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Emotions of Women and Men – Similarities – Differences – Development

Abstract

The article presents a survey of empirical studies and meta-analyses on the similarities and differences in the emotionality of women and men. Women's and men's emotions are analyzed in terms of their experiencing and expression. Special attention is paid to emotions connected with caring and aggression. Differences and similarities are presented in different age groups.

Keywords: *emotions, masculinity, femininity, gender psychology*

Emotions of women and men in the early psychological research

In common opinions women are considered as more emotional and affectional than men. At the same time, it is thought that women are less capable of controlling their emotional states than men, they rarely conceal their emotions, they are very vulnerable and it is easy to make them cry.

In Western culture women's and men's emotions are described in terms of "heart" and "mind." "Heart," or emotionality is considered as the essence of femininity, whereas "mind" is a symbol of masculine rationality.

The contrast between "heart" and "mind" in women and men was also emphasized in early scientific conceptions in psychology. In his book "Psychology of Women" (1910, after: Fisher, 1998), G. Heymans, founder of the Dutch school of experimental psychology, wrote that women's emotionality suppresses their ability to think in an abstract, innovative and independent way. Stanley Hall (1984, after: Fisher, 1998) claimed that women follow their intuition more often and such emo-

tions as: fear, anger, or compassion occur more often in their behaviour. Whereas men experience emotions less frequently and they express them in solitude. Freud (1905, Fisher, 1998) presented similar opinions claiming that women have a strong tendency towards swinging moods. He considered women as a more jealous gender. He also claimed that women are more susceptible to neurosis.

Behaviourists, in turn, argued that women are not good mothers because they cannot keep distance between themselves and their child and their “uncontrollable” emotions are a threat to children. While it is masculine objectivism and less emotional approach towards children that is sound and appropriate in the process of upbringing (Fisher, 1998).

It was generally assumed that emotionality is a typically feminine characteristic. In personality tests, emotionality has been understood as one of the crucial, typically feminine characteristics since 1936 (Terman, Miles, 1936, after: Fisher, 1998).

However, in contemporary psychology there appear opinions and empirical data indicating that women and men show their emotions in a similar way, but they do it more willingly in different circumstances. The analysis of contemporary empirical research into the gender differences in feeling, i.e. occurring and experiencing emotions, shows that they are not as considerable as it could seem on the basis of traditional opinions. Bigger differences, however, concern the expression of emotions. The influence of social norms concerning emotions and their role in women and men is more and more often emphasized.

Experiencing of emotions by women and men

From the developmental point of view, research into babies does not present distinct differences between girls and boys in their emotionality. Some comparisons show that girls are more sensitive to social stimuli and boys lose their temper more easily (Haviland, Malatesta, 1982; after: Basow, 1986).

Research into preschoolers shows that boys react more intensively in situations connected with frustrations, whereas girls are the most sensitive to conflicts with other children (Maccoby, Jacklin, 1974). In situations of experimental looking at exciting slides, 4–6-year-old boys showed a tendency to restrain and conceal their emotions, whereas girls’ emotional expression remained at a similar level (Buck, 1977, after: Basow, 1986).

In the research into boys’ and girls’ fear different results were obtained depending on situational variables. As far as fear of strangers was concerned, which occurred in nearly half of the children, the girls’ reactions were more intensive. Observational research into shyness does not indicate that in childhood and

adolescence girls are shyer than boys, however, teachers' evaluation and children's self-descriptions suggest girls' higher timidity and shyness (Brody, 1984, Maccoby, Jacklin, 1974, Basow, 1986).

In the situation of examination stress in adults, female students revealed a bigger fear than male students more often. However, the obtained differences might be a function of social expectations, which allow women to openly admit to fear and anxiety but do not approve of such behaviours in men. Research showed that differences in experiencing fear are connected with gender identity. The description of experiencing very intensive fear and anxiety correlates with mental femininity (Krasnoff, 1981; after Basow, 1986).

In their well-known investigation, Grossman and Wood (1993) asked men and women for an evaluation of how often and how intensively they experienced six basic emotions: fear, happiness, sadness, anger, disgust, and apprehension. What appeared was that the women experienced those emotions more intensively and frequently than the men, except anger. At the same time, feminine women highly approving of gender stereotypes declared more intensive emotions. In the second investigation, the participants looked at slides having emotional content in three different experimental situations: in the first one – they were told that expressing emotions is justifiable and sound; in the second one – on the contrary, that it is not good or sound; in the third (control) one – the participants were not given any instructions. The results showed that the women revealed more intensive emotions only in the control situation. Whereas, differences did not occur when the opinions on the expression of emotions presented to the participants were comparable.

Other research (Fujita, Diener, Sandvik, 1991; after: Brannon, 1999) similarly shows that in self-narrations people evaluate their emotions in accordance with stereotypes: women evaluate them as more intensive than men. The women described negative emotions in themselves rather than positive ones more frequently, although they generally felt as happy as men.

In the frequency of occurrence and intensity of emotions, gender differences remain under a strong influence of social stereotypes and convictions, which prevent men from revealing emotions and encourage women to do that. There is also no evidence that women are emotional and experience intensive emotions and men do not experience anything.

In her analysis of gender differences in emotionality, Linda Brannon (1999) points out the significance of the reception of emotions from the body. She refers to Zajonc's (1984) and Lazarus's (1984) famous argument concerning the priority of emotions and cognition comprehended as the priority of physiological signs or information. In the context of this argument, James Pannebaker and Tomi Roberts

(1992) suggest that in determining their emotions women first use cognitive information about a situation and men, in contrast, physiological information from the body. They base their conviction on the fact that in laboratory investigations men can recognize their inner physical indicators, such as: heartrate, blood pressure and level of glucose better than women (however, this difference does not occur in natural conditions). At the same time, in laboratory conditions women recognize other people's emotions in a better way (even when they do not know their physiological reactions). The obtained result is explained by the fact that in the process of socialization women are taught to concentrate on others and interpret signals mainly from other persons rather than listen attentively to the reactions of their own body.

In the analysis of this aspect of inter-gender differences what is worth recalling is Dutton and Aron's (1974) well-known experiment studying the emotions of men walking along a bridge hanging over a precipice who were approached by an attractive poller on their getting to the other end. They revealed a tendency to ascribe the physiological symptoms of tension (e.g. heartrate, sweating, trembling) not to the fear of the precipice, but to a violent feeling of falling in love with the beautiful girl. In that situation the men invited the girl out after her giving them her telephone number, in order to, allegedly, better learn the results of the survey.

Whereas when that experiment was conducted among women, a considerable number of the participants did not even want to accept the offered telephone number. It was thus noted that the tendency to the erroneous determination of the causes of excitation occurred only in the men. Presumably, it resulted from the stereotypical image of a man, who should not be afraid and does not tend to admit to fear even to himself.

Gender stereotypes seem to play an important role not only in the evaluation of one's own emotions, but also in the evaluation of other people's emotions. Observers evaluating emotions in women and men might make mistakes as a consequence of gender stereotypes. Stephanie Shields (1987) asked students to describe the most emotional person they knew. Women were considered as such more often. They were described as those experiencing mainly negative emotions : sadness, depression or anger.

Other research (Condry, Condry, 1976; after: Brannon, 1999) shows that a baby's perception of emotions depends on the observer's conviction of its sex. Two groups of participants were shown a female baby dressed as a boy or a girl respectively. The same reactions were evaluated as anger in the "boy" and fear in the "girl."

Thus, the perception of emotions of women and men, one's own and other persons', to a great extent might result from expectations connected with gender stereotypes.

Expression of emotions in women and men

Psychological research shows that the differences in showing emotions by women and men are generally much bigger than in the experiencing of emotions itself.

Studies on the non-verbal way of expressing emotions show that women are generally more expressive, their facial expression of emotions is especially strong, they cry or laugh more often, but also they gesticulate more. Numerous investigations show that it is easier to read emotions from a woman's face than from a man's, and women are more willing to talk about their emotional experiences with others (Mayo, Henley, 1981; Hall, 1984; Manstead, 1992; Goos, Silverman, 2002; Lewin, Herlitz, 2002).

In the light of the research into the *d* effect for gender differences in meta-analyses what is indicated is a considerable advantage of women at different age as far as the ability to decode non-verbal behaviours ($d = -0.46$) and the ability to express ($d = -0.52$) are concerned. Both girls ($d = -0.30$) and adult women ($d = -0.35$) recognize human faces better (Hall, 1984).

Smiling in social situations distinctly differentiates the sexes. This is women who smile more often than men in social situations ($d = -0.63$), but these differences occur only in adults and they are not found in children ($d = 0.04$). Scrutinizing is a distinctly more frequent behaviour in adult women ($d = -0.68$), slightly weaker differences are found in younger children ($d = -0.39$). Women also notice other people's glances more often ($d = -0.65$).

Whereas men reveal distance in approaching other people more often ($d = 0.56$) and show nervous ($d = 0.72$) and expansive ($d = 1.04$) behaviours (Hall, 1984).

These differences in expressing emotions may be considered mainly as a result of the specificity of gender norms and expectations. A woman's traditional role approves of clear expression and communication of all emotions, whereas the stereotype of a man allows the expression of emotions connected mainly with aggression and anger. Therefore, women usually reveal even such emotions as apprehension or sadness with more openness and confidence, without being afraid of social disapproval.

Similarly, women's social status, which is more frequently lower than that of men, demands from them a considerable ability to interpret non-verbal communication and endear themselves (e.g. by smiling) in a lot of social situations. Women are socially rewarded for openness in communication and they are expected to be responsible for close relationships.

Gender differences in the expression of emotions concern crying. Crying is treated as the clearest revelation of one's weakness. This is men who, according to

the socialization dictates, very rarely react by crying in social situations. Whereas women cry more frequently. They react in this way not only when they are sad, but also when they are angry, disappointed, or terrified.

Only in such extreme events as death of someone dear are the differences between the sexes in the reaction by crying almost invisible. Because the occurrence of crying in men is appropriate only in extremely difficult moments, whereas women are allowed to cry in many different situations (Lombardo et al., 2002).

There are gender differences not only in the frequency of crying, but also in its intensity and loudness and in the mood after it. Generally, women cry more often and more loudly, both in negative and positive circumstances. However, crying in women and men depends not as much on the gender, but on personality variables, mainly on the tendency towards depression (Peter, Vingerhoets, Vanheck, 2001; Rottenber et al., 2002).

Independently of the differences in the social concession to women's and men's crying, in laboratory situations they are assessed differently when they cry. Research was conducted where the participants were supposed to evaluate a woman and a man who, in turn, cried, laughed and did not express emotions. Paradoxically, while crying the man was perceived more positively (than while laughing or not showing emotions), whereas the crying woman was perceived negatively (Labott et al., 1991).

The expression of emotions in women and men is strongly influenced by social expectations, social roles and gender stereotypes.

Caring of women and men

In discussions on gender differences in emotionality, mainly in the biological approach, women's caring is emphasized as a result of a maternal instinct, as opposed to male aggression as a necessity to fight, conquer and defend – an aggression instinct.

Recently opinions have been appearing in psychology stating that maternal behaviours are not only prompted by a biological imperative, but to a great extent they are the effect of the learning and socialization process. Not the biological but social origin of caring behaviours is mainly emphasized (Hrdy, 1981; Basow, 1986, Brannon, 1999).

What is pointed out is a lack of gender differences in caring in small children. The classic results of Harry Harlow's research (1959, 1971, after: Brannon, 1999) into apes are mentioned, where the physical contact with mother or contact with a soft object conditioned proper emotional-social development of apes and taught

maternal behaviours. The animals which were deprived of such “contact comfort” did not reveal caring behaviours and were not able to look after the young. Thus, they did not have the allegedly innate maternal instinct.

In the argumentation about the lack of evidence for the existence of an only biological or innate caring instinct, Konrad Lorenz’s (Brannon, 1999) famous research into the imprinting phenomenon is mentioned. It emphasizes the significance of the critical period important for the occurrence of attachment in animals (in geese). Attention is also drawn to the first few hours after birth as especially important in the occurrence of the relationship between mother and child. The critical period is the first 24 hours, especially first 45 minutes, after the delivery. Mothers that could hug their children after delivery felt more closely attached to them than mothers that were not allowed to have physical contact after the delivery (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, Money, Ehrhardt, 1972, after: Basow, 1986).

The existence of such a critical period in the occurrence of the mother-child bond suggests that such behaviours do not have an unconditional or innate character. At the same time, there are numerous known examples of avoidance of maternal behaviours not only among humans but also among animals, in which instincts play an essential role. The research, thus, does not prove an unambiguous biological basis of maternal behaviours.

Similar data in developmental psychology show that in children under 4 years of age there are no differences in caring reactions or interests in babies among girls and boys (Melson, Fogel, 1988, after: Brannon, 1999).

Research was conducted (Berman, 1976, 1980, after: Brannon, 1999) into caring behaviours in both sexes in the paradigm of the experimental analysis of differences in the reactions to a small baby : in a natural situation, in reactions to photographs of children and reactions to small animals. Self-narrations, physiological reactions (e.g. heartrate) and behavioural reactions (e.g. speed of reaction to a baby’s cry) were measured. The biggest inter-gender differences were noticed in self-descriptions where the girls evaluated the baby’s attractiveness more highly and revealed more positive emotions. Whereas the measurement of physiological reactions showed significantly smaller differences. Behavioural reactions depended mainly on situational factors, e.g. the sex of the participant and the observing experimenter. The biggest inter-gender differences occurred in a situation when the participant and the observer were men, and not when the participant was a man and the experimenter was a woman.

In the analysis of parental behaviours it is emphasized that the time and effort devoted to looking after a child depends on the sense of satisfaction in the parental role. The experience developing parenthood is a feeling that taking care of a child is important and highly valued socially. Quite the opposite happens when

a person has a feeling that looking after a child limits his/her freedom and independence (Thompson, Walker, 1989).

Thus, caring behaviours in women and men are significantly influenced by expectations and social roles. Their intensity depends to a great extent on the social context and inter-gender differences, absent in early childhood, intensifying with age. They are connected with the influence of socialization, which differentiates boys' and girls' games and interests quite early. This is girls' activities, such as playing with dolls and playing "home," that are connected with the development of caring.

Aggressiveness of women and men

Research into gender differences in aggression usually undertakes an analysis in the life span. However, measurement of aggressiveness in the first months of life is hampered mainly for definitional reasons. Studies on babies' aggressive behaviours do not show uniform differences between girls and boys, but male babies seem to get irritated more quickly and they seem to be emotionally shaky and less sensitive to social stimuli (Haviland, Malatesa, 1982).

The situations in which 3-5-year-old children have emotional "outbreaks" are different for girls and boys. Boys react the most strongly in frustrating situations, whereas girls are most sensitive to conflicts with other children. Girls are able to restrain their reactions in shorter time than boys (Fitzgerald, 1977, after: Maccoby, Jacklin, 1974).

The survey of Maccoby and Jacklin's (1974) research into gender differences in aggression shows that boys are more aggressive than girls at preschool age and at primary school. Whereas Hyde's meta-analysis (1984) shows that differences decrease with age and are the smallest in the period of study. From adolescence on, both girls and boys become less aggressive.

Longitudinal research into aggression was conducted by Leonard Eron et al. in the period of 1977-1987 on a group of 600 children at the age of 8 and over, and continued for 22 years until they became 30. A relationship was found between parents' behaviour, negligence of caring and children's aggression in the youngest group. The tendency towards high aggression noticed in 8-year-old girls and boys persisted during the consecutive 10 years. 8-year-old children watching violent television programmes appeared to be a predictor of aggression in 19-year-olds. An especially strong relationship was found in children watching aggression on television at the age over 10-11. Those who were aggressive at the age of 8, as adults (30 years old) in their biography had criminal incidents and car accidents more

often and they were aggressors towards their spouses and children more frequently. A higher proportion and level of aggression in men persisted for those 22 years (Eron et al., 1983, Eron, 1987).

Similar results were obtained in other investigations. Aggression found in childhood (at an early school age) persisted at a steady level for six years. In girls there was a trend towards aggressive behaviours consisting in slander, gossip and isolation of a victim. This type of aggression was noticed in 10% of fourth-grade girls and as many as 33% of seventh-grade girls. However, it did not refer to aggression towards boys. Because more acts of dangerous physical aggression were found in them. At the same time, boys were afraid of the consequences of their aggression on the part of parents to a lesser degree (Perry, Perry, Weiss, 1989, after: Brannon, 1999).

Other aims realized in aggressive behaviours were also noted in the representatives of both sexes. In boys it was used to increase control over others, build prestige and get money. In girls it was directed towards creating their own person more often and it meant losing emotional control over themselves (Campbell, 1993, after: Brannon, 1999).

Generally, various analyses of adults' aggressiveness state its higher intensity in men. However, meta-analyses show that there are differences in the situations provoking aggression in representatives of both sexes. Men react by aggression more intensively in situations of a lack of any provocation and in situations of physical assault, prevention from gaining success, interruption of performing a task, questioning their skills or abilities, negative information about their intelligence, and in a crowd and in traffic jams. Whereas women react more intensively to insult, i.e. vulgar comments, patronizing or rude treatment and psychical or social harm (Bettencourt, Miller, 1996).

In situations of aggression, women are more often afraid of the possibility of retaliation and especially the use of force. They are scared and feel guilty after an act of aggression. Aggression is perceived as inappropriate for women. Women more often use indirect aggression in the form of: derision, mockery, or arrangement of ridiculing situations. In public conditions they are aggressive more rarely (Baggio, 1989; Battencourt, Miller, 1996).

In analyses of gender differences in aggression what is emphasized is the fact that this is men who are perpetrators of the majority of crimes. Despite the fact that since the 1970s women's share in crime statistics has been increasing, men's share in all crimes amounts to 85% in the American statistics. Most of the perpetrators of the most serious crimes are men (e.g. the perpetrators of 90% of murders and assaults are men) (Brannon, 1999).

Research also shows those men more often reveal aggressive behaviours connected with dangerous and aggressive driving. Aggressive drivers are most often

young men driving fast cars, revealing high approval of the “macho” stereotype of a man (Krahe, Fenske, 2002).

In reflections on gender differences, definitional and methodological differences in the understanding of aggression are worth paying attention to. Because in psychology this phenomenon is understood in a very broad way and it comprises various emotions, behaviours and individual characteristics. Thus, although aggression is most often understood as an intentional behaviour aiming at doing harm or giving someone pain, the difference between aggression and responding aggressively is not clear. Similarly, behaviours defined as assertive might be treated as similar to aggressive behaviours. Whereas as far as criminal behaviours are concerned, although they doubtless contain strictly aggressive acts, from the perspective of gender differences it is important to analyze their origin, i.e. the “way” to joining criminal groups and actions.

In the 1980s, pointing at problems in the comparison of aggressive behaviours of women and men, Alice H. Eagly and Valerie J. Steffen (1986) made an extensive review of 63 investigations concerning 81 psychological reports on aggression in the context of gender. The meta-analysis concerned only research into adults, within the period of 1967–1983, described in significant psychological publications.

Seeking such aggression that would not be connected with a social context, they limited their meta-analysis to investigations within social psychology, in which behavioural indicators were used. They excluded criminal behaviours, verdicts of guilty in trials, acts of vandalism, violence in family, suicide, and other self-destructive acts, aggression resulting from roles played (e.g. distribution of awards, haggling, or negotiating), but also other aggression measurement performed using projective methods, self-narration tests or questionnaires measuring aggressiveness or a tendency towards aggressiveness as personality variables. They did not include aggressive behaviours resulting from the effects of medicines or pharmacological agents. The populations of the participants did not concern criminals or mental hospital patients, either.

They analyzed research into aggression observed in standardized conditions. The majority of them were laboratory experiments or, more rarely, experiments conducted in natural conditions. In the substantial part of the traditional experiments with aggression, according to the “teacher-student” paradigm, the participants enacted the role of a teacher punishing by electrical impulses or noise into a less bright student’s headphones. Whereas in the natural experiments, the participants were put in moderately frustrating situations consisting in squeezing into a queue or standing at the traffic lights behind a driver who does not move at the green light. None of the investigations concerned aggression in close relationships or arranged meetings.

Eagly and Steffen (1986) distinguished physical aggression leading to giving pain or injuring and psychological aggression (from verbal and descriptive angles) causing social harm, e.g. hurting someone's feelings, tarnishing someone's reputation, or damage to one's opinion of oneself.

They also included the significance of situational variables connected with a possibility of a behaviour choice, a necessity of behaving in an aggressive way or only the intensity of an aggressive behaviour. Similarly, the presence of witnesses or "audience's eye," supervision of an experimenter (public vs private character), the character of provocation (from minimal to total block of behaviour) and the sex of the target of aggression were considered as able to modify the range of aggressive behaviours. They studied the persons' convictions concerning the consequences of aggression assuming that it may evoke a sense of guilt, anxiety over one's safety, harm caused to others or a feeling that it is justified. They also analyzed the year of publication and the sex of the research authors.

As a result of the 50 conducted independent assessments of the d effects, the mean value was $d=0.29$, which indicates greater aggressiveness of men. The result proved to be considerably lower than Hyde's (1984) earlier meta-analysis, which described the value of gender differences at the level of $d=0.50$. However, the quantity of Eagly and Steffen's particular effects was varied.

According to assumptions, the biggest difference between the sexes concerned greater physical aggression in men ($d=0.40$), whereas within psychological aggression the differences were considerably smaller ($d=0.18$). In semi-private conditions (observation by an experimenter) men reacted aggressively more than women ($d=0.38$) whereas in public conditions gender differences were smaller ($d=0.21$) and the smallest in private conditions ($d=0.17$). Gender differences in aggression were bigger in laboratory conditions ($d=0.35$) than in natural conditions ($d=0.21$). Similarly, differences were bigger when aggression was "forced" by the character of a situation ($d=0.37$) than in a situation when there was a possibility to choose a behaviour freely ($d=0.24$). Aggression was aimed at men more often ($d=0.13$).

However, among 50 assessments the scientists found 6 whose results indicated bigger aggression of women. They comprised such behaviours as: hooting at a lorry driver standing at the green light ($d=-0.37$), negative evaluation of persons in a questionnaire ($d=-0.36$), or non-verbal show of disapproval ($d=-0.31$).

Indeed, the women, more often than the men, evaluated aggression as more harmful to the victim. Similarly, they thought that as a result of aggression they would experience a sense of guilt to a greater degree. They reckoned that they might experience greater danger as a result of retaliation. The studied women and men were convinced that an average man tends to be more aggressive than an average woman.

Generally, the meta-analysis showed that men are more aggressive than women. Gender differences are more distinct in physical aggression than in psychical one, in laboratory conditions than in natural ones, more in semi-private situations than in public and private ones and in such situations where aggression is an expected behaviour rather than one of possible choices of behaviour. In the face of aggression, women have a greater sense of guilt, they are more sensitive to the harm done to a victim and reveal greater anxiety over retaliation. Women's and men's different convictions may become mediators in undertaking aggressive behaviours.

In the conclusion of the reflections on gender differences in aggression it should be remarked that there is a great variety of behaviours determined as aggressive, and in that case giving a simple answer about the character and range of inter-gender differences within aggression is not possible in science.

The multitude of phenomena called aggression should be remembered: physical, psychical, verbal, non-verbal aggression, violence, self-aggression, crime, vandalism, etc. In the research into aggression what is also significant is the developmental perspective, because the range and kind of aggressive behaviours changes with age.

As Eagly and Steffen (1986) emphasize, research into gender differences is also connected with problems of a methodological kind. For instance how to investigate aggression in neonates and babies? Or how does the "teacher-student" paradigm, popular in social psychology, influence the values of the effects obtained in meta-analyses? Finally, situational limitations occur in research, connected with the fact that aggression becomes not as much an individual reaction but a requirement of a role and a component of a certain social context.

* * *

To sum up, it is worth emphasizing that empirical investigations show that the inter-gender differences within women's and men's emotionality are not as big as popular opinions would suggest.

Men similarly to women experience emotions and differences concern their expression. In the process of socialization women are more encouraged to express emotions and men, by contrast, to suppress them. However, men are not banned from all emotions. Because men are encouraged to reveal emotions connected with the expression of power, such as: aggression, anger, disrespect, contempt, or hate. They are connected with fight, power and dominance and they are part of the traditional male role. Whereas such emotions that show a man as subordinate and weak are considered as improper for a man.

Similarly, there are certain emotions that are socially considered as undesirable for women. They are states connected with aggression, because women are per-

ceived as gentle and responsible for harmonious relationships with others. Revealing weakness, sadness, apprehension, and crying by women is more acceptable.

Thus, asymmetry is observed consisting in the fact that women are socially encouraged to express all possible emotions except aggression, whereas men are discouraged from showing the majority of emotions, but encouraged to express aggressiveness.

Contemporary psychological research consistently indicates the significant role of social and cultural factors for the picture of differences and similarities of women's and men's emotionality.

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