Introduction

- Emotional inhibition linked to mental health problems (Coggins & Fox 2009)

- Avoiding expressing unpleasant emotions can be barrier in counseling (Vogel et al., 2008)
  - Ambivalence about emotional expression associated with (Spokas, Luterek, & Heimburg, 2009)
    - Depression
    - Anxiety
    - Eating disorders
    - Substance use
Goal: Understand beliefs about emotional expression that may influence counseling process
- Unravel themes prevalent in beliefs

Participants were 562 ISU students
- Freshmen-Seniors
- Majority were female

Wrote out three beliefs about emotional expression

1,686 statements analyzed via content analysis
- Identified themes among statements
The Seven Themes

Gender Stereotype
Difficulty with Expression
Impact Others
Vulnerability
Normalization
Regulated Expression
Beneficial
Supported or contradicted gender stereotypes

Ex: “Men shouldn’t cry.”
Ex: “Crying is okay for men too.”
Emotional expression is difficult or uncomfortable

Ex: “I don’t like expressing my emotions because it is hard to put them into words.”
Impact Others

- Positively or negatively impact others

Ex: “Expressing my emotions brings me closer to others.”

Ex: “Expressing your emotions is annoying to others.”

Subthemes

- Build Relationship
- Hurt Others
- Burden Others

- Bar chart showing the distribution of subthemes.
Expressing emotion leads to feeling weak, rejection, or judgment

Ex: “Expressing my emotions means that I am a weak person.”
Expressing emotions is normal, important, or necessary

Ex: “Expressing your emotions is normal.”
Regulated Expression

- Should be controlled, dependent on certain factors, or contributes to loss of control

Ex: “It is okay to express your emotions only when someone asks you to share them.”
Good, helpful, healthy

Ex: “Expressing your emotions is healthy.”
Frequency of Statements

- Gender Stereotype
- Difficulty with Expression
- Impact Others
- Vulnerability
- Normalization
- Regulated Expression
- Beneficial

Frequency
Essential aspect of effective counseling is ability to understand clients’ emotions

2nd most frequent theme: Regulated Expression
- Emotional expression should be controlled, dependent on certain factors, or contributes to loss of control
Difficulty expressing feelings influenced by underlying beliefs and gender roles (Coggins & Fox, 2009)
- Men more likely to express anger
- Women more likely to view anger as being an unacceptable emotion

Socially anxious individuals tend to believe that emotional expression is a sign of weakness
- Suppress emotions to maintain control (Spokas, Luterek, & Heimburg, 2009)
Limitations

- Generalizability
- Self-serving bias
- Sample statements provided
Future Research Directions

- Scale development
  - Beliefs about Emotional Expression Questionnaire

- Cultural differences
  - Race/Ethnicity
  - Gender
  - Age
Counseling Implications

- Assess client beliefs about emotional expression
  - Improve responses to clients with negative beliefs

- Develop effective counseling strategies to address negative beliefs