

Are women more emotional than men?

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How many times have we read, or heard it said, that women are more emotional and men are more rational? I conjecture that this idea is thousands of years old, and since it carries a pejorative connotation about women, we can deduce that it must have been created by men.

While I think that there is truth underlying the idea, I think that the idea, as stated, is false and that it is based on a misunderstanding of cognitive processes. I think that if we identify the relevant cognitive processes, we'll understand how men and women do tend to differ.

Here is what I have in mind.

Cognitive preference

There is an overall gender difference in cognitive preference: women tend to trust intuition more than men do, while men tend to trust explicit reasoning more than women do.

This gives rise to the classic kind of marriage conflict in which the husband challenges the wife on the basis of explicit reasoning, and the wife holds to her viewpoint in spite of the husband's challenges.

Another classic marriage situation is one in which a new person enters the couple's life. The wife is expected to be a better judge of the person's integrity and character on the basis of a woman's uncanny ability to make such judgments, as if she has a sixth sense.

We should keep in mind that although these classic examples illustrate an overall difference in cognitive preference between men and women, the difference is not absolute, across all situations because, of necessity, men use intuition pervasively, and women do use explicit reasoning.

Also note that by *overall difference* I refer to the frequency distribution for men vs. the frequency distribution for women. For example, when plotted, the frequency distribution for the height of men lies largely to the right of the frequency distribution for the height of women, but there is overlap because some women are taller than some men. Applying this example to cognitive preference, we replace the feature of height with the propensity to use explicit reasoning.

Emotion

What does emotion have to do with this difference between men and woman?

Nothing. The association of emotion with this difference in cognitive preference is a fallacy that is reflected in use of the word *feeling*. The word *feeling* is used to refer both to intuition and to emotion, and this is a source of confusion. If someone says, "I feel that we should take the freeway," the word *feel* does not refer to emotion but to intuition.

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I think that once the concepts of emotion and intuition are accurately understood, there is no reason to believe that women are more emotional than men are.

There are differences between men and women in the *expression* of emotion, but I think that these differences are largely due to cultural norms.

For example, it is more acceptable for a man to express strong anger than for a woman to express strong anger. I think that part of the reason for this is that a man's lower voice and larger body enable him to express strong anger more effectively than a woman can.

As another example, at a memorial service for a person, it is more acceptable for a woman to cry publicly than it is for a man to cry publicly. In our culture, it is expected that a man will suppress the expression of sorrow sufficiently to prevent public crying, while it is acceptable if a woman does not.

Meeting format

At the meeting, I'll briefly present the foregoing ideas, then we'll discuss the differences between men and women in their cognitive preferences. I encourage everyone to think of specific examples to illustrate the points that they wish to make.

For the interested reader, I present the main facets of my theory of mind in the following meeting agenda:

How does our mind work?

<http://www.meetup.com/Why-human-life-makes-sense/events/138613022>