

Reasons Behinds Gender Difference in Expressing Gratitude

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ABSTRACT

It has been proved that expressing gratitude can help maintain the overall well-being of humans. However, there is an obvious gender difference in expressing gratitude. Generally speaking, women are overall better gratitude expressers than men. Therefore, this paper mainly studies the reasons behind the gender differences in expressing gratitude. Through doing interviews and literature reviews, results show that the reason behind this phenomenon is the traditional standards for masculinity and femininity and different hormonal compositions. These results can help people find ways to improve themselves as gratitude expressers in order to feel happier.

Keywords: gender, interview, masculinity, femininity, hormonal compositions, positive psychology

1. INTRODUCTION

In positive psychology research, gratitude is strongly and consistently associated with greater happiness. Gratitude helps people feel more positive emotions, relish good experiences, improve their health, deal with adversity, and build strong relationships. [1] Expressing gratitude, a direct way to deliver appreciation, can help us become much more delighted. When expressing gratitude, different individuals feel differently. To be more specific, some people feel pretty comfortable showing appreciation while others may feel expressing gratitude embarrassing or may not have the habit of expressing gratitude. It is understandable that different people have different lifestyles and therefore differs in expressing gratitude, however, something strange in society is that there is a phenomenon of women being more likely to express gratitude than men in general. This phenomenon is a determinant of the social roles men and women play and thus it is worth thinking about. So this research will study the differences between men and women expressing gratitude and the reasons behind them. Working on the gender difference in expressing gratitude can help people find out the determinants of expressing gratitude comfortably and efficiently so that people can help others understand how men and even all human-beings can improve themselves to express gratitude easier in order to be happier.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In 2008, Jeffrey J. Froh, Charles Yurkewicz and Todd B. Kashdan examined 154 students and found out that compared with girls, boys acquire more benefits by expressing gratitude. [2] In 2014, Khan Ibadat and Singh Nayanika found significant gender differences between male and female teachers with respect to gratitude. [3] In 2017, Neal Krause, Robert A. Emmons, Gail Ironson and Peter C. Hill found out that women are more like than men to express gratitude to god by examining the HbA1c. In 2017, Xiao Dong Yue, Neelam Arjan Hiranandani, Feng Jiang, Zhenhu Hou, Xiaohua Chen found out that women show more gratitude than men when studying gender differences in 55 of the universities in China. [4] According to all of those previous studies, undoubtedly, huge differences and gaps exist between genders in terms of expressing gratitude. In 2011, American Psychological Association did a well designed research to show how showing gratitude can help partners maintain relationships. In 2013, DR Kerry Howells found out the significant positive impact expressing gratitude has on helping school leaders maintain formal relationships. [5] Those previous studies show that expressing gratitude has various positive effects in a variety of aspects. However, further researches are needed to truly find the reasons especially the reasons behind the behinds gender difference in expressing gratitude.

A few hypotheses can be raised about the possible reasons behind the phenomenon of women being more

comfortable and more able to express gratitude to others than men. First, it may be because of the remained traditional standards for men and women, to be more precise, men are required to be strong while women are required to be caring. Second, when considering from the perspective of gratitude receivers, they are more likely to consider women as more sincere gratitude expressers because of stereotypes and the different expressing abilities of different expressers. Last but not least, perhaps there are some natural genetic differences in women and men that can result in different reactions to the same stimulus, including how they react to thank others.

3. ANALYSIS OF THE REASONS BEHINDS GENDER DIFFERENCES IN EXPRESSING GRATITUDE

First of all, the requirements of masculinity for men and femininity for women have never been erased with the gradual development of modern society, which can limit the emotional expression of men to a great extent.

This study randomly interviewed two men of similar ages, with similar educational backgrounds but have different attitudes towards those traditional standards due to different family education.

Mr. Yang's parents generally give him more space to develop his own values and perspectives rather than require him to live with the same values as theirs. His parents never teach him how to behave more appropriately in order to be a 'boy', to be more specific, his parents never ask him to be strong as a man or require him never to be careful as a girl.

Mr. Li's parents often require him to live a life according to their values and teach him that he should take more risks and more responsibilities in both the family and the society since he is a male. His parents always asked him to do more housework rather than his sister and he always seemed to be the one to be blamed when the children caused any trouble.

Due to the different family education, Mr. Yang and Mr. Li have completely different points of view about their social responsibility as a man and their feelings towards expressing gratitude. Mr. Yang doesn't think there is any gender difference in terms of social responsibility and feels comfortable expressing gratitude. Mr. Li believes that men should take more risks than women in a family and in the society. He always lives according to the standard of being a gentleman and he believes it is embarrassing to express sincere gratitude to others.

Mr. Yang is always used to expressing his emotions towards others. He thinks crying and complaining to his loved ones is the best way to reduce burden, which feels easy and comfortable to him as well. He always express gratitude to whoever he is grateful for, which is a significant determinant of his well-being. Throughout his life, his boyfriend has helped him the most to realize his dreams and he always express his gratitude with specific emotions to his boyfriend sincerely and easily.

Mr. Li cannot comfortably express gratitude and even other emotions. He doesn't regard crying as a decent way to alleviate stress and he never expresses his love with details to his wife. He has never formally expressed gratitude to anyone because he feels it embarrassing. He sometimes regrets not expressing his gratitude to his middle school Math teacher who gave him directions for his life, which results in less happiness.

To briefly summarize what I've found out by interviewing these two men, men who agree more with traditional standards for masculinity may feel more uncomfortable expressing gratitude since it seems not decent to them while men who admit and embrace flexibility in gender differences are more likely to express gratitude. Compared to the factor of masculinity, femininity imposes fewer limits in terms of women's emotional expression, especially the expression of pleasure and gratitude. Additionally, this indicates that women are more comfortable expressing gratitude partly because of fewer limits in traditional standards since they are required to express feelings and have a caring heart rather than be strong.

Table 1. comparison chart of the results

	Mr. Yang	Mr. Li
Family education about 'being a boy'	His parents never teach him how to act appropriately in order to be a 'boy', instead, his parents give him enough freedom to develop his own values and perspectives	His parents always teach him to take more risks and responsibilities as a boy. He is always the one to be blamed no matter what trouble he and his sister make.
How they themselves view the social responsibility of a man	He believes that men and women all share the equal amounts of and exactly the same social responsibilities.	He agrees with the education of his parents and believes that men should take more risks and responsibilities.

How they view emotional expressions	He claims that it is and should be okay for men to express emotions. He tends to cry rather than be mad when he is in low spirits and he doesn't think crying makes him feel ashamed.	He has cried for a few times in his life and he feels ashamed when crying. In daily life, he rarely expresses emotions, even to his loved ones.
Do they express gratitude	He is used to gratitude expressions	He never expresses gratitude formally
Did they express gratitude to the ones they are most grateful for?	He is the most grateful for his boyfriend since his boyfriend offers spiritual support all the time and he always tells his boyfriend how grateful he is with every detail. He says that expressing gratitude to his boyfriend makes him chill.	He is the most grateful for his middle school Math teacher who pointed out that he should go to university to further his study and he never thanked this teacher. Now he does not even have the chance to thank this teacher and he regrets.

Therefore, masculinity and the education of parents can limit men's expression of gratitude to some extent. However, since femininity is less likely than masculinity to impose limits in terms of emotional expression, women express gratitude more comfortably and more frequently than men.

The second hypothesis raised is that considering from the perspective of gratitude receivers, they are more likely to regard women as more sincere gratitude expressers. To be more specific, women may be considered to be better or more able to express gratitude because of stereotypes or education received by those receivers at an early age.

To test this hypothesis, I went doing short interviews with random passers-by in the street. I basically asked the interviewee two questions: first, do you receive more thanks from men or women?

Are you more comfortable with gratitude from men or women? As a result, almost none of my interviewees find women are better gratitude expressers than men. This conclusion goes against my previous hypothesis and indicates that people actually desire the same amounts of gratitude from men and women when living in modern society, which may highly depend on the changes in people's thoughts with the development of feminism and can be another reason for why men should learn to express more gratitude.

The second hypothesis proved wrong, I raised the third hypothesis, perhaps there are some natural genetic differences in women and men that can result in the different reactions to the same stimulus, including how they react to thank others. Perhaps this difference is caused by the different compositions of their brains and it is unlikely to change in their lives.

In 2018, Julia Heller, Shahram Mirzazade, Sandro Romanzetti, Ute Habel, Birget Derntl, Nils M.Freitag, Jorge B Schulz, Imis Dogan and Kathrin Reetz did a

psychological experiment and found out that women are better than men in realizing emotions in the first place because of natural and genetic factors. [6]

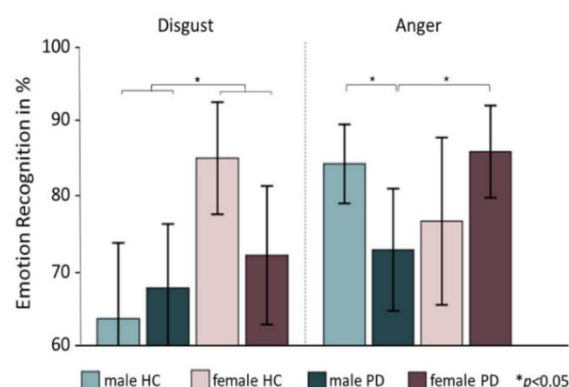


Figure 1. Significant group differences in emotion recognition according to the Ekman 60 faces test

As early as 1985, Broody found out that biological factors, including genetic, hormonal, and neuropsychological variables, as well as social factors, contribute to gender differences in emotion. [7] Obviously, while social factors are certainly a part of the reasons, biological factors play an essential role in terms of gender differences in expressing gratitude. This is not mostly because of different brain components but depends more on genetic factors and hormonal factors, namely, different hormonal components can cause different levels of prosocial behaviors, the expressions of gratitude included.

As a result, this hypothesis is proved. Different hormonal compositions in men and women cause women to be more reactive when feeling positive emotions and thus women express gratitude more.

4. CONCLUSION

This article focuses on the reasons behind the phenomenon of women being more likely to express gratitude than men. It can be concluded that there are both social factors and biological factors affecting the gratitude expressions of men and women. In terms of social factors, women were required to be caring and pleasing while men were required to be strong and brave according to traditional standards for masculinity and femininity. Those standards have never been completely erased in modern society and as a result, men are less comfortable expressing gratitude than women. In terms of biological factors, mostly because of different hormonal compositions, women are more reactive when feeling positive emotions than men.

To further improve this study, a well-designed biological experiment about hormonal differences should be done. It is worth noting that all discussions about the reasons behind the phenomenon that women can express gratitude more than men are to make humans feel happier.

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