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Are Men more Emotional than Women?

By Jeannie Liu

“Women are supposed to be elegant and gentle,” my overly traditional aunt said as I ran around the living room shooting my brother with a Nerf gun in my oversized shorts and baggy t-shirt. “Ladies should sit still, look nice, not be running around like an animal,” my aunt said. As I rolled my eyes and ran off, she followed, yelling at me, “you should be more like your sister! Look how nice she is sitting in her nice white dress, reading. She has not made any noise since I got here!” As I turned to talk back, my brother shot me in the back directly between my shoulder blades and ran around me as a sign of victory. Walking back behind my brother, my aunt continues to lecture, “you are not a boy, now go take a shower, change into something nicer, and wait quietly for dinner.” I looked around for support from my grandparents and siblings, but I got nothing. Instead, I stomped up the stairs and slammed my door before picking out “nicer clothes.”

For as long as people have been on Earth, society has set norms for how men and women should act. According to society, women are supposed to be emotional, caring, gentle, graceful, stylish, skinny, and quiet. The same goes for men; they have to show strength, they have to provide for the family, they have to be in charge, and they are not allowed to show emotions. However, Ryan Smith and Anna Alzokei, both researchers at the University of Arizona with PhDs in psychology, and William D.S Killgore, a professor at the University of Arizona and Harvard Medical School, have found societal views to be wrong. Scientifically, men are as emotional as women; however, based on one’s environment, past experiences, as well as how the emotions are interpreted, one can appear more emotional than others; if there is continuous force

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on the suppression of men's feelings, there will be long term impacts, and in order to prevent that, society should loosen stereotypes on gender roles as well as be more open and accepting to men's feelings.

According to Smith, Alzokei, and Kilgore, there are six universal emotions that everyone is born with: sadness, anger, surprise, happiness, fear, and disgust; these are emotions that are universally recognized, and none of that is based on gender; a male is just as capable of feeling these six universal emotions as any female. Emotions are usually triggered by the kind of thoughts that one may have in a given situation. The intensity of an emotion varies by the thoughts that one associates with the situation, thus the intensity varies by person, not by gender. Emotions are processed in the limbic system, which is part of the brain; this is the main system that controls how emotions and experiences are felt. Therefore, scientifically, everyone is capable of processing and understanding universal emotions, and it is the matter of how feelings are interpreted and expressed, not who processes them, that makes someone appear emotional.

Although one might not know it, their physical environment plays a significant role in their ability to process emotions. According to Newport Institute, "along with the view of nature, light plays an important role on one's mental health." In research conducted by a neurologist at the University of Pennsylvania, they found that people who were kept in the dark for an extended period of time were expressing more depressive moods than those who were able to see some light (Newport). When people start to express depressive behavior, they are also less likely to understand emotions, leading them to be less emotional than those who are in an area that has more natural light. Reducing depressive behaviors can allow people to be more connected with their emotions, which, in turn, allow one to be more expressive of what they are feeling.

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Furthermore, the people in one's environment also play a role in how emotions are processed. According to Eduard T. Klapwijk, Sabine Peters, Robert R. J. M. Vermeiren, and Gert-Jan Lelieveld, professionals in the Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, stated that peers and parents have an enormous impact on how a child develops emotionally. Those who are around peers who are more positive and supportive are more likely to be happier and more accepting of those around them (Klapwijk et. al.). If the child is around people who help and embrace the expression of emotions of every child, then the children growing up in that environment are more likely to be more emotionally open than those who did not grow up in an open and accepting environment.

Parents are also a key factor of one's environment that can impact the way children process emotions. Authoritative parenting style is when the parents are supportive of the child but still strict enough to enforce rules to help the child go through life. According to Terrence Sanvictores, researcher at Touro University, Nevada, and Magda D. Mendez, professor at Lincoln Medical Center/Weill Cornell, authoritative parenting is the best way to help a child grow and learn. Having the authoritative parenting style can allow a child to grow up in an environment that allows them to express themselves. Giving a child the chance to communicate their feelings and accepting them, despite what they are, increases their ability to express their feelings later on in the future.

Uninvolved parenting is when the parent is not present in the child's life. Children need strict rules so they are able to learn, but they also need love and care as they are also human beings trying to navigate the world (Sanvictores, Mendez). With no one to express or accept their feelings, the child growing up in an uninvolved household, is more likely to struggle with expressing and understanding their feelings compared to the children who grew up in an

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authoritative parenting household. Along with the parenting styles, children also need to be in an environment where the parents are capable of expressing their emotions, so the child can learn. Regardless of the parenting style, societal norms are likely to still be enforced on children unintentionally. By doing something like encouraging their daughters to express their feelings more compared to their sons, places stereotypes on gender roles for the child unknowingly (Dell). Parents play an enormous role in how a child develops and learns emotions, but the enforcement of gender stereotypes can impact the child even more.

Along with the environment, one's past experiences, both good and bad, can influence how one shows emotions in a given situation. Each experience is unique, and depending on the experience itself, it can leave the child unable to process or feel emotions as well as being more sensitive to certain aspects of their life. According to The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, "children who face trauma often have difficulty identifying, expressing, and managing emotions." The child can respond in unpredictable ways ranging from explosive to overly calm. The child might also block out the memory or anything that reminds them of the trauma; due to the trauma, they are likely to develop a trigger word, action, or place that they are more sensitive to. For example, a child with divorced parents, could view holidays to be dreadful because they are forced to choose the parent they want to spend that holiday with, whereas, for someone who does not have divorced parents, the holidays are a happy time of the year where they get to spend time with their family all together. The child with the divorced parents might be more emotional than the child whose parents are still together during the holiday season, but that is not based on gender, but rather the experience each child will face.

Being in the same environment does not create the same feeling for everyone; it also depends on how the person interprets the emotion. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, past

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experiences can have an effect on how a child expresses their feelings, but also, how they interpret each feeling. When a child faces critical trauma, it could affect their thinking clearly, reasoning, or even problem solving (The National Child Trauma Stress Network). If they are put in a situation that is a trigger to them, despite the place or object being something that generates happy feelings universally, the child might interpret it as something negative, like anger, stress, or sadness. If the child is truly struggling to process any emotions at the time, they are likely to consider multiple alternatives like blocking out the issues or ignoring it at the moment (The National Child Trauma Stress Network). When they block out the moment, it is usually due to the fact that the situation brought them much pain, and they do not want to think about it. When that is the case, anything that reminds them of this certain event is going to likely trigger negative emotions and make the child appear less emotional. Even if a child does not experience trauma, there is a high chance that they will still experience situations differently than their peers. For example, if everyone wrote down what they felt when they hear the word 'dog,' not everyone is going to think of happy, warm, and fun feelings; some people might be afraid of dogs or prefer cats or just do not enjoy pets. Everyone is going to interpret each word differently and that is not based on gender, but rather, based on the experiences that were tied to that word or experience.

Forcing people to suppress their feelings will lead to long term impacts. Emotional suppression is what one does when there are topics that are uncomfortable for the individual to discuss as an instinctual way to defend oneself (Elsig). While suppressing emotions appears to be the simple way to handle feelings, according to Caldac Clinic, Claudia M. Elsig, MD, suppressing feelings in the long-run can make one more aggressive and even a potential for a delayed consequence in cardiovascular reactivity. Other consequences from suppressing feelings

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are depression, anxiety, possibly cancer, and even early death. Women are less likely to be faced with having to suppress their emotions because society has deemed it to be 'normal' for women to express their emotions, whereas if a man expresses his emotions he is seen as 'weak.'

However, just because society thinks women should be emotional, does not mean that everything is easy for women to talk about. Nonetheless, while there are things that are uncomfortable to discuss, everyone should not risk their psychological and physiological well-being to fit societal norms.

On the contrary, women may appear to be emotional beings because of hormonal differences, but that is not fully the case. Debra Umberson, Meichu D. Chen, James S. House, Kristine Hopkins and Ellen Slaten, authors of the article "The Effect of Social Relationships on Psychological Well-Being: Are Men and Women Really So Different?" conducted research to see if there are "gender differences across a range of relationships and consider whether the form and quality of these relationships affect the psychological functioning of men and women." Ultimately, they found that there were role strains. Studies show that women are under more stress: "Women's roles and relationships are often seen as more demanding and less rewarding than men's, therefore more conducive to depression" (Umberson, Chen, House, Hopkins, Slaten). Women are more likely to seem emotional because of their capacity of what and how much they can handle at once, because they are more likely to be under an increased amount of stress from societal gender norms and career expectations compared to men; they are more likely to seem emotional as a resulting factor of stress. These releases of emotions are not due to hormonal differences, but more so the pressure of society.

While there is no perfect solution to help everyone in society to drift away from gender stereotypes, being more accepting of men's feelings is a way to help them progress. If men, and

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some women, continue to suppress their feelings they will be facing the long term consequences later in life just to fit societal norms. Society should not just assume that one is more emotional than the other just based on their gender, but more so the person they are, that includes their past experiences as well as how they interpret emotions. There is no one set thing that can determine who is more emotional, however, everyone is capable of expressing and experiencing emotions, it just varies on the intensity of how they feel it. By being more supportive of men in the community and being able and accepting of their emotions and ways to express themselves can reduce possible long term consequences and improve society overall; therefore, my aunt should not enforce the societal norms on me and my siblings.

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