**Gender and Emotions**

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Our culture has dichotomized functional roles between males and females such that females are socialized for the expressive role and males are socialized for the instrumental role. This seems to be based upon the assumption that males and females join together solely for procreation, continuation of the species. Since it is the female who actually gives birth, she is designated the nurturing adult who stays in the home, caring for the family, or returns from a job to care for the family. The male is designated as the rough, tough adult who goes outside the home to hunt and forage, or, these days, earn the income, to feed the family. According to this dichotomy, expression of feelings is the domain of the female. Females readily learn appropriate gender role behavior by emulating the behaviors of the primary caregiver, usually a female.

Males, on the other hand, differentiate themselves from their female caregivers by adopting the antithesis of female behavior, which is to be unemotional. It is argued that boys more often than girls are admonished for crying and told "Big boys don't cry." Little boys tease each other with the grave insult of being "sissy," or feminine-like, if they cry. Males are referred to as "woos" if they display what is considered to be traditionally female gender role behavior. The more males have been restrained from expressing feelings, the more they disdain the expression of feelings and criticize women for being "irrational."

When in relationship to one another, traditional males and females will polarize such that, the more "rational" one becomes, the more "irrational" the other becomes, as if to keep a balance. Taken to an extreme, some heterosexual couples set up dichotomized relationships in which the woman appears to do all the emotional work and emotional expression for the man, who behaves as though he is unemotional. The woman who accepts responsibility for the emotional content of the relationship becomes infuriated with the man for not expressing feelings.

On the other hand, both the expressive and instrumental roles lead people to believe they are responsible for the feelings of their partners. Since we have no control over others, illusions to the contrary, we are doomed to fail at attempts to make our partners feel joy.

In her 1935 book, *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies*, Margaret Mead observed that expressive and instrumental roles where distributed differently among the three New Guinea tribes of the Arapesh, the Mundugumur, and the Tchambuli. Not all societies assign roles the same as in the United States. Social scientists concluded that males and females exhibit the same or different gender role behaviors through socialization according to the culture.

Biological explanations point to testosterone levels as moderating feelings. In their research of "androgenized females," that is, females who have unusually high levels of testosterone, Money and Ehrhardt[[1]](#footnote-1) found more "male-like" behavior. The author of an article that appeared in a popular "woman's" magazine, who had received injections of testosterone, indicated that her empathy diminished and she had more of a "devil may care" attitude. Some research has concluded that our prisons are full of males with higher testosterone levels than the general population, which is what makes them capable of aggression without emotional regard for their victims. In other words, if, as a society, you want fewer wars, elect all female officials and heads of state and put no men in charge. However, this research has been criticized for methodology which makes the conclusions suspect.

All human beings feel and experience the same range of emotions. Male and female are not dichotomous categories or opposites. It is not true that males are unfeeling creatures, whereas females are abundantly able to feel. Although males and females may be differently socialized to express feelings differently and in different situations, males and females do not have different feelings.

1. John Money and Anke A. Ehrhardt, *The Archives of Sexual Behavior*, Vol. 1. (1971), pp. 241-262. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)