In this chapter we explore gender differences in emotions, defenses, and in the relationship between the two, drawing on our own research as well as on the work of other gender theorists and researchers. We also investigate the ways in which gender differences in self-esteem, anxiety, and depression in a nonclinical sample may be mediated as well as moderated by gender differences in defenses and emotions.

Not much is known about how particular defenses, such as denial, are systematically related to the acknowledgment of particular emotions, such as shame or anger. Even less is known about gender differences in the patterns of these relationships. What is known is that women tend to report defenses and dysphoric emotions that are associated with an inward focus on the self more than men, whereas men report defenses and dysphoric emotions
associated with an outward focus on others more than women. Women report more internalizing dysphoric emotions (such as shame, guilt, hurt, fear, and anxiety) than men, and more internalizing defenses, such as turning against the self. In contrast, men report more externalizing dysphoric emotions (such as contempt) than women, and more externalizing defenses, such as turning against the other (Brody, 1999; Cramer, 1991). Although these patterns appear to be well established, especially among middle-class European Americans (see Brody, 1999), little is known about gender differences in the patterns of relationships between emotional functioning and the use of specific defenses.

In a related vein, several theorists have suggested that the internalizing problems (such as depression, anxiety disorders, or low self-esteem) that characterize women more than men are due to an inability to regulate internalizing emotions, such as shame, whereas the externalizing disorders (such as aggression) that characterize men are due to an inability to regulate externalizing emotions, such as anger (see Gross, 1998; Major, Barr, Zubek, & Babey, 1999; Nolen-Hoeksema & Rusting, 1999). If we consider defense use to be an emotion regulation strategy, then investigating the patterns of relationships among emotional experiences, defense use, and various aspects of adjustment may clarify this issue.

Gender and Development

Psychoanalytic thinking has historically had an ambivalent relationship with the notion of gender and its impact on psychic life and personality functioning. Drive-based psychoanalytic theorists tended to generalize about intrapsychic and interpersonal development based on the male psyche and only later adjusted their theories to explain female development while leaving many of the basic theoretical assumptions intact (see Horney, 1967). Freud (1926/1959) believed that the primary source of anxiety for men was castration, whereas the predominant source of anxiety for women was loss of love. Because castration anxiety was more remote from interpersonal relationships than fear of losing love, Freud thought that male development provided a more impersonal foundation for the development of the superego, leading to a more
rigid and enhanced sense of morality for men than for women (Freud, 1925/1964). (One implication of this theory is the idea that men would be more defensive about violating moral standards than would women.) In one of the most important critiques of Freud’s psychology of women, Schafer (1974) suggested that Freud’s ideas were significantly flawed because of the influence of traditional 19th-century patriarchal and evolutionary values that dominated his conceptualization. Schafer (1974) emphasized the importance of masculine value-laden social forces, pre-Oedipal stages in development, and the role of the maternal figure in affecting women’s development.

A comprehensive psychoanalytic theory about the role that gender plays in intrapsychic development was largely missing until the work of Nancy Chodorow (1978) and other feminist object-relations theorists (see Benjamin, 1988; Fast, 1984). Among other things, Chodorow posited that parent–child relationships are inherently shaped by gender and that the qualities of these gendered relationships are internalized and organized as intrapsychic aspects of development that differ for the two sexes. Specifically, the fact that mothers, who are women, serve as the primary caretakers for their children has a disparate effect on the development of boys and girls. Same-sex identification is fundamental to mother–daughter relationships, and cross-sex de-identification is fundamental to mother–son relationships. Interacting primarily with a same-sex caretaker with whom they identify enables girls to develop a heightened capacity for empathy and intimacy and a self-definition inherently oriented toward someone outside of the self, toward connecting with an “other.” However, this identification also results in a restricted sense of autonomy and agency.

Boys, on the other hand, are required to differentiate from the feminine role model provided by their mothers in order to develop a distinct gender-role identity. Developing a masculine identity involves distancing oneself from intimacy, particularly because fathers are often unavailable as intimate same-sex identificatory role models. Recent theorists such as Pollack (1995) and Bergman (1995) have hypothesized that feelings of vulnerability, loss, and shame in men’s lives result as a partial consequence of cultural emphases on premature separation from mothers. These feelings of vulnerability are theorized to be defended against through the expression
of anger and aggression (Pollack, 1995), as well as a dread and avoidance of intimate relationships that may potentially replicate the early pattern of premature separation they experienced (Bergman, 1995). Mother-son separation is thus viewed by these theorists as a developmental trauma that contributes to men's future difficulties in intimacy, empathy, and commitment. In its emphases on disconnection, male development inculcates the pursuit of individual rather than communal goals and encourages the expression of emotions that are adaptive for agency.

Gender theorists thus stress how girls' development gives primacy to communion, or relationships with others, whereas boys' development gives primacy to agency, or the pursuit of individual ambitions. We use gender differences in communion and agency as a framework within which to understand and explain gender differences in emotions and defense use. Communion and agency were terms originally used by Bakan (1966) to denote the tendency to focus on connections with others (which has been found to be more characteristic of women) versus the tendency to focus on the separateness of the self (which has been found to be more characteristic of men). The importance and complexity of these ideas were recognized as early as 1958 by the philosopher Hanna Arendt, who claimed that access to "who" we are (our "qualities, gifts, talents and shortcomings" [p. 179]) could be gained only through speech and action, through human contact. She viewed autonomy not as a fixed property of the self but rather as a potential that needs others in order to develop. Although she was not a feminist philosopher, Arendt's emphasis on how relationships with others contribute to the development of an autonomous self can be viewed as a precursor to future feminist scholarship (Arendt, 1958; see also Bilsky, 1997).

Communion and agency have been viewed as broad styles of personality organization, or self-schemas that may relate to gender differences in many aspects of cognitive, emotional, and interpersonal functioning (see Cross & Madson, 1997). For example, Cross and Madson (1997) supported the idea that men and women often differ in their use of communal versus agentic strategies to preserve self-esteem. Women have been found to enhance self-esteem by protecting and strengthening their relationships with others, whereas men have been found to enhance self-esteem by overes-
Estimating the uniqueness of their own abilities and belittling their partners.

In an extensive theoretical review, Helgeson and Fritz (1999) argued that unmitigated communion—a tendency to focus on others to the exclusion of the self—characterizes women more than men and is related to psychological distress and depression. Men are more likely to score highly on unmitigated agency, a focus on the self and separation to the exclusion of the other. This is associated with low self-esteem, psychological distress, and poor health. Tendencies toward unmitigated communion in women and toward unmitigated agency in men can potentially lead to nonmutually empathic relationships in both sexes, which, in and of themselves, are related to distress in men (see Nolen-Hoeksema & Rusting, 1999) as well as to heightened depression, anxiety, and lowered self-esteem in women (Lee & Robbins, 1998; Sperberg & Stabb, 1998).

**Communion, Agency, and Emotional Expression**

We draw on the concepts of communion and agency to understand why and in what contexts women report more internalizing negative emotions (such as shame and hurt) than men do, and how and why gender differences in defense styles relate to these negative emotions. Markus and Kitayama (1991) marshaled evidence for the idea that internalizing, or interpersonally engaging emotions, such as shame and hurt, are adaptive for communion because these emotions function to preserve or repair relationships. In contrast, externalizing, or interpersonally disengaging emotions, such as anger or pride, are adaptive for agency because they further individual goals and disrupt interpersonal bonds.

Data indicate that women report internalizing emotions that are adaptive for communion (e.g., shame, warmth, fear, vulnerability) at greater intensities than men, whereas men express some externalizing emotions that are adaptive for agency (e.g., loneliness, pride, and contempt) at greater intensities than women (Brody, 1999; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). When women and men are asked about which emotions they choose to express, women report not
disclosing emotions that may risk damaging their relationships, whereas men report not disclosing feelings that threaten their sense of control (Rosenfeld, 1979). However, data that run counter to these ideas indicate that women express more verbal anger than men, even though anger is an externalizing emotion thought to be more adaptive for agency and interpersonal disengagement (Brody, 1997). Moreover, some studies also have shown that men express more guilt—an emotion thought to be adaptive for communion and interpersonal engagement—than women (Brody, 1999).

The theoretical work of Helen Block Lewis (1971) suggests that gender differences in shame and guilt, with women hypothesized to express more intense shame and men more intense guilt, may stem not only from the communal function of these two emotions but also from their origins in communal versus agentic styles of personality organization. According to Lewis, women’s shame-prone tendencies stem primarily from their disposition to internalize feelings of hostility and anxiety, reflecting a lack of differentiation between self and other (which is also manifested in a field-dependent cognitive style). Men, on the other hand, are theorized to be guilt prone, partly as a consequence of social pressures that encourage strong ego boundaries, a field-independent cognitive style, and competitiveness. These qualities can place men in a position of hurting others, which in turn causes feelings of guilt. To reduce feelings of guilt men use externalizing defense mechanisms and isolation of emotion. In partial support of these ideas, Ferguson and Crowley’s data (1997) indicate that men’s guilt is more related to their defensive style—including attributing less blame to others—than is their shame, whereas women’s shame is more related to their defensive style—including their likelihood to punish themselves—than is their guilt.

Context Specificity of Gender Differences in Emotion

It is important to bear in mind that gender differences in emotional functioning are context specific and are especially dependent on the kinds of situations that precipitate the emotion (Brody, 1999). For example, men express more anger when achievement is frus-
trated, whereas women express more anger when interpersonal trust is violated or betrayed (Stapley & Haviland, 1989). Men express more jealousy when their partners are sexually involved with someone else; women express more jealousy when their partners are emotionally involved with someone else (see Brody, 1999). If women's sense of self is more highly related to their relationships with others than is men's, then women's dysphoric emotions should be more intense than men's when a loss of an intimate relationship is threatened. Moreover, the types of defenses women report using should be those that are internalizing and function to preserve social relationships. In contrast, men should report more dysphoric emotions than women when their autonomy is threatened. Men should also report using externalizing defenses that function to preserve a sense of self based on separateness from others.

On the basis of the literature, our first research prediction was that men and women would report differential negative emotions in response to two different kinds of interpersonal stress: rejection by a partner and demands for more intimacy from a partner. Men should express more dysphoric emotions than women when partners demand intimacy from them, because their self-construals of separateness would be threatened. Women should express more dysphoric emotions than men when partners act in rejecting ways toward them, because their self-construals of communion would be threatened. Consistent with Lewis's (1971) theory, we also predicted that men would report more guilt in response to both interpersonal rejection and demands for intimacy, whereas women would report more shame in response to both kinds of situations. We also explored how gender differences in emotional expression were related to gender differences in patterns of defense use, which we turn to next.

Defense Mechanisms, Agency, and Communion

The classical psychoanalytic view of defense mechanisms generally asserts that they are unconscious processes that serve to avert or modulate unwanted conflicts, impulses, or feelings. Acknowledg-
ing the presence of these unwanted processes could result in the disruption of ego functions (Cramer, 1998b). Bion’s (1962) and Winnicott’s (1965) work represents the beginning of a shift from an emphasis on an intrapsychic to an interpersonal understanding of the function of defense mechanisms. In this vein, defenses are viewed as emerging in a two-person interpersonal context and not simply as a response to intrapsychic conflicts. Newer psychoanalytic conceptualizations view defense mechanisms as part of a set of “relational and cognitive patterns that develop in the context of close relationships with important others” (Cooper, 1998, p. 949).

The purpose of defense mechanisms from this standpoint is not only to protect the individual from the awareness of unacceptable thoughts or wishes but also to protect against the actual or psychic loss of a relationship with another person (the relationship being internalized as an integral part of the self; Cooper, 1998; Modell, 1975, 1984). Following from both more traditional and newer conceptualizations of defense mechanisms, men and women’s differing self-construals of communion and agency may lead them to feel vulnerable in different situations, leading to the use of defenses in those situations. Women may use defenses in situations in which relationships are threatened; men may use defenses in situations in which an autonomous sense of self is threatened. Moreover, women and men may use different defenses because these defenses differentially facilitate communal or agentic goals. The expression of internalizing defenses, such as turning against the self and withdrawal, may be adaptive for preserving social relationships. Externalizing defenses, such as projection and turning against the other, may be adaptive for asserting separateness from others.

The research literature demonstrates patterns that are consistent with these ideas. Internalizing defenses are used more frequently by women than by men, whereas the reverse is true of externalizing defenses (Cramer, 1991). Moreover, men are more likely to use coping strategies involving self-control, as consistent with an agentic self-definition, and women are more likely to use coping strategies involving seeking support from others, as consistent with a communal self-definition (Folkman, Lazarus, Pimley, & Novacek, 1987). As with defense mechanisms, coping styles are theorized to modulate conflict, and they function to protect the self
but involve more conscious processes than do defenses (Cramer, 1998a).

Cramer and Blatt (1990) researched two developmental personality lines characterized by consistent emotional and defensive patterns that parallel agency and communion. The anaclitic line involves the development of stable, mutually satisfying interpersonal relationships, similar to communion, whereas the introjective line involves the development of a stable, realistic, and positive self-identity, similar to agency. Individuals with an anaclitic personality configuration tend to incorporate the use of avoidance defenses such as denial, repression, and displacement to maintain interpersonal relationships while neglecting the development of the self, whereas those with more introjective configurations use externalizing defenses such as projection, which protect and preserve the self, while neglecting to form satisfying interpersonal relationships (Cramer & Blatt, 1990). Cramer and Blatt reported that the majority of anaclitic individuals are females and the majority of introjectives are males.

Defense Mechanisms and Emotions

How defense mechanisms relate to the quality of emotions that are experienced and expressed is an extremely complex issue. First, it is important to distinguish between emotional experiences and emotional expressions in relation to defense use. Emotional experiences are often not observable to others, whereas emotional expressions are, and this private–public distinction may lead to the use of defenses for different purposes. For example, defenses may be used to ward off emotional experiences because such experiences violate one’s self-concept. In contrast, defenses may be used to ward off the public expression of specific emotions because these emotions may be socially unacceptable or undesirable. Because the way one is viewed in the eyes of others may become internalized as one’s self-concept, it is possible that defenses simultaneously protect one’s public as well as one’s private images, distorting both expressions and experiences.

Further complicating the relationship between defense use and emotional functioning is that expressed emotions may themselves
serve as defenses. Waelder's (1930/1976) principle of multiple function allows for a complex relationship between defense and that which is defended, in that the same behavior, emotion, or idea can be simultaneously an expression of, and a defense against, a particular wish, feeling, thought, or need. For example, expressing anger may be a defense against a conflict involving vulnerability, or anger may itself be partly the emotion on which the conflict centers, or both.

One also needs to consider that defenses may differ from each other in the way they relate to emotional expressivity. Plutchik (1998) theorized that defenses are derivatives of emotional experiences, with repression deriving from intense anxiety, displacement from anger, and compensation from sadness. Other researchers have viewed defenses along a maturity continuum. Mature defenses are more adaptive for functioning and well-being and include humor, sublimation, and suppression, whereas immature defenses are less adaptive for functioning and well-being and include denial, acting out, reaction formation, projection, and turning against the other (Vaillant, 1971, 1977). Mature defenses can be hypothesized to involve a conscious acknowledgment of difficult emotions with little distortion. Emotions are viewed as originating in and belonging to the person's internal world (Kernberg, 1980, 1984). For example, humor and suppression both involve an awareness of a feeling, such as anger, perhaps accompanied by more conscious decisions to minimize the feeling or put it aside. In contrast, immature defenses, such as projection or reaction formation, involve a distortion of a feeling such as anger, so that awareness of the feeling may never surface. Such defenses confuse internal conflicts with external reality (Kernberg, 1980, 1984). These ideas lead to the predictions that more mature defenses should be more positively associated with the acknowledgment of dysphoric emotions appropriate to a given situation than should immature defenses, whereas immature defenses should be more negatively associated with the acknowledgment of dysphoric emotions appropriate to a given situation than should mature defenses.

Somewhat different predictions about the relationships between defenses and emotions emerge from a functionalist perspective (see Brody, 1999). Because defenses and emotions are both func-
tional and adaptive for the maintenance of self-esteem and self-construals, then similar categories (externalizing versus internalizing) of defenses and emotions should be called into play in the same situation. For example, if a situation involves relationship rejection and women's communal sense of self is threatened, then they should report internalizing emotions as well as internalizing types of defenses in response to such situations. Both the emotions and the defenses would minimize damage to the relationship and possibly repair it. The same could be hypothesized of men using externalizing emotions and externalizing defenses: Both are functional for the maintenance of an autonomous sense of self. These hypotheses lead to the predictions that internalizing emotions and defenses should be positively related; that externalizing emotions and defenses should be positively related; but that internalizing emotions and externalizing defenses, as well as externalizing emotions and internalizing defenses, should be negatively related.

Yet another set of predictions emerges when emotions and defenses are viewed from the perspective of how socially acceptable they are for each sex. Cultural display rules prescribe minimizing the expression of vulnerable feelings, especially those connoting vulnerability, such as shame, hurt, and sadness, in men who display bravado (Zillmann, Weaver, Mundorf, & Aust, 1986). For women, cultural display rules prescribe minimizing the expression of externalizing feelings, especially those connoting aggression, such as interpersonal and intrapsychic functioning, because violating stereotypes. These display rules have powerful effects on both externalizing and internalizing defenses. Emotions and defenses should be positively related, that externalizing emotions and defenses should be positively related, but internalizing emotions and internalizing defenses, as well as externalizing emotions and internalizing defenses, should be negatively related.
defense mechanisms, such as denial, to ward off their vulnerability. For women, similar processes would take place if aggression or contempt should arise. One prediction that arises from this reasoning is that for men the ability to acknowledge socially unacceptable internalizing feelings, such as sadness or hurt, will be more negatively related to the use of defenses than they will be for women, whereas for women the ability to acknowledge externalizing feelings, such as contempt or anger, will be more negatively related to using defenses than they will be for men.

It is important to note that defensive behaviors themselves, and not just emotional expressions, are subject to cultural display rules. For example, it is more socially acceptable for a man than for a woman to act out aggression. Because both defensive behaviors and emotions are subject to the same display rules, it is likely that women will report both higher levels of internalizing defenses and internalizing emotions than men, whereas men will report both higher levels of externalizing defenses and emotions than women.

We have been arguing on the one hand that the types of emotions acknowledged and the types of defenses used will be positively related for internalizing defenses and emotions and that externalizing emotions and defenses will have a similar relationship. This argument emerges from several different perspectives, including the ideas that (a) the reported emotions themselves are a type of defense, (b) defenses and emotions are subject to similar display rules, and (c) defenses and emotions are both functional for maintaining communal and agentic self-construals. On the other hand, we have also argued that a pattern of gender differences should emerge such that, for men more than for women, all types of defense use will be negatively related to the acknowledgement of internalizing emotions. In contrast, for women more than for men, all types of defense use will be negatively related to the acknowledgement of externalizing emotions. Finally, we have argued that more mature defenses, such as sublimation, humor, and suppression, should involve less distortion of appropriate dysphoric emotions than immature defenses, such as denial, acting out, and reaction formation. Mature defenses should show positive relationships with the acknowledgment of appropriate dysphoric emotions and negative relationships with the acknowledgment of
inappropriate dysphoric emotions; whereas the reverse should be true of immature defenses.

There is scant empirical research on the relationship between emotions and defenses that would clarify the accuracy of our predictions. A recent study by Offer, Lavie, Gothelf, and Apter (2000) indicated that self-reports of anger were related to self-reports of projection, displacement, and regression, whereas self-reports of anxiety were related to displacement, reaction formation, and undoing. Some of the results support at least some of our predictions: For example, externalizing defenses (projection and displacement) were found to be associated with an externalizing emotion (anger); whereas internalizing defenses (reaction formation and undoing) were found to be associated with an internalizing emotion (anxiety). However, displacement was also found to be associated with anxiety, a finding we would not have predicted. Because Offer et al. did not explore emotions as a function of situational context, and did not specifically focus on gender, their results are only partially relevant to our ideas. They did not clarify how gender differences were measured, but reported finding no gender differences in the patterns of relationships among anger, anxiety, and defenses.

In our research we focused on the conscious acknowledgment of emotions in specific situations and, by systematically considering the ways in which emotional experiences and general defense style were related to each other, we hoped to develop a clearer understanding of gender differences in these patterns of relationships. We also hoped to better understand the ways in which emotions themselves may be a form of defensiveness or may precipitate other defensive strategies.

Defenses, Emotions, and Adjustment

How do emotions and defenses relate to gender differences in self-esteem, depression, and anxiety? A recent meta-analysis of gender differences in self-esteem revealed that women generally report lower self-esteem than men, although the magnitude and the direction of gender effects differ depending on age, social class, and ethnicity of participants as well as the method of assessing self-esteem (Major et al., 1999). Similarly, women generally show higher
rates of depression and mood disorders than men, with the results becoming especially pronounced in early adolescence (Nolen-Hoeksema & Rusting, 1999). Psychoanalytic theories to explain these gender differences have ranged from penis envy (Freud, 1925/1964) to explanations involving women’s lower social status and power (Horney, 1967). Although the explanations for these gender differences are undoubtedly complex, and span multiple interacting intrapsychic, cultural, and possibly even biological factors, our focus here is on the role of intrapsychic processes, specifically the role of emotions and defenses.

Do women generally suffer from lower self-esteem, higher depression, and higher anxiety than men partly because they use different defenses and emotion regulation strategies than men do? Research has pinpointed three possible types of defense-emotion regulation difficulties that may mediate, or underlie, these gender differences in adjustment. First, some research has noted a relationship between the use of denial and reports of depression (Offer et al., 2000). Margo, Greenberg, Fisher, and Dewan (1993) showed that as the level of depression increases, not only denial, but also optimistic defenses that protect self-esteem—such as principalization (intellectualization, rationalization, isolation of affect) and reversal (negation, repression, suppression, and reaction formation)—are used significantly less. Some of these defenses may be used less by women than by men.

Second, researchers have shown that depression is associated with either the suppression of anger, the expression of anger, or both, leading researchers to theorize that it is the frequent experience of anger and failure to regulate it that may be related to depression (see Brody, 1999; Sperberg & Stabb, 1998). It may be that gender differences in depression are related to corresponding gender differences in anger regulation strategies, with women’s relatively high depression related to a relatively high suppression of anger.

Third, Nolen-Hoeksema and her colleagues (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1987, 1990, 1998; Nolen-Hoeksema, Larson, & Grayson, 1999) have persuasively argued that males are more likely to respond to depressive mood states with active, instrumental defensive and coping strategies, whereas women are more likely to react to depressive states by ruminating over their problems. *Ruminating* involves
a tendency to experience feelings or repeated thoughts about a specific object or situation for an extended period of time. A ruminative style of responding to depression amplifies the dysphoric effects of the depressed mood, making negative interpretations of events and memories more accessible and more influential. In addition, rumination inhibits engagement in everyday behaviors that could have facilitated a sense of control over and improvement in mood. Thus women's propensity to ruminate over negative emotion may offer an important explanatory paradigm for their heightened and sustained experience and expression of depression and related emotions.

Nolen-Hoeksema's work suggests that defenses or coping strategies that help distance negative or upsetting thoughts, emotions, or events may create lower subjective experiences of distress and that these strategies are more apt to be used by men than by women. For example, Parkes (1990) reported that men in her sample evidenced significantly more suppression characterized by restraint, withdrawal, and ignoring the problem than women and that higher levels of suppression were associated with lower levels of distress.

In accordance with previous research, we predicted that both the expression of anger and other externalizing emotions, as well as the expression of externalizing defenses, especially defenses that distance emotion, such as sublimation and suppression, would be higher in men than in women. We also predicted that gender differences in using these types of emotions and defenses would mediate any gender differences in self-esteem, anxiety, and depression. However, we also thought it was possible that gender would interact with emotional expression and defense use in predicting adjustment—in other words, gender might be a moderator variable. For example, perhaps low self-esteem would be evident only among men, and not women, who expressed high levels of internalizing emotions. Such a possibility is suggested by several researchers who have found that individuals who use defense strategies atypical for their sex differ in adjustment levels from those who do not use atypical defenses, sometimes with poorer adjustment (Cramer & Blatt, 1990) and sometimes in complex and different ways for each sex that are not easily interpretable (see Frank, McLaughlin, & Crusco, 1984).
Description of the Study

In a nonclinical sample of college students we investigated gender differences in reported emotional responses to hypothetical scenarios in which partners were either rejecting or demanding of intimacy. We also explored gender differences in reported patterns of defense use and the relationships between defense use and types of emotions expressed. Finally, we analyzed how gender differences in self-esteem, depression, and anxiety might be mediated by gender differences in emotions and defenses or might moderate emotions and defenses to predict adjustment.

Our measures of emotions, defense use, and distress were all based on self-reports, although we attempted to assess participants' reported emotional reactions to particular situations rather than in general. However, the use of self-report measures raises the caution so convincingly described by Shedler, Mayman, and Manis (1993) that some people may present the illusion of being psychologically healthy simply because they deny distress on self-report measures. In our data, this caution is particularly warranted as we explore relationships among reports of defenses such as denial and reports of distress. For example, if we find that use of denial predicts psychological health, does that mean that denial is an adaptive defense, or does that mean that people who use denial give the illusion of being healthy because they are apt to deny distress along with their other negative emotional experiences? We attempt to grapple with these questions as we present our results, and we place special emphasis on results that demonstrate complex interactions among our variables, allowing us to clarify differing patterns in the relationships among self-reported adjustment, emotions, and defenses for men and women.

The sample was composed of 118 undergraduate students (57 women and 61 men) who were enrolled in a psychology course at a major east coast university. The mean age of the women was 18.75 years ($SD = 0.99$), and for men it was 19.00 years ($SD = 1.28$). Ninety percent of the sample was American, and 10% was from several other countries in Asia, South America, Europe, and the Middle East. Sixty-six percent of the sample was European American, 9.3% was Asian American, 7.6% was Hispanic American, and 6.8% was African American.
We explored reported emotions to eight hypothetical stories: five concerning rejection by partners and three concerning partners needing care and intimacy. These stories were labeled *Romantic Relationships Vignettes* (Muderrisoglu, 1999) and had previously been used to assess participants' attachment styles. An example of a rejection story was as follows: "Chris had made plans to introduce you to his/her family. Recently Chris has appeared less interested in arranging that get-together." An example of a story depicting partners needing intimacy was the following: "Chris is going through a rough period of time and has been needing your comfort and asking to see you more often."

Participants were asked to rate the intensity of 24 emotions they would potentially feel in the stories using a 5-point scale (1 = *not at all* to 5 = *extremely*). We selected 12 emotions for analysis in this study: 6 dysphoric, internalizing emotions, including hurt, shame, disappointment, nervousness, sadness, and guilt, and 6 externalizing emotions, including anger, annoyance, contempt, disgust, boredom, and surprise. For some analyses we averaged the intensity of these 2 sets of 6 emotions separately for rejection and partner-needs stories, generating four scores: internalizing emotions to rejection stories (alpha reliability = .77), internalizing emotions to partner demands for intimacy stories (alpha reliability = .78) and, correspondingly, externalizing emotions to rejection stories (alpha reliability = .77) and externalizing emotions to partner needs stories (alpha reliability = .74).

We conceptualized defenses as unconscious processes that aim to avoid or distort some aspect of intolerable affect in order to sustain self-esteem or to maintain relationships. To explore general defense use, participants completed the Defense Style Questionnaire (DSQ; Bond, Gradner, Christian, & Sigal 1983), a self-report measure that assesses participants' conscious awareness of the types of defensive behaviors they use. It can be argued that using a self-report measure violates the conceptualization of defenses as unconscious processes. However, it has been theorized that the actual behaviors through which defense mechanisms manifest themselves may be more accessible to conscious awareness than the functions they serve, thus allowing for the validity of self-report measures of defensive behaviors (Bond et al., 1983).

We used a modified 64-item version of the DSQ, including 17 of
the original 25 defense mechanisms that we thought were most conceptually relevant for relationship stresses, including suppression, sublimation, humor, reaction formation, undoing, inhibition, withdrawal, idealization, projection, passive aggression, acting out, omnipotence/devaluation, isolation, splitting, regression, denial, and affiliation. Our selection of the DSQ was based partly on the broad range of defenses it assessed, and our selection of particular defenses was based on the work of several highly influential psychoanalytic writers, including Anna Freud and Otto Fenichel, as compiled by Vaillant (see Vaillant, 1977, p. 79).

Sample items for each defense are presented in Table 6.1. Each item is rated on a 9-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Each defense score is calculated by taking the mean of the corresponding items for the defense measured. On the basis of Bond et al.'s (1983) suggestion, we performed a principal-components factor analysis to explore the best fitting factor solution, as opposed to using the factor solutions obtained in previous studies. A principal-components analysis with a varimax rotation revealed four conceptually meaningful factors with eigenvalues >1 that explained 51.5% of the total variance. Defenses were considered part of a factor if their loading was greater than .45. The first factor, labeled Impulsive Action-Oriented Defenses, included acting out, omnipotence–devaluation, passive aggression, projection, splitting, and lowered use of sublimation. This factor comprises immature defenses that involve high levels of distortion of internal and external reality. The second factor, labeled Internalizing Defenses, included inhibition, isolation, withdrawal, and denial. The defenses in this factor involve shifting from engagement with the outside world to a more internal focus and, in so doing, limiting and constricting potential opportunities to confront or repair interpersonal conflicts directly. The third factor, labeled Social Preservation Defenses, included affiliation, idealization, reaction formation, and undoing and involves defenses that aim to maintain interpersonal connections, sometimes by transforming intolerable ideas and emotions into more tolerable ones. The fourth factor, labeled Distancing Defenses, includes humor, suppression, and lowered use of regression, which share an acknowledgment of conflicntual emotions or ideas with only subtle changes in their form of expression.
### Table 6.1

*Sample Items From the Defense Style Questionnaire*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of defense</th>
<th>Sample item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Suppression</td>
<td>I'm able to keep a problem out of my mind until I have time to deal with it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sublimation</td>
<td>I work out my anxiety through doing something constructive and creative like painting or woodwork.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humor</td>
<td>I'm usually able to see the funny side of an otherwise painful predicament.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reaction formation</td>
<td>I try to be nice to people I don't like.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undoing</td>
<td>After I fight for my rights, I tend to apologize for my assertiveness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inhibition</td>
<td>I'm very shy about standing up for my rights with people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawal</td>
<td>I withdraw from people when I feel hurt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idealization</td>
<td>There is someone I know who can do anything and who is absolutely fair and just.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projection</td>
<td>Most of what happens to me is not my responsibility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive aggression</td>
<td>If my boss bugged me, I might make a mistake in my work or work more slowly so as to get back at him or her.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting out</td>
<td>I often act impulsively when something is bothering me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omnipotence/devaluation</td>
<td>I am superior to most people I know.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isolation</td>
<td>Often I find that I don't feel anything when the situation would seem to warrant strong emotions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Splitting</td>
<td>As far as I'm concerned, people are either good or bad.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regression</td>
<td>I fall apart under stress.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denial</td>
<td>People say I'm like an ostrich with my head buried in the sand. In other words, I tend to ignore unpleasant facts as if they don't exist.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affiliation</td>
<td>When I feel bad, I try to be with someone.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We also explored levels of general defensiveness using the subscales of Denial of Distress and Repressive Defensiveness from the Weinberger Adjustment Inventory (WAI; Weinberger & Schwartz, 1990). Denial of Distress (11 items, $\alpha = .75-.78$) measures the extent to which individuals do not acknowledge normative experiences of distress. Sample items (scored in reverse) include “I feel a little down when I don’t do as well as I thought I would” and “If people I like do things without asking me to join them, I feel a little left out.” The Repressive Defensiveness scale (11 items, $\alpha = .79$) measures the extent to which individuals describe themselves as always considerate of others, responsible, and in control of their socially undesirable impulses. Sample items (scored in reverse) include “There have been times when I said I would do one thing but did something else” and “Once in awhile, I don’t do something someone asked me to do.”

To explore psychological adjustment, we used three subscales from the Distress scale of the WAI (Weinberger & Schwartz, 1990): Anxiety, Depression, and Self-Esteem. Each item is rated on a 5-point scale ($1 = \text{not at all true of me}$ to $5 = \text{very true of me}$).

Results

Gender differences in reported emotions. Using the agency–communion framework we had predicted that (a) men would express more negative emotions than women in response to partners' intimacy demands and (b) women would express more negative emotions than men in response to partners' rejection. On the basis of previous literature on emotional expression, we also predicted that (c) men would express more guilt than women to both partner rejection and partner intimacy scenarios and that women would express more shame than men to both types of scenarios.

We performed two sets of repeated measures multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVAs), consisting of gender as a between-groups variable, type of situation (rejection vs. intimacy demands) as a repeated measure, and types of emotion as the multiple outcome measure in the analysis. One MANOVA focused on the six internalizing emotions (hurt, shame, disappointment, sadness, guilt, and nervousness); the second focused on the six externalizing...
emotions (anger, annoyance, contempt, disgust, boredom, and surprise).

The MANOVA for internalizing emotions indicated that the multivariate main effect of gender was significant, multivariate $F(6, 111) = 3.47, p < .01$. Specific emotions that showed significant gender differences were guilt, univariate $F(1, 116) = 4.40, p < .04$, with women expressing less guilt than men (women: $M = 0.18, SD = 0.32$; men: $M = 0.34, SD = 0.48$), and sadness, univariate $F(1, 116) = 3.70, p < .06$, with women expressing more sadness than men (women: $M = 0.97, SD = 0.72$; men: $M = 0.73, SD = 0.65$). The multivariate main effect of situation was highly significant, multivariate $F(6, 111) = 75.63, p < .001$, with every emotion except nervousness showing a significant univariate $F$ and with means indicating that both men and women reported more intense emotions (except for nervousness) when partners rejected them than when partners demanded intimacy. The multivariate Gender $\times$ Situation interaction was also significant, $F(6, 111) = 3.14, p < .01$; with significant univariate interactions for hurt, $F(1, 116) = 5.28, p < .02$; and sadness, $F(1, 116) = 9.75, p < .002$. In accordance with our hypotheses, these interactions revealed that men reported more hurt and sadness than did women when partners demanded intimacy but reported less hurt and sadness than women when partners rejected them (see Table 6.2).

The MANOVA in which externalizing emotions were the outcome variables revealed no main effects of gender. Although the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotion</th>
<th>Men (n = 61)</th>
<th>Women (n = 57)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Partner rejection</td>
<td>Partner demand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>$SD$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadness</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hurt</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>1.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
multivariate Gender × Situation interaction was not significant, $F(6, 111) = 1.68, p = .13$, a univariate Gender × Situation interaction for anger tended to be significant, $F(1, 116) = 3.52, p = .06$. This interaction revealed a tendency for men to be less angry than women in response to rejection scenarios but more angry than women in response to scenarios involving a partner’s demands for intimacy. Finally, the main effect of situation was again highly significant, $F(6, 111) = 66.15, p < .001$, with all emotions showing significant univariate $F$ values, indicating that both men and women reported more intense emotions in response to rejection than in response to a partner’s needs for intimacy.

**Gender differences in defense use.** We had predicted that expressing externalizing emotions, especially anger, and externalizing defenses, would be higher in men than in women. We have already discussed gender differences in anger, which were context specific to either rejection or partners’ needs situations, and we have more to say later about how the expression of anger related to adjustment variables. As displayed in Table 6.3, a one-way MANOVA for gender using the four DSQ defense styles as outcome measures showed that men tended to report distancing de-

---

**Table 6.3**

*Means and Standard Deviations for Defenses*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Defense</th>
<th>Men ($n = 61$)</th>
<th>Women ($n = 57$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$M$</td>
<td>$SD$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSQ Acting out</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSQ Internalizing</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSQ Social Preservation</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSQ Distancing</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WAI Denial of Distress</td>
<td>24.39</td>
<td>5.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WAI Repressive Defensiveness</td>
<td>24.34</td>
<td>5.70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. DSQ = Defense Style Questionnaire; WAI = Weinberger Adjustment Inventory.*
fenses (suppression, humor, and less regression) significantly more than women, multivariate $F(4, 113) = 2.15, p < .08$, univariate $F(1, 116) = 5.11, p < .03$. A separate MANOVA based on the two WAI defense scales also indicated multivariate main effects of gender, $F(2, 115) = 11.86, p < .001$, with men denying normative experiences of distress significantly more than women (Denial of Distress scale on the WAI: univariate $F[1, 166] = 10.23, p < .002$); women reported significantly higher amounts of always doing the right thing and never giving in to temptations (Repressive Defensiveness scale on the WAI: univariate $F[1, 116] = 6.02, p < .02$). These findings suggest that for men, defenses may be related to experiencing negative emotions or distress, whereas for women defenses may be triggered by feelings, wishes, and behaviors that do not conform to strict cultural standards for interpersonal and moral behaviors.

**Relationships between DSQ defenses and WAI defenses.** As displayed in Table 6.4, denial of distress on the WAI was related significantly positively to distancing defenses for both sexes and negatively to internalizing defenses. Other correlations indicated that the more acting-out defenses that were reported on the DSQ, the less Repressive Defensiveness was reported on the WAI (significant for women, a trend for men). It seems that for both sexes, but especially for women, wishes to conform to social standards relate to lowered tendencies to report acting-out defenses. This relationship may be due to the socially undesirability of externalizing behaviors and defenses, especially for women.

**Relationships between emotions and defenses.** We had predicted that (a) the types of emotions expressed and the types of defenses reported would be positively related, that is, that internalizing defenses and internalizing emotions would be positively related, as would externalizing emotions and externalizing defenses, whereas externalizing defenses and internalizing emotions would be negatively related, as would internalizing defenses and externalizing emotions; (b) among men, more frequent reports of defenses would be negatively related to internalizing emotions, whereas among women, more frequent reports of defenses would be negatively related to externalizing emotions; and (c) that mature defenses would be positively related to reports of appropriate dysphoric emotions and negatively related to reports of inappropriate dysphoric emotions, whereas immature defenses would be nega-
Table 6.4

Pearson Correlations Between Defense Style Questionnaire Defenses and Weinberger Adjustment Inventory (WAI) Defenses for Each Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Defense</th>
<th>Acting out</th>
<th>Internalization</th>
<th>Social preservation</th>
<th>Distancing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WAI Denial of Distress</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>-.32**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WAI Repressive Defensiveness</td>
<td>-.23*</td>
<td>-.39**</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .10. **p < .05. ***p < .01.
tively related to reports of appropriate dysphoric emotions and positively related to the reports of inappropriate dysphoric emotions.

Pearson correlations between specific defenses on the DSQ and WAI and internalizing and externalizing emotions are displayed in Table 6.5. These correlations revealed that for both men and women, externalizing and internalizing emotions were related to increased reports of acting-out defenses, such as "I often am driven to act impulsively." Neither internalizing nor externalizing emotions was related to the use of other defenses on the DSQ. This finding only partially supports our hypotheses. The data suggest that acting-out defenses are precipitated by intense levels of emotion or that intense levels of emotion themselves are defenses that accompany the use of acting-out defenses. Alternatively, acting out may be a less efficient defense strategy for regulating emotions than are other types of defenses.

Other results revealed that men's internalizing emotions to partners' demands for intimacy, such as hurt and sadness, were sig-

Table 6.5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotion</th>
<th>DSQ Acting-out defenses</th>
<th>WAI repressive defensiveness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internalizing emotions to partners'</td>
<td>.29**</td>
<td>.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>demands</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internalizing emotions to partners'</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rejection</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Externalizing emotions to partners'</td>
<td>.30**</td>
<td>.27**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>demands</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Externalizing emotions to partners'</td>
<td>.37***</td>
<td>.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rejection</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. DSQ = Defensive Style Questionnaire; WAI = Weinberger Adjustment Inventory. **p < .05. ***p < .01.
nificantly negatively related to their reports of repressive defensiveness on the WAI \( r = -.26 \). This relationship was near 0 for women \( r = .06 \). A Fisher's z test for the differences between the women's and men's correlations indicated that the correlations were significantly different (Fisher's z = 1.73, \( p < .05 \), one-tailed). These results are consistent with the idea that men who use defenses to conform to social and moral conventions acknowledge less intense feelings of vulnerability than do other men and that the acknowledgment of vulnerability is not related to social conformity in women.

A somewhat different relationship emerges when emotions are categorized into those that are appropriate (or realistic) when partners are rejecting versus those that are inappropriate or unrealistic. We considered appropriate internalizing emotions in response to rejection to be those that did not imply a negative judgment about the role of the self in the rejection and included disappointment, sadness, and hurt, whereas inappropriate internalizing emotions were those that did imply a negative judgment about the role of the self in the rejection and included guilt, shame, and nervousness. Appropriate externalizing emotions were those that did not imply a demeaning attitude toward the other, including anger, annoyance, and surprise, whereas inappropriate externalizing emotions were those that did imply a demeaning attitude toward the other, including contempt, disgust, and boredom. We derived scores for each of these four categories (appropriate and inappropriate internalizing and externalizing emotions) by calculating means across the three emotions in each category. Consistent with our previous results for sadness, gender differences for appropriate internalizing emotions were significant, \( t(116) = 2.31, \ p < .03 \), with women reporting more appropriate internalizing emotions than men (women: \( M = 2.31, SD = 0.99 \); men: \( M = 1.88, SD = 1.01 \)), but gender differences for the other three categories of emotions were not significant.

We then correlated the four types of emotions with (a) mature defenses (sublimation, suppression, humor, undoing, withdrawal, and affiliation), (b) immature defenses (acting out, idealization, omnipotence–devaluation, passivity–aggression, projection, reaction formation, inhibition, denial, and splitting), (c) the four DSQ defenses, and (d) the two WAI defenses. (We did not calculate ap-
propriate and inappropriate emotions for the stories concerning partners' needs for intimacy, because it wasn't clear that any of our dysphoric emotions was an appropriate or realistic reaction to these scenarios.)

The results are displayed in Table 6.6 and indicate that for the entire sample reports of inappropriate externalizing emotions tended to be positively correlated with the use of immature defenses. For men only, using immature defenses was significantly related not only to reports of inappropriate externalizing emotions but also to reports of appropriate externalizing emotions and inappropriate internalizing emotions and was also positively, although not significantly, related to appropriate internalizing emotions. In contrast, and contrary to our predictions, for women, mature defenses were negatively related to reports of appropriate internalizing and appropriate externalizing defenses. Fisher's z tests analyzing the differences between men's and women's correlations revealed that the only significant difference was in the relationship between immature defenses and appropriate externalizing emotions.

Table 6.6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of emotion</th>
<th>Mature defenses</th>
<th>Immature defenses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate internalizing</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.27**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>emotions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate externalizing</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.27**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>emotions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inappropriate internalizing</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>emotions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inappropriate externalizing</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>emotions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .10. **p < .05.
izing emotions (Fischer’s z = 1.90, p < .05), which was significant for men and not for women.

It is worth noting that reaction formation, true to its definition, was significantly negatively related to the expression of inappropriate externalizing emotions (r = -.19, p < .05) as well as to the expression of appropriate externalizing emotions (r = -.23, p < .02). This was in contrast to the other immature defenses, which were each positively related to the expression of externalizing emotions. These patterns tended to emerge similarly for both genders.

**Emotions and psychological adjustment.** Table 6.7 shows the means and standard deviations for self-esteem, depression, and anxiety for each gender. We found that the women in our sample reported significantly lower self-esteem and higher levels of anxiety than the men did. Levels of depression did not differ for men and women. These three variables (self-esteem, anxiety, and depression) were highly and significantly correlated with each other in both sexes (the lowest correlation between any pair was for anxiety and depression in men: r = .50, whereas the highest was between depression and self-esteem in men: r = .69). However, because of conceptual differences among the three variables, we analyzed them separately in relation to defenses and emotions.

**Interactions among gender, emotions, and defenses.** First, to test the moderation hypothesis, we explored whether there was a significant interaction between defenses and gender in predicting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>25.51</td>
<td>4.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>19.91</td>
<td>6.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-esteem*</td>
<td>14.66</td>
<td>5.21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Reverse scored.
the adjustment variables. We conducted six regression analyses in which the outcome variables were the adjustment measures (self-esteem, anxiety, or depression). For three of these analyses the four DSQ factors were predictors, and for the other three the two WAI defenses were predictors. The first block of predictors entered comprised the four DSQ factors or the two WAI defenses. The second block of predictors consisted of dummy variables that coded the interaction between gender and each of the defenses. We interpreted interactions, when significant, by performing regressions separately for each gender looking at the relationships between outcome variables and predictors.

A significant main effect revealed that higher denial of distress was related to higher self-esteem in both sexes ($B = 0.65, p < .03$). Significant interactions revealed that, for self-esteem, gender significantly interacted with internalization defenses such as withdrawal ($B = -0.74, p < .01$). For women, higher internalization defenses were related to lower self-esteem ($B = 0.46, p < .001$), whereas for men there was no significant relationship between internalization defenses and self-esteem ($B = 0.14, p < .25$). That higher levels of internalizing defenses predict lower self-esteem in women is consistent with previous work showing that rumination (an internalizing coping strategy) is maladaptive for women (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1998).

For both sexes, those who reported lower distancing defenses reported higher anxiety ($B = 0.43, p < .05$). The interaction of gender with three defenses also predicted anxiety: DSQ internalization defenses ($B = 0.52, p < .05$), DSQ social preservation defenses ($B = 0.94, p < .004$), and WAI denial of distress ($B = 0.62, p < .05$). For women, higher internalization defenses and lower denial of distress predicted higher anxiety, but this was less true of men (women: $B = 0.36, p < .001$ for internalization; $B = 0.63, p < .001$ for denial of distress; men: $B = 0.19, p = .09$ for internalization; $B = 0.37, p < .01$ for denial of distress). Here again, an internalizing style for women predicted worse adjustment—in this case, higher levels of anxiety. In contrast, for men, DSQ social preservation defenses predicted higher anxiety ($B = 0.26, p < .005$), which was not true of women ($B = 0.16, ns$). The relationship between social preservation defenses and heightened anxiety for men is consistent
with Cramer and Blatt's (1990) finding that men who use stereotypically feminine defenses have worse adjustment.

The Gender × Defense interactions did not predict depression, which was predicted by main effects of type of defense. In both sexes, higher internalization defenses were related to higher depression (B = 0.70, p < .02), and higher denial of distress was related to lower depression (B = -0.50, p < .08). These results are consistent with other research on the defenses that predict depression, especially higher denial predicting lower depression (see Nolen-Hoeksema, 1990).

Next we performed a parallel set of regressions, using internalizing and externalizing emotions to partners' rejection and partners' needs as predictors, along with dummy variables for the interactions between gender and each type of emotion. The outcome variables were self-esteem, depression, or anxiety. These regressions revealed a main effect of higher externalizing emotions in response to partners' rejection predicting higher self-esteem (B = 0.81, p < .08). A significant interaction between gender and internalizing emotions when partners made demands also predicted self-esteem (B = 1.23, p < .02). Men who reported more internalizing emotions, such as shame and sadness, when partners made demands reported lower self-esteem (B = 0.80, p < .001), whereas women did not (B = 0.03, ns). Anxiety and depression were also predicted by interactions between gender and externalizing emotions when partners made demands (B = 0.96, p < .06, for anxiety; B = 1.32, p < .001, for depression). Men who reported more externalizing emotions reported lower anxiety (B = -0.59, p < .01) and lower depression (B = 0.69, p < .01), whereas women did not show this relationship (B = 0.07, ns, for anxiety, and 0.13, ns, for depression). That internalizing emotions predicted lower self-esteem and that externalizing emotions predicted lower anxiety and depression in men are again consistent with Cramer and Blatt's (1990) finding that men who have a gender-inappropriate emotional style have worse adaptation than do men who have a gender-appropriate style.

Finally, we performed a set of three regressions using appropriate-inappropriate emotions, gender, and the interactions between gender and these four types of emotions as predictors of depression, self-esteem, and anxiety. For depression, neither main effects
of the emotions nor interactions were significant. For anxiety, gender significantly interacted with inappropriate internalizing emotions to rejection ($B = 0.98, p < .05$). Simple regressions revealed that, for men, expressing inappropriate internalizing emotions, such as shame, guilt, and nervousness, was related to higher anxiety ($B = 0.33, p < .01$), but not for women ($B = -0.06, ns$). For self-esteem, gender tended to interact with appropriate externalizing emotions. Simple regressions revealed that, for women, self-esteem tended to be higher when the expression of appropriate externalizing emotions was higher ($B = 0.21, p = .11$), whereas for men there was no relationship ($B = 0.02, ns$).

**Mediating Hypotheses**

Our final question was whether the differing emotions and defense styles reported by the two sexes mediated the gender differences in psychological adjustment. We had originally predicted that gender differences in externalizing emotions (especially anger) and in externalizing defenses (especially distancing) would mediate any gender differences in adjustment, including self-esteem, anxiety, and depression. However, because our data did not show main effects of gender differences in anger, we instead considered potential mediators to be the variables that had shown gender differences: namely, distancing defenses on the DSQ, repressive defensiveness and denial of distress on the WAI, and the average intensities of sadness and guilt attributed to all of the stories.\(^1\) To assess whether these gender differences in feelings and defenses mediated the relationship between gender and defenses, we conducted mediational analyses using multiple regressions in accordance with the recommendations of Kenny, Kashy, and Bolger (1998).

Four steps are required to show mediation. First, an initial variable (gender) must be correlated with an outcome variable (self-

---

\(^1\) Although the use of appropriate internalizing emotions has also shown gender differences, this difference was largely accounted for by the gender difference in sadness. Because sadness was already being tested as mediating variable, it was not necessary to do a separate analysis to test the degree to which appropriate internalizing emotions served as mediators.
esteem and anxiety). (Because depression did not show gender differences in this sample, we could not examine the variables that mediated gender differences in depressive functioning.) Second, the initial variable (gender) must be significantly correlated with the potential mediators (types of defenses or emotions). In this case, gender was correlated with distancing defenses, denial of distress, repressive defensiveness, and sadness and guilt reported to stories. Third, the mediator should be related to the outcome variable when controlling for the initial variable. When defenses were analyzed as mediators of self-esteem and anxiety, distancing defenses and denial of distress still significantly predicted self-esteem and anxiety after gender was controlled (self-esteem: distancing defenses, \( B = -0.35, p < .001 \), and denial of distress, \( B = 0.46, p < .01 \); anxiety: distancing defenses, \( B = 0.50, p < .001 \), and denial of distress, \( B = 0.51, p < .001 \)). Repressive defensiveness also tended to predict anxiety significantly after gender was controlled (\( B = -0.17, p = .06 \)), although now it did not predict self-esteem (\( B = 0.13, ns \)).

These first three steps demonstrate partial mediation. A fourth step is necessary for demonstrating complete mediation in that the relationship between the initial variable (gender) and the outcome variables (self-esteem or anxiety) should be reduced to near 0 when the mediator’s influence is controlled. When the defenses of distancing or denial of defenses are each controlled, gender’s relationship to self-esteem and anxiety becomes nonsignificant (when distancing is controlled as a predictor of self-esteem: \( B = 0.12, ns \), as a predictor of anxiety: \( B = -0.11, ns \); when denial of distress is controlled: for self-esteem, \( B = -0.06, ns \), and for anxiety, \( B = 0.06, ns \). In contrast, gender continues to predict both self-esteem (\( B = 0.22, p < .02 \)) and anxiety (\( B = 0.25, p < .008 \)) when repressive defensiveness is controlled. Thus, gender differences in anxiety and self-esteem seem to be fully mediated by gender differences in the defenses of distancing and denial of distress. Gender differences in anxiety are only partially mediated by repressive defensiveness, whereas repressive defensiveness does not mediate gender differences in self-esteem.

When sadness and guilt are entered into similar types of meditational analyses they appear to be partial mediators of gender differences in anxiety and self-esteem. Guilt and sadness both con-
continue to predict anxiety and self-esteem when gender is controlled
(anxiety: guilt after gender, $B = 0.18$, $p = .05$, and sadness after
gender, $B = 0.17$, $p = .06$; self-esteem: guilt after gender, $B = 0.21$,
$p < .02$, and sadness after gender, $B = 0.18$, $p < .05$). However,
gender also continues to predict anxiety and self-esteem when sad-
ness and guilt are controlled (anxiety: gender after guilt, $B = 0.24$,
$p < .01$, and gender after sadness, $B = 0.17$, $p = .06$; self-esteem:
gender after guilt, $B = 0.23$, $p < .01$, and sadness after guilt: $B = 0.18$, $p < .05$).

**Discussion**

Tables 6.8 and 6.9 summarize the major findings of our study. Per-
haps most important, the data show that men report more negative
internalizing emotions, such as shame and hurt, in response to
partners' needs than do women, whereas women report more neg-
ative internalizing emotions in response to partners' rejection than
do men. We have argued that these data are consistent with fem-
inist object-relations theories of development, such as Chodorow's
(1978), that stress the importance of agency to men's self-construals
and the importance of communion to women's self-construals. If
we theorize that emotions such as shame and hurt are functional
and defensive processes that serve to restore or repair a relation-
ship with another to protect the self, then gender differences in
these emotions indicate the kinds of situations in which men's and
women's self-esteem are differentially threatened. Women are more
apt to view rejection by partners as a threat to their communal
sense of self and therefore react with dysphoric emotions; men are
more apt to view partners' demands for intimacy as a threat to
their separate sense of self and therefore react with dysphoric emo-
tions.

We also found that men reported less sadness and more guilt
than women in situations involving both rejection and partners' needs. Less sadness is consistent with cultural display rules for
men that discourage the expression of personal vulnerability. An-
other of our findings—that men who conformed more highly to
social and moral conventions acknowledged less intense feelings
of vulnerability than other men—supports this interpretation. Gen-
der differences in guilt perhaps result from men having a more
Table 6.8
Summary of Key Results for Reported Emotions and Defense Use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Both genders</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reported emotions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Report more negative internalizing affects (e.g., shame and hurt) in response to partners’ needs than women.</td>
<td>□ Report more negative internalizing affects in response to partners’ rejection than men.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Report less sadness and more guilt than women across situations of rejection and partners’ needs for intimacy.</td>
<td>□ Tend to report more anger than men in response to rejection and less anger than men in response to partners’ needs.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Defense use</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Report more externalizing defenses (e.g., distancing and denial of distress) than women.</td>
<td>□ Report more defensiveness about violations of social and moral standards than men.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relationships between defense use and emotional expression</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Use of immature defenses was related to greater reports of externalizing and internalizing emotions. (Only use of reaction formation was negatively related to reports of emotions.)</td>
<td>□ For men more than women, immature defenses relate positively to expressing appropriate externalizing emotions (e.g., anger).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ High repressive defensiveness is related to low internalizing emotions in situations involving partners’ needs for intimacy.</td>
<td>□ Mature defenses relate negatively to reporting appropriate internalizing and externalizing defenses.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6.9
Summary of Key Results for Relationships Among Adjustment, Reported Emotions, and Defenses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Both sexes</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Defenses and adjustment: Women report higher anxiety and lower self-esteem than men</td>
<td>□ Lower anxiety is related to higher reports of distancing defenses.</td>
<td>□ Higher social preservation defenses are related to higher anxiety.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Higher depression is related to higher reports of internalization and higher denial of distress.</td>
<td>□ Higher internalizing emotions (e.g., shame, sadness, or nervousness) are related to lower self-esteem and higher anxiety.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Higher denial of distress is related to higher self-esteem.</td>
<td>□ Higher externalizing emotions to partners' needs are related to lower anxiety and depression.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotions and adjustment</td>
<td>□ For women, self-esteem tends to be higher when the expression of appropriate externalizing emotions is higher.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Higher externalizing emotions (e.g., anger) in response to partners' rejection are related to higher self-esteem.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
active and agentic stance than women, which may lead them to feel more responsible when things go wrong in relationships, in accordance with Lewis's (1971) theory. A male agentic sense of self was also indicated by our findings that men used more externalizing defenses than did women, including distancing, and that they were less defensive about violations of social and moral standards than were women. Externalizing defenses are also consistent with cultural display rules that encourage an outward-directed emotional stance.

That men used less repressive defensiveness than women, which measured a concern for upholding social and moral standards, seems to contradict Freud's idea that men have a more rigid and enhanced sense of morality than women. The results are more consistent with newer theoretical ideas that moral standards can take both impersonal and interpersonal forms and that women's morality may be based more on interpersonal connections to others than is men's (Gilligan, 1982). Women's communal self-construals may make them more defensive than men about violating social or group norms.

Defenses, emotions, and adjustment. In general, for both genders, reports of internalizing defenses, such as inhibition and withdrawal, were associated with increased depression, and less denial of distress was also associated with poorer adjustment. Conversely, the heightened expression of externalizing emotions in the face of a partner's rejection (such as anger and contempt) was associated with higher self-esteem, and reports of more externalizing defenses, such as distancing, were associated with better adjustment. Our data, along with those of other research, support the idea that the expression of anger (especially when it is appropriately labeled and verbally expressed) is adaptive, perhaps because it is functional for changing relationships in a desired direction (see Brody, 1999).

Several of our results may be a function of self-presentation biases, as Shedler et al. (1993) cautioned, in particular the relationship between denial of distress and better adjustment. At least some of the participants who reported both denial and better adjustment may suffer from what Shedler et al. termed illusory mental health, which is accompanied by potentially maladaptive increased autonomic reactivity. We do not have the kinds of data available
that would help us to sort out this issue, and it is possible that the relationship between higher denial of distress and better adjustment is spurious. However, other results of our study are not so easily dismissed as being due to illusory mental health. For example, the findings that participants who reported using internalizing defenses such as withdrawal and inhibition also reported more depression, and that externalizing emotions such as anger are related to heightened self-esteem, do not seem to reflect response biases in an obvious way. Moreover, the distancing defenses that men reported using more than women, including humor and suppression, are not among those that are differentially socially acceptable for the two sexes, making it unlikely that a self-presentation bias is the reason that men reported the use of these defenses more than women did.

Our results add to the growing body of literature indicating that men report distancing defenses (as well as the more suspect defense of denial) more than women and that such defenses are more adaptive for lower distress (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1998; Nolen-Hoeksema et al., 1999; Parkes, 1990). Our data extend this literature by showing that such gender differences significantly mediate gender differences in self-esteem and anxiety. These data suggest that if women used distancing defenses more often, they would report lower levels of anxiety and higher self-esteem than they currently do, and gender reports of distress and self-esteem might be equalized. Defenses were more powerful mediators of adjustment than were reported feelings, in that not only did distancing and denial of distress fully mediate gender differences in self-esteem and anxiety, but also repressive defensiveness partially mediated gender differences in anxiety. In contrast, reports of sadness and guilt only partially mediated gender differences in self-esteem and anxiety.

Why should distancing defenses be adaptive for adjustment? These defenses involve a conscious awareness of experienced feelings that are distorted only subtly when expressed. Our conceptualization is that the distancing factor, including defenses such as humor, enables the expression of feelings in ways that continue to convey their meaning. Suppression, another defense in the distancing factor, allows for feelings to be set aside until an appropriate forum is available for their expression, and the lowered use of regression involves expressing feelings in developmentally ap-
propriate ways. Much research indicates that expressing painful feelings, even long after the initial event eliciting the affect has occurred, is related to positive health consequences and is adaptive for interpersonal relationships (Pennebaker, 1989, 1993). By expressing and not inhibiting feelings, especially through the use of language, people can more readily understand and find meaning in their experiences, thus assimilating them. Moreover, people can receive support and legitimacy for their experiences, and social support itself has many positive health consequences (see Brody, 1999).

The general pattern of our data also revealed that women who used fewer internalizing defenses relative to other women, such as withdrawal, isolation, and inhibition, as well as women who denied distress, had higher self-esteem, lower anxiety, or both. These results differ somewhat from previous literature that has shown that using defenses typical of the opposite sex is related to poorer adjustment (Cramer & Blatt, 1990). Especially for women, heightened use of gender-role appropriate defenses seems to be maladaptive, as is consistent with Helgeson and Fritz’s (1999) work on unmitigated communion. Also consistent with this argument is the finding that women who reported gender-role atypical patterns of emotion, such as anger, in response to partners’ rejection tended to report higher self-esteem.

It is not surprising that the use of internalizing defenses and coping processes, such as inhibition, may be related to poorer adjustment. Previous research has indicated that inhibition influences health negatively by producing short-term increases in autonomic activity that may accumulate over time, leading to long-term stress-related disease, including impaired cardiovascular and immune functioning (Hughes, Uhlmann, & Pennebaker, 1994; Pennebaker, 1993; Pennebaker, Kiecolt-Glaser, & Glaser, 1988). For example, research participants who have been instructed to inhibit the expression of emotions such as disgust show evidence of greater sympathetic nervous system activation, including increased skin conductance, when compared with control groups who are given no inhibition instructions (Gross, 1998; Gross & Levenson, 1993).

An interesting feature in our data is that the pattern of relationships among internalizing defenses, higher anxiety, and lower self-
Esteem did not hold true for men. (It is worth remembering that men reported using internalizing defenses at levels equal to those reported by women.) For men, the general pattern of the data revealed that internalizing defenses such as withdrawal or inhibition did predict depression but did not predict self-esteem and anxiety. It is possible that the negative consequences of using internalizing defenses in men is tempered by their relatively higher expression of externalizing emotions, such as anger, in some situations. In fact, Pearson correlations indicated that, for the two genders, the relationship between reports of internalizing defenses and of externalizing emotions were in opposite directions, although neither correlation was significant. For men, internalizing defenses related positively to expressing externalizing emotions in response to a partner’s rejection \( r = .13 \), whereas for women, they related negatively \( r = -.10 \). It may also be that for women, using internalizing defenses is especially problematic because it prevents women from having satisfying social relationships that are so integral to a communal sense of self.

Rather than being predicted by the use of internalizing defenses, men’s anxiety and self-esteem were predicted by the quality of their emotional reactions to interpersonal stress. Reports of internalizing emotions, such as shame and sadness, were related to lower self-esteem, anxiety, or both, whereas reports of relatively higher externalizing emotions in response to partners’ demands, including anger and contempt, were related to lower anxiety and depression. These findings support research showing that cross-gender defenses and emotional styles in men are associated with poorer adjustment (Cramer & Blatt, 1990) and extends this work to include the controversial idea that the expression of vulnerable feelings in men is associated with poorer adjustment. Here again, Shedler et al.’s (1993) cautions about self-report data are worth heeding, in that it may be that men who were willing to admit to feelings of vulnerability in the face of social sanctions were also willing to admit to distress. These men may be less defensive and concerned about endorsing socially undesirable characteristics than other men, with the implication that they are not more distressed but instead more open and disclosing. Even if we ignore this caution and assume the relationship between internalizing emotions and distress is nonspurious, the correlational nature of
the data do not allow us to infer the direction of the causality (or determine whether indeed there is a direct causal link) between worse adjustment and reports of internalizing emotions for men.

The only defense that predicted men's anxiety levels was the use of social preservation defenses, such as affiliation and reaction formation, that related to increased anxiety. It may be that only when men become highly anxious relative to other men do they use defenses that protect their social relationships. Alternatively, both reported anxiety and social preservation defenses may characterize men who have a more communal sense of self than other men, because both serve the function of restoring social relationships perceived to be in jeopardy.

**Relationships between reported emotions and defenses.** Both a strength and a weakness of this study lies in our decision not to assess emotions and defenses in response to the same situations. We measured the acknowledgment of emotions to specific situations, and we measured self-reports of a general, nonsituationally specific defense style. These independent measurements made it less likely that we could clarify how the acknowledgment of emotions relates to defense use in particular situations, that is, how emotions themselves may be a form of defensiveness. On the other hand, our independent measurements are a more conservative test of the idea that emotional functioning and defensive functioning are related to each other independent of context.

The results did not support our predictions that the use of defenses would be negatively related to reports of internalizing emotions in men and to reports of externalizing emotions in women. For both men and women, acting out and immature defenses (which we defined as those in which distress is not acknowledged and heightened distortion occurs) were related to greater reports of dysphoric emotions in situations of interpersonal stress for both men and women. Also, especially for men, immature defenses were related to reporting appropriate externalizing emotions, such as anger, annoyance, and surprise. Immature defenses, with the exception of reaction formation, seem to bear a linear relationship with reports of negative emotions, and both may be derivatives of the same underlying processes, such as a vulnerable, easily threatened sense of self.

The acknowledgment or experience of dysphoric emotions may
EMOTIONS, DEFENSES, AND GENDER

itself be a defense when mature defenses are not in place. In accordance with this idea is the finding that, for women only, use of mature defenses, in which an emotion was recognized in less distorted ways, was related to the lowered acknowledgment of dysphoric feelings (both internalizing and externalizing) in situations in which partners were rejecting. Although these results need to be viewed as tentative, because significant differences were not found between women’s and men’s correlations, they suggest that, at least for women, mature defenses successfully regulate dysphoric emotions. Alternatively, the experience of less intense dysphoric emotions may lend itself to more mature defense use.

Our data could not address the degree to which the expression of feelings serves as a defense against the experience of painful feelings. For men, expressing socially acceptable externalizing feelings, such as anger, may be a defense against experiencing internalizing feelings, such as sadness, which may threaten agentic self-construals. Similarly, women may express socially acceptable internalizing feelings, such as sadness, to defend against experiencing externalizing feelings, such as anger, which may threaten communal self-construals. We could not test these ideas, because we did not distinguish between experience and expression and did not include a measure of unconscious experience. Future research could profitably include such measures to sort out the relationships among emotional experiences, emotional expressions, and defenses.

**Clinical implications.** Our study has interesting and provocative implications for clinical work. Perhaps the clearest clinical implications are that men’s and women’s self-esteem may be threatened by, and vulnerable to, different types of interpersonal insults and injuries. What one sex may deem threatening, the other sex may not. This finding can help clinicians understand the differential relationship stresses facing women (potential rejection or the termination of a relationship) and men (demands for increased relationship intimacy).

Women’s and men’s differential use of defenses and reports of feelings may be related to different types of adaptations. Women’s expression of internalizing dysphoric feelings, sometimes in response to anger-inducing situations such as rejection, may promote feelings of helplessness, anxiety, and depression in such situations
and may also be self-perpetuating. Men's expression of internalizing dysphoric feelings in response to partners' needs may create feelings of helplessness in situations involving demands for intimacy and may promote social relationships in which men fail to take responsibility or in which alienation rather than intimacy is promoted. On the other hand, men's higher use of distancing defenses may promote a sense of agency and control that may be adaptive for self-esteem.

Our data suggest that both clinicians and researchers should not assume that certain defenses are adaptive and others maladaptive, regardless of gender. Although distancing defenses were adaptive for both men and women, the use of internalizing defenses, such as inhibition, were significantly related to anxiety and self-esteem in women, but not in men.

The same caution holds for the relationship between adaptation and emotional expression, which we found to differ for the two sexes. Men, but not women, who reported more internalizing emotions (such as sadness and hurt) also reported more depression, lower self-esteem, and more anxiety. At the very least, these data should make clinicians question whether acknowledging feelings of vulnerability is a fruitful goal for men. Although we have cautioned that these results may be due to a self-presentation bias in men, the relationship between internalizing emotions and distress for men should be a warning signal for clinicians. Whatever the reasons, internalizing emotions expressed by men may be a diagnostic indicator for poor adjustment. These results seem counter to Pennebaker and Beall's (1986) data showing that experimental groups, especially those that include men (Smyth, 1998), who express their feelings about traumatic experiences in writing, show evidence of enhanced functioning compared to control groups who write about nontraumatic issues. Enhanced functioning in experimental groups has been indicated by measures of psychological well-being (e.g., positive affect, adjustment, and general temperament), physical health (e.g., health center visits and upper respiratory illness), physiological functioning (e.g., measures of immune functioning, such as Epstein-Barr antibodies and T-helper lymphocytes), and general functioning (e.g., grade-point average, re-employment, absenteeism, cognitive functioning, and school behavior). However, analyses of the qualitative aspects of narratives
that relate to improvement have not included detailed categorizations of the types of dysphoric emotions expressed, such as internalizing versus externalizing emotions or emotions related to vulnerability versus those related to blaming others. Instead, improved functioning has been shown to be related to decreasing disorganization and more coherence and focus in narratives over time (Pennebaker, 1993; Pennebaker, Mayne, & Francis, 1997); increased use of insight words, such as understand and realize (Pennebaker, 1993); and, in some samples, the use of positive emotion words (Pennebaker & Francis, 1996). Our data suggest that more detailed analyses of the types of dysphoric emotion words expressed by women and men might be a fruitful avenue for further research.

Our findings also suggest that clinicians should encourage women to use more distancing defenses and denial; fewer internalizing defenses, such as inhibition; and to express more appropriate externalizing emotions, such as anger, in the face of rejection. For both sexes, and consistent with previous literature, using more distancing defenses, attempting to deny distress, and expressing externalizing emotions in the face of rejection by others are associated with better self-esteem. For women in particular, use of internalizing defenses predicts lower self-esteem and higher anxiety. However, there may also be interactions between physical and mental health in relation to emotional expression and defense use that we did not assess. For example, if clinicians encourage women to express more anger, they may indeed increase women's self-esteem but increase their propensity for particular physical diseases, especially cardiovascular reactivity. Future research should continue to explore the complexity of the relationships among gender, emotional expression, defense use, and health, including both mental and physical adaptation.

References


