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Gender Differences in Emotional Expressivity

R. Aaliya Sultana and K. Priyadarshini*

Shri Shankarlal Sundarbai Shasun Jain College for Women, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India

Corresponding author

KEYWORDS

Emotional expressivity; gender differences; positive emotional expressivity; negative emotional expressivity; impulse strength

A B S T R A C T

This study aims to compare and analyze the gender differences in emotional expressivity among young adults. Age range of the sample chosen for the study was 18-25. Berkeley's Expressivity questionnaire developed by Gross and John (1995) was used to study the emotional expressivity. Researcher planned to conduct an ex – post facto research study with the sample size of 760. Samples were collected through convenience mode of sampling and t-test was adopted for statistical computation of the results and testing their significance. This study can be further used to analyse the variations when it comes to gender and emotional expressivity. Factors like socio economic status, marital status and individual idiosyncrasies influence emotional expressivity. The inference gained from the study shows that women showed higher positive emotional expressivity, negative emotional expressivity and higher impulse strength. On an overall emotional expressivity aspect, women showed higher emotional expressivity when compared to men.

Introduction

Emotional expressivity is the fundamental level of communication for human beings. Human beings interact through the expression of emotions verbally as well as non-verbally. The expression of emotions is distinguished pointedly in its ability to be observed which makes it stand apart from other verbal and non-verbal behavior. Emotions are the primary driving forces of the human nature as man is evolutionarily of a gregarious nature. These emotions that build up the psychosocial and sociocultural aspects of a man are not only inherent but have a way of projecting on the surface as their primary quality. Emotional expressions can happen either consciously or unconsciously. The level of emotional expression and the kind of emotions expressed are controlled by various factors that surround their genetic components, cultural environment, and situational context. Emotional experience and emotional expression are tightly bound together and may also be dared to be called the different sides of a same coin. They are inter linked and are inter dependent on one

another in the emotional process concerning inter personal relations. Individuals high in expressive confidence have been found to be in good control of their emotions, as well as experiencing and expressing positive emotions with family and peers (Gross and John, 1998). These assets probably result in them being better liked by others, with whom they interact. In contrast, individuals high in negative expression are more likely to experience and express negative emotions, possibly with the consequence that they are less well liked. Emotional expression refers to how one conveys emotional experience through both verbal and nonverbal behavior (Gross, 1999).

Emotions do not just occur on a whim. They are responses to stimulus that trigger that particular emotional expression. Hence, the specificity of an emotion depends on the stimuli that they have been presented with (Berkowitz and Harmon-Jones, 2004). Emotions are not only responsive reactions but also act as adaptive functions. Hence, human beings learnt to develop emotional expression concerning particular situations. Darwin's work emphasized the biological utility of emotional expression. Thus, it contributed to the development of an evolutionary-expressive approach to emotion, which suggests that emotion exists because it contributes to survival (Oatley, 1992). Striking individual differences in expressivity suggest that people differ in their response tendencies and in how they express these impulses as they arise (Frijda, 1988; Levenson, 1994; Plutchik, 1980). Darwin did not maintain that all forms of emotional expression are innate, but he believed that many of them are. These adaptive functions aren't laid in concrete but can be subjected to modification or inhibition due to social learning (Darwin, 1872). Cultural differences heavily influence the emotional expressions of individuals across gender. But surprisingly, uniformity is not a common ground for different cultures concerning emotional expressivity (Zuckerman *et al.*, 1976). Apart from cultural differences, the basic factor of any process includes individual differences. Emotional expression is also one such process that is determined majorly by individual differences. Striking individual differences in expressivity suggest that people differ in their response tendencies and in how they express these impulses as they arise (Frijda, 1988; Levenson, 1994; Plutchik, 1980). People learn to express these emotions in different ways. So, unless a person's idiosyncrasies are known, it may be difficult to know exactly what emotion that person is experiencing. These idiosyncrasies are not only specific to individuals but also among different genders. A person often expresses several emotions at one time; these blends of emotions are hard to judge (Morgan and King, 1993). Hence, there is a need for the study of emotional expressivity among men and women for a better understanding of their emotions. Therefore this study aims to understand the gender differences in emotional expressivity among young adults from 18 to 25 years. Whilst we are studying only the gender differences, further in depth information can be extrapolated later with the available data.

Review of literature

In a meta-analysis of sex differences in the feeling of "moral" emotions (Else-Quest *et al.*, 2012), women tended to experience more negative emotions, such as more guilt, shame, to a lesser degree embarrassment. Similar results were found in a recent meta-analysis of children's emotions (Chaplin and Aldao, 2013). In a cross-cultural study of 37 nations, women tended to report more negative emotionality (Fischer *et al.*, 2004).

Among those nations with relatively higher sociopolitical gender equity, sex differences were found in the intensity of felt sadness, fear, shame, and guilt (Fischer and Manstead, 2000).

Barrett (2010) examined whether sex differences in emotion are related to the social context. Researcher predicted and found that sex-related differences in emotion in global self-descriptions, but not in the averaged momentary ratings of emotion. Although most of the other context variables were themselves associated with emotional experience or expression, suggesting that they were emotionally evocative, none emerged as elicitors of sex differences in emotional experience; felt intimacy in the interaction was associated with sex differences in ratings of emotional expression. Together, the findings present certain caveats to the widely held belief that women are the "more emotional" sex.

Study conducted by Plant *et al.,* (2009) documented the gender stereotypes of emotions and the relationship between gender stereotypes and the interpretation of emotionally expressive behavior. Participants believed women experienced and expressed the major emotions (e.g., sadness, fear, sympathy) more often than men. Exceptions included anger and pride, which were thought to be experienced and expressed more often by men.

Women do appear to react more negatively to unpleasant experiences in experimental settings (Bradley *et al.,* 2001; Chentsova-Dutton and Tsai, 2007; Grossman and Wood, 1993). For instance, in a study of sex differences in reactions to pleasant and unpleasant slides (Gomez, Gunten, and Danuser, 2013), researchers found women reacted more negatively to unpleasant slides (e.g., mutilated bodies, physical violence, and suffering or dead animals), a sex difference that persisted in size from ages 20 to 81. Kring and Gordon (1998) found women react with more sadness to sad films than men do and women react with more fear-disgust to fearful-disgusting films than men do. In contrast, men reacted with greater happiness to happy films. Men and women appear to differ in the brain regions used to regulate reactions to unpleasant experimental stimuli, as well (Domes *et al.,* 2010; McRae *et al.,* 2008).

Fischer, *et al.,* (2004) aimed to test the universality of the gender-specific pattern found in studies with Western respondents, namely that men report more powerful emotions (e.g., anger), whereas women report more powerless emotions (e.g., sadness, fear). Overall, the gender-specific pattern of women reporting that experience and express more powerless emotions and men more powerful emotions.

Brody *et al.,* (2002) conducted a study using experience sampling or measures other than self-report (e.g., observer reports or clinical evaluations), sex differences in the actual daily life experience of negative emotionality (Diener *et al.,* 1983; Fujita *et al.,* 1991; Seidlitz and Diener, 1998), but not always (Barrett *et al.,* 1998).

Sex differences in the stressful reactions to coping with negative daily life events also have been found (Matud, 2004), and observation data of women's written and verbal behavior, contrary to popular belief tends to find women express more negative emotions than men do (e.g., Burke *et al.,* 1976; Levenson *et al.,* 1994). Women report more negative emotionality when their partners reject them, men tend to report more negative emotions when their partners demand more intimacy.

A study conducted by Weinberg *et al.*, (1999) was aimed at the gender differences in emotional expressivity among early infants. Eighty-one 6-month- old infants and their mothers were videotaped in Tronick's face-to- face still-face paradigm to evaluate gender differences in infant and maternal emotional expressivity and regulation.

A study done by Kring and Gordon (1998) assessed the expressive, experiential and physiological emotional responses of men and women. Compared with men, women were more expressive, did not differ in reports of experienced emotion, and demonstrated different patterns of skin conductance responding. Results found that gender role characteristics and family expressiveness moderated the relationship between sex and expressivity.

A study conducted by Gross and Carstensen (1997) on age differences in emotional experience, expression, and control were investigated. Across studies, a consistent pattern of age differences emerged. Compared with younger participants, older participants reported fewer negative emotional experiences and greater emotional control.

Findings regarding emotional expressivity were less consistent, but when there were age differences, participants reported lesser expressivity. Results are interpreted in terms of increasingly competent emotion regulation across the life span.

A study investigated by Gross and John (2003) says that emotional expressivity has three facets: impulse strength, negative expressivity, and positive expressivity. After evaluating its factor structure and psychometric properties, researcher tested propositions derived from an analysis of display rules. As predicted, women were more expressive than men; Asian-Americans less expressive than other ethnic groups; and democrats more expressive than republicans. Expressivity also was related to two mood dimensions and to four of the big five personality dimensions. The pattern of findings for the subscales showed convergent and discriminant validity. Positive mood, extraversion, and agreeableness were most strongly related to the positive expressivity subscale. Negative mood, neuroticism, and somatic complaints were most strongly related to the impulse strength and negative expressivity subscales.

Blier *et al.*, (1989) conducted a study to assess gender differences in the expression of different feelings as well as to examine the relationship between each gender's confidence in expressing different feelings and the target person's gender. Findings indicated a significant interaction between subject gender and target person gender for confidence in expressing anger and love/liking/affection.

Males reported lower confidence in expressing anger to females than did female subjects, and males were more confident expressing anger to men than to women. Females reported significantly higher confidence in expressing liking/love/affection to males than did male subjects. Female subjects were significantly more confident in expressing fear and sadness than male subjects regardless of the target person's gender. However, females did not report significantly more confidence in expressing loneliness than males with either target gender.

Materials and Methods

Objective

To find out the difference of the dynamics on the emotional expression among young adult males and females.

Hypotheses

There will be a significantly higher positive emotional expressivity among women when compared to men.

There will be a significantly higher negative emotional expressivity among women when compared to men.

There will be significantly higher impulse strength among women when compared to men.

There will be a significantly higher emotional expressivity among women when compared to men.

Research Methodology

The research design used in the study was ex-post facto design. Ex post facto design is a quasi-experimental study examining how an independent variable, present prior to the study, affects a dependent variable.

The sampling method used was convenience sampling as the data was collected by sending questionnaires through online distribution. The sample included 760 individuals, consisting of 380 males and 380 females. The Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire (BEQ), developed by Gross and John (1995), was used to measure emotional expression. The tool consists of 16 items. The scale is separated into 3 facets: Negative Expressivity, Positive Expressivity, and Impulse Strength.

Variables

Independent variable: Gender

Dependent variable: Positive Emotional Expressivity, Negative Emotional Expressivity and Impulse Strength.

Tool used

The Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire (BEQ), developed by Gross and John (1995), was used to measure emotional expression.

The tool consists of 16 items. The scale is separated into 3 facets: Negative Expressivity, Positive Expressivity, and Impulse Strength. It uses a 7 point Likert scale.

Reliability

Cronbach's alpha coefficients were 0.83 for the BEQ full scale, and 0.61-0.77 for subscales.

Test-retest correlations were 0.61 for the full scale, and 0.57-0.61 for subscales

Validity

Construct validity was demonstrated by correlations between BEQ scores and scores on measures of emotional expressivity, self-monitoring, self-esteem, depression, "Big Five" (neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness) personality traits, and emotional control.

Scoring

The respondents were scored on a 7 point Likert scale on which 1= strongly disagree, 4= neutral and 7= strongly agree. Scoring is kept continuous. 3 items are reverse scored.

Negative expressivity is defined by 6 items, positive expressivity by 4 items and impulse strength by 6 items.

Interpretation

Higher score indicates greater expressivity.

Results and Discussion

Positive emotional expressivity

The alternate hypothesis – "There will be a significantly higher positive emotional expressivity among women when compared to men" is accepted**.** Emotions like joy and surprise are considered positive. Women tend to exhibit these emotions in a higher degree when compared to men. The conclusion is supported by the study done be Plant, et.al, (2009). Women are socially accepted to freely display their emotions whereas men are not encouraged to do so. Stereotypical gender roles also play a major role in the emotional expressivity of women.

Negative emotional expressivity

The alternate hypothesis "There will be a significantly higher negative emotional expressivity among women when compared to men" is accepted**.** A secondary analysis on a cross- cultural dataset supports that the negative emotions like sadness and fear are intensely experienced by women rather than men.

Women are also said to express more submissive emotions due to the stereotypical gender roles and evolutionary changes. Bradley *et al.,* (2001) studied that upon exposure to an unpleasant stimuli women react with sadness whilst men react with disgust or anger. Hence, additionally women are neurologically wired to express more negative emotions when compare to men.

Impulse strength in emotional expressivity

The alternate hypothesis – "There will be a significantly higher impulse strength in emotional expressivity among women when compared to men" is accepted**.** Conventionally speaking, men tend to be more impulsive than women but studies show otherwise. A study conducted by Mitchel, et.al on importance of sex difference in impulse control and addiction clearly explains how women are more impulsive than men. Although when it comes to impulse control women are poor in control than men. Hence, women are more prone to express their emotions without a clear thinking associated with it. The situational factors and the people involved play a clear role in influencing the impulse strength related to emotional expressivity.

Overall emotional expressivity

The alternate hypothesis – "There will be a significantly higher emotional expressivity among women when compared to men" is accepted**.** A study conducted by Gomez *et al.,* in 2013 states that there is an involvement of physiological and psychological processes in the expression of emotions. But our study focused only on the psychological aspect of it so the physiological arousal part was not involved in the emotional expressivity. From a cultural point of view women are stereotypically associated with more emotional expressivity.

Limitations

As the questionnaire was online and the data collection was done in survey method, doubts clarification was unable to be done.

There was a cultural influence in the data collected and emotional expressivity depends largely on the cultural background.

A better interventional or in-depth study could be done given more time.

Table.1 Summary of Independent Samples t Test on the scores of Men and Women on Positive Emotional Expressivity

Variables	N	M	SD	T
Male	380	20.12	3.3	2.48*
Female	380	20.7	3.3	

*p<0.05 level

Table.2 Summary of Independent Samples t Test on the scores of Men and Women on Negative Emotional Expressivity

Variables	N	M	SD	T
Male	380	21.2	5.1	4.3**
Female	380	22.7	4.7	

**p<0.01 level

Table.3 Summary of Independent Samples t Test on the scores of Men and Women on Impulse Strength in Emotional Expressivity

Variables	N	M	SD	T
Male	380	29	5.8	4.9**
Female	380	31	5.2	

**p<0.01 level

Table.4 Summary of Independent Samples t Test on the scores of Men and Women on Overall Emotional Expressivity

Variables	N	M	SD	t
Male	380	70.3	10.5	5.7**
Female	380	74.4	9.4	

**p<0.01 level

Suggestions

The study could be done in a large population involving different cultures.

The study can be done on a broader age group involving various developmental stages.

An elaborate study involving the present data with various other co relational factors.

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