotions Are Fine in Harvard Study") described research showing that, although negative emotions are unpleasant, they do not spread to those around us. The article highlighted that "feeling unhappy, sad or anxious may last for a while but it does not have any serious consequences for those around you." All participants were then asked to write an essay, which asked them to "recall a time when you have experienced particularly strong negative emotions." They were then asked to rate their current emotions on the PANAS.

Results

One participant in the high expectancy condition was more than three standard deviations above the mean for negative mood at Time 1 and was therefore excluded, leaving 25 participants in the high expectancy condition and 29 participants in the low expectancy condition. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) on PANAS scores Time 1 revealed no significant baseline differences between conditions for negative, $F(1, 52) = 2.83, p = .100$, or positive feelings, $F(1, 52) = 0.40, p = .842$. To determine whether there was any effect of condition on the emotional responses of participants, we conducted a repeated measures ANOVA with condition as a between-subjects variable and PANAS scores at Time 1 and Time 2 as within-subjects factors. This revealed that, for positive emotions, there was no main effect of time, $F(1, 52) = 2.40, p = .127$, and no interaction of Time \times Condition, $F(1, 52) = 1.20, p = .279$. For negative emotions, there was a main effect of time, $F(1, 52) = 15.48, p < .001$, such that participants experienced less negative emotions at Time 1 ($M = 1.31, SE = 0.05$) than at Time

2 ($M = 1.60$, $SE = 0.08$). However, this effect was qualified by a Time \times Condition interaction, $F(1, 52) = 7.70$, $p = .008$. Comparisons revealed that participants in the high social expectancy condition experienced a significant increase in negative emotion (Time 1, $M = 1.24$, $SE = 0.08$; Time 2, $M = 1.72$, $SE = 0.12$, $p < .001$), but participants in the low social expectancies condition did not (Time 1, $M = 1.40$, $SE = 0.07$; Time 2, $M = 1.48$, $SE = 0.10$).¹

Discussion

Study 3 supported our hypothesis that perceived social expectations not to feel negative emotion have the effect of producing more negative emotion in response to a negative emotion induction compared when such social expectancies are not salient. This provides support for our causal hypothesis that it is these perceived social norms that either aggravate or ameliorate unwanted emotions in response to our experience of those emotions.

Our approach to manipulating social expectancies primarily relied on communicating the apparent high cost of negative emotion (compared to communicating no costs) for others in our social network. We argue that in highlighting these costs for others we have increased the perceived pressure not to experience negative emotion, compared to communicating low costs and therefore reducing perceived pressures. However, social expectancies may be more directly communicated by making salient public opinion regarding the experience of negative emotion. In Study 4, we used this more direct approach to manipulating social expectancies for negative emotional experiences.

The findings of Study 3 also point to the apparently harmful effects of social messages in regard to emotional experience. As expected, being told it is better for others if one does not experience negative emotion increased people's experience of negative emotion compared to being told that such emotion states have few consequences. However, we have not compared these effects against a baseline where no information regarding the social costs of negative emotion is provided. This is important given the apparent salience of social expectancies for our Australian sample in Studies 1 and 2. If social expectancies not to experience and express negative emotion are salient, then communicating these expectations may merely reinforce this assumed wisdom. Thus, it could be that the high social expectancy condition represents a default assumption and that the effect is in fact by driven by the low expectancy condition. In other words, it may be that reducing these perceived expectancies by communicating the acceptability of negative emotion serves to dampen emotional responding compared to providing no information.

Study 4

In Study 4, we used manipulations of social expectancies that more directly reflected our measures used in Studies 1 and 2. In this way, we aimed to make public opinion in regard to the appropriateness of negative emotional experiences salient, rather than highlighting the costs for others as we did in Study 3. In this way, we aimed to communicate social expectancies directly by telling people that, on average, others in society either do or do not approve of the experience and expression of negative emotions. In addition we included a neutral control condition against which to

compare the effects of communications in regard to social norms for emotional experience. In line with Studies 1–3, we expected that negative mood would be higher in the high social expectancies condition relative to the low social expectancies condition. It is not possible to confidently state a priori where the no-information control would lie with regard to the two experimental conditions. On the basis of the relative salience of social expectancies in Australian culture (Studies 1 and 2), however, it is plausible that participants in the control condition would also be relatively high in their endorsement of social expectancies and that the control condition would mirror that of the high social expectancies condition.

Method

Participants. Participants were 86 undergraduates (66 women, 20 men; $M_{\text{age}} = 20.78$). It was stipulated that they must be Australian citizens to participate. The average number of years living in Australia was 15.63 years. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: high social expectancy, low social expectancy, or a no-expectancy-information control condition.

Materials. Participants were administered the questionnaire as part of a larger study. They were first provided the 20-item PANAS (Watson, Clark, & Telgen, 1988) and asked to indicate their current mood. They were then given an information sheet indicating they were beginning the main part of the study. They were told the main study was a “reading comprehension and recall task” and that it would involve a number of different tasks with each representing a different form of memory encoding and recall.

The first task was an “express yourself” task (Wegner, Erber, & Zanakos, 1993). This was provided to participants to get them into an experiential writing mode. They were then provided with one of three news articles presented in the same format as in Study 3. One news article was titled, “Society Accepts Sadness in Melbourne Study.” Participants read about a large cross-sectional survey conducted in Australia finding that “People like sad people just as much as happy people and most people feel it's important that people are able to experience and express their negative emotions.” The other news article was titled, “Society Doesn't Accept Sadness in Melbourne Study.” In this article, participants learned that the survey results indicated “people don't like sad people as much as happy people and most people feel it's important that people don't always experience and express their negative emotions.” In both articles it was noted that “feeling sad or anxious is never a pleasant experience”; however, it was public opinion, and therefore social expectancies not to feel sadness, that varied between conditions. The third article represented a control condition where participants read about a new citrus fertilizer. All articles were written in a similar format and style with only key concepts adjusted. Once they had read the article, participants completed the same five-item

¹ We use the full complement of negative emotions contained within the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule. Mostly these represent high or low arousal negative emotions in line with our approach in Studies 1 and 2 (i.e., distressed, upset, ashamed, guilty, afraid, nervous, jittery, irritable). Two other emotions (hostile, scared) are perhaps less related to our theoretical approach, however, when we remove them the reported results do not change.

measure of personal expectancies ($\alpha = .70$) and a six-item measure of social expectancies ($\alpha = .73$) used in Studies 1 and 2. This served as a check on the manipulation of social expectancy.

The essay task required that participants write about a personal event where they had “experienced particularly strong negative emotions (such as feeling depressed, sad, anxious, or stressed).” Once they had finished they were again asked to rate their current mood on the PANAS.

Results

Participants were more likely to endorse the social expectancies items in the high social expectancies condition ($M = 6.30$, $SD = 1.40$) compared to the low social expectancies condition ($M = 5.33$, $SD = 1.21$; $p = .004$), $F(2, 83) = 5.72$, $p = .005$. Endorsement of these items in the control condition was equivalent to endorsement in the high social expectancies condition ($M = 6.32$, $SD = 1.13$; $p = .948$) but significantly different from the low social expectancies condition ($p = .004$).

In sum, the low social expectancy condition aroused significantly lower social expectancies than in the control condition. It is interesting to note that the high social expectancy information aroused similar social expectancies to the no-information control. This shows that participants’ default is to expect that society is intolerant of negative mood and that our high social expectancy condition merely reinforced this assumed wisdom. Rather, it was communicating the apparent acceptability of these emotions that challenged status quo thinking. It should be noted that personal expectancies did not vary by condition, $F(2, 83) = 1.99$, $p = .190$, meaning that social expectancies were manipulated cleanly and independently of personal expectancies.

An ANOVA on PANAS scores at Time 1 revealed no significant baseline differences between conditions for negative, $F(2, 83) = 1.56$, $p = .217$, or positive emotions, $F(1, 52) = 1.86$, $p = .162$. In order to determine whether there was any effect of condition on the emotional responses of participants we conducted a repeated measures ANOVA with condition as a between-subjects variable, and PANAS scores at Time 1 and Time 2 as within-subjects factors. This revealed that, for positive emotions, there was a main effect of time, $F(2, 83) = 30.53$, $p < .001$, such that participants experienced more positive emotions at Time 1 ($M = 2.69$, $SE = 0.09$) than at Time 2 ($M = 2.27$, $SE = 0.09$); however, there was no interaction of Time \times Condition, $F(2, 83) = 0.65$, $p = .527$. For negative emotions, there was again a main effect of time, $F(2, 83) = 21.27$, $p < .001$, such that participants experienced less negative emotions at Time 1 ($M = 1.44$, $SE = 0.07$) than at Time 2 ($M = 1.73$, $SE = 0.07$); however, this effect was qualified by a Time \times Condition interaction, $F(2, 83) = 3.94$, $p = .023$. Comparisons revealed that participants in the high social expectancy condition experienced a significant increase in negative emotion (Time 1, $M = 1.35$, $SE = 0.11$; Time 2, $M = 1.76$, $SE = 0.13$) as did participants in the control condition (Time 1, $M = 1.37$, $SE = 0.12$; Time 2, $M = 1.79$, $SE = 0.13$, $ps < .001$). However, participants in the low social expectancies condition did not experience any significant increase in negative emotion (Time 1, $M = 1.61$, $SE = 0.12$; Time 2, $M = 1.65$, $SE = 0.13$, $ps < .001$).²

To determine that our effects are driven by participants’ perceptions of social expectancies, we conducted a mediation analysis

(Preacher & Hayes, 2004) to see whether change in ratings of the social expectancies measure could explain differences in mood from Time 1 to Time 2. To this end we contrast coded our condition variable (low-expectancies = 1; high-expectancies = 0; control = 0) and computed a negative emotion change score (Time 2–Time 1). Condition predicted ratings for social expectancies ($\beta = .35$, $p < .001$) and also predicted change in negative emotion ($\beta = .29$, $p = .006$). When both condition and social expectancies were regressed onto change in negative emotion, the effects for condition became nonsignificant ($\beta = .20$, $p = .063$), whereas social expectancies were a significant predictor ($\beta = .26$, $p = .019$). This was consistent with full mediation, confirmed with a bootstrapped 95% confidence interval that did not include zero (0.01, 0.27). This helps to demonstrate that it was changes in perceived social expectancies, and not simply differences in the valence of our primes, that was responsible for variations in emotional response.

Discussion

Study 4 supported our hypothesis that communicating high expectancies in regard to negative emotional experiences produces more negative emotional responses compared to communicating low expectancies, which instead dampened negative emotional responding. This finding is consistent with the supports of Study 3 and highlights the potential impact of media communications on emotional functioning.

As predicted, perceived social expectancies remained high even when no information in regard to social norms for emotional experience was provided. It is interesting to note that these levels were just as high as when social expectancies were made salient. This finding highlights the salience of social norms in regard to the cost of negative emotion for Westerners. It appears that communicating the message that experiencing and expressing negative emotions is socially accepted works against this salient norm, reducing perceived social expectancies and dampening negative emotional responses to the recall of negative emotional events.

General Discussion

In our research we set out to explore the consequences of people’s beliefs about how they think others expect them to feel. Across four studies, we found evidence that perceived social expectations not to feel negative emotions are associated with more negative emotion and lower well-being. In Study 1, we demonstrated that social expectancies were associated with increased negative self-evaluation when experiencing negative emotion. In Study 2, we showed that this process had implications for emotional functioning and well-being, with social expectancies increasing negative emotion and reducing well-being. Across both studies, we found these associations independent of personal expectancies, which tended to show expectancy consistent rather than harmful associations with well-being (Study 2). We also found that these associations are relatively robust across cultures, although social expectancies were more strongly associated with

² As in Study 3, we use the full complement of negative emotions from the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule. Removing the two less relevant emotions (hostile, scared) does not change any of our reported findings.

negative emotionality and reduced well-being in cultures that place a relatively high value on the experience of positive emotion compared to cultures that do so to a lesser degree.

In Studies 3 and 4 we provided experimental evidence that communicating the social costs (Study 3) or reduced social acceptance (Study 4) of negative emotion yields larger negative emotional responses compared to being told that experiencing and expressing negative emotion has few social costs and is acceptable. This finding highlights the potentially harmful effects of perceived social expectations for emotional experience. When social norms place pressure on people not to experience negative emotion, people react to these perceived norms with increased negative emotional responding. Alternatively, when these norms communicate the acceptability of these emotions, people's experience of those emotions appears to be dampened. Noteworthy is the finding of Study 4 that communicating social expectancies does not appear to increase the salience of these social norms, which remain just as high when no communication regarding social norms is provided. This demonstrates that these social pressures appear to be highly normative and particularly so within Western cultures.

Our research contributes to previous work that highlights the social nature of emotion (e.g., Fischer & Manstead, *in press*; Frijda & Mesquita, 1994) and specifically the importance of social appraisals in the production of emotional experience (Manstead & Fischer, 2001). We add to this work by focusing on the role of social appraisal of emotion states themselves. Perceptions of how others evaluate and find acceptable the emotions we experience appear to be an important ingredient in producing downstream emotional responses, and ironically in aggravating those same emotions that are deemed to be socially undesirable or unacceptable.

Our work also contributes to research on maladaptive responses to emotional experience. When people respond to their own emotions with negative self-reflection these response styles play a role in producing poor psychological outcomes (e.g., Nolen-Hoeksema, 2000). From the perspective of control theory (Carver & Scheier, 1982, 1990), discrepancies between how we actually feel and how we think we should feel are likely to result in negative self-focused thought, leading to increased negative emotions and decrements in well-being. A particularly insidious element of social expectancies is that they set up emotion goals that are hard to abandon. Salient reminders of the value of happiness and costs of sadness ensure that people are either explicitly or implicitly driven to achieve these goals, and yet constantly avoiding sadness is a particularly difficult goal to attain. As noted by Watkins (2008), when people experience discrepancies in the contexts of hard-to-attain and hard-to-abandon goals they become stuck in unconstructive, negative, self-focused thinking. In this way, our findings provide for reflection on the ways in which social messages may affect emotional functioning and well-being: promoting particular emotional states as more desirable than others may achieve more harm than good.

Next to social expectancies, our own personal expectancies about our emotional experiences appear to be less noxious. Previous work has demonstrated that personal expectations guide and direct desired emotional experiences (Eid & Diener, 2001; Mitmansgruber et al., 2009). Consistent with this, in Study 2, we found that personal expectancies not to experience negative emotion were associated with increased satisfaction with life. How-

ever, other research has demonstrated that personal expectations are associated with suppression (Campbell-Sills, Barlow, Brown, & Hofman, 2006a) or avoidance (Hayes et al., 2004), both of which have been linked to psychopathology (e.g., Campbell-Sills, Barlow, Brown, & Hofman, 2006b; Zvolensky, Feldner, Leen-Feldner, & Yartz, 2005). Consistent with this, in Studies 1 and 2, we found that personal expectancies not to experience negative emotion were associated with more negative self-evaluation. However, in Study 2, this effect disappeared after controlling for social expectancies. There is some disagreement in the literature on whether personal expectations guide and direct or amplify unwanted emotion, and our data do not provide any clarity in this regard. Important for our purposes, however, is the finding that perceived social expectancies appear to aggravate unwanted emotions and reduce well-being through their role in activating negative self-evaluation when experiencing normatively discrepant emotions, and this cannot be accounted for by personal expectancies in regard to emotional experience.

We argue that social pressures not to feel negative emotions lead people to reflect negatively on themselves when they experience negative emotions, leading to amplification of those emotions. However, in our studies, self-evaluation did not fully mediate the effects of social expectancies on satisfaction with life or depression. The findings suggest that the link between social expectancies and reduced well-being may occur independently of self-evaluation processes. One alternative possibility is that perceived social expectations may promote other maladaptive responses to emotional experience. For example, suppression or avoidance of emotional states have been shown to have negative outcomes (Gross, 1998; Gross & John, 2003; Gross & Levenson, 1993; Hayes et al., 2004) and may also have the ironic effect of amplifying those emotions (Dalglish, Yiend, Schweizer, & Dunn, 2009; Moberly & Watkins, 2008; Wegner, 1994; Wegner, Erber, & Zanakos, 1993). Social expectancies, in addition to promoting a ruminative self-focus, may also lead people to suppress or avoid their emotional experiences. It is important to note that we did measure people's tendency to avoid or fail to accept their own emotions (personal expectancies), and these were consistently related to social expectancies; however, they did not explain the effects of social expectancies on emotional functioning and well-being. Indeed, our approach to measuring personal expectancies and that used in most work on suppression and avoidance differ substantially, and future work could investigate these relationships.

The research presented in this article represents a first attempt to investigate the importance of social expectancies of emotion for emotional functioning and well-being. As such, these studies support a number of important conclusions, but they also raise a number of questions. One such question relates to the role of social norms and cultural values. We argue that perceived social expectancies are informed by social norms and cultural values, although we have not directly measured these norms or values. In addition, our findings indicate culture as a moderator of the magnitude of our effects, yet these effects were still significant in both cultures. Future work could investigate the links between cultural values such as individualism and self-expression, aiming to locate boundary conditions to the effects reported in this research.

Conclusion

Emotions are fundamentally social phenomena. Our research provides the first evidence that people's generalized beliefs about how others expect them to feel may play a central role in their emotional experience and well-being. Our work shows that the more people hold beliefs that others expect them not to experience negative emotions, the more frequently and intensely they are likely to experience those negative emotions. Such ironic effects also relate to indicators of well-being, such as satisfaction with life and depression. Moreover, our findings suggest that these relationships are at least partly mediated by the negative self-evaluations that people have when they experience undesired emotions. Attempts to promote the value of feeling good over the value of feeling bad by emphasizing social norms for these emotions may therefore have the effect of making people feel bad more often.

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