Emotions and Masculinities

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ABSTRACT: This article explores the intersection of masculinity and emotiveness, challenging the stereotypical notion that boys and men should suppress their emotions to conform to traditional gender roles. Drawing on perspectives from gender studies, it highlights how boys are conditioned from infancy to prioritize traits deemed "masculine," such as competitiveness and emotional restraint, while discouraging behaviors considered "feminine," like empathy and emotional expression. By referencing the works of sociologists like Giddens and the psychological insights of Zimbardo and Coulombe, the article reveals how these gender expectations are perpetuated through societal norms, education, and even rituals like circumcision, which symbolically reinforce male toughness. It also addresses the broader implications of this conditioning, such as the impact on men's emotional intelligence, mental health, and interpersonal relationships. The article argues that the rigid constructs of masculinity are not only limiting but also detrimental, suggesting a need for a paradigm shift in the way society raises boys. The paper calls for a re-evaluation of how boys are socialized, promoting an inclusive approach to gender that benefits both men and women by breaking down harmful stereotypes and fostering emotional growth.

KEYWORDS: emotion, gender socialization, gender stereotypes, emotional intelligence

Introduction

"Boys don't cry! Wipe your tears! Get over it!" I have heard these exclamations many times as a student, as a mother, and also in my social life. Although I have faced strong opposition to all actions concerning a gender perspective on all surrounding aspects, these exclamations represent a gender education, even if imperfect, but they indicate that we are discussing gender. This paper will focus on masculinity and analyze how gender stereotypes affect the way boys grow up, are educated, and interact in society. Boys and girls receive gender-differentiated education from the very first moments of life, through their parents and those around them. Boys wear blue and play with cars, planes, or guns, while girls wear pink and play with dolls. From their early years, boys are taught to control their emotions and be competitive and competent. Expressing emotions is seen as similar to girls and women, which implies weakness, and we don't want that, right? Historically, men were responsible for hunting, providing food for the family, leading the tribe, the home, and the family. The only emotions permitted for boys and later men are anger, aggression, and the internalization of emotions.

Methods and Research Instruments

The scientific research methodology involved defining the aim and objectives of this article, focusing on gender stereotypes and societal expectations regarding male behavior. Evidence from experts, among others, was analyzed to understand how embracing these stereotypes

affects authenticity and has negative consequences on relationships with others. Consequently, the research employed a variety of methods, including:

- Bibliographic documentation by carrying out an in-depth analysis of data and information regarding gender stereotypes, how to influence men's personality, and new men typology;

- The qualitative research method through which the information necessary to form an opinion on male personalities was collected;

- The cognitive-structural method that provided the framework necessary to optimize the conclusions by structuring information and analyzing the semantics and terminology used in the field of male psychology.

Social Context

Consciously or unconsciously, we are evolving and finding enough information to guide mothers and fathers on how boys can learn to recognize and express their emotions, whatever they may be, with the certainty that their masculinity will not be affected. On the contrary, they will become men with developed emotional intelligence, empathetic, and capable of not completely ignoring signs of someone's distress (Pop 2020). I believe we are in the midst of a revolution in social norms, which sometimes creates confusion across different generations and in communication between women and men, as well as between girls and boys. On one hand, we are witnessing a revolution in social norms where women have become vocal in advocating for their freedom to live as they choose. On the other hand, men feel directionless from society and are drawn to leaders who are vocal but promote values that resonate only with their interests.

If sex is represented by the presence of sexual organs and definitive physical characteristics, and more recently, these can be changed, gender refers to the psychological, social, and cultural attributes of men and women. Giddens (2000) argues that the distinction between sex and gender is fundamental because he believes that most differences between men and women are not biologically determined (although most people consider them to be), but rather socially and culturally determined. This is not a competition to determine which has more differences; at this point, I only note that both sex and gender, shape what it means to be a woman or a man, a girl or a boy.

Regarding sex, aside from sexual anomalies (resulting from a set of clinical conditions due to chromosomal, gonadal, and/or genital variation -1 in 4500-5500 newborns (Garcia-Acero et al. 2020), it is considered binary. Gender, or the social and cultural construct, on the other hand, is seen as being strongly determined by geographical regions and periods. In other words, simultaneously, we find a variety of genders developed in different geographical areas, and even within the same geographical area, different social and cultural constructs can emerge over different periods. In this sense, gender relations are dynamic, transformable, and transformative systems.

Gender socialization, or the learning of gender roles through all social environmental influences, is a process that begins from the moment a child is born. Thus, it is considered that sex is a determining factor in gender socialization. Through gender socialization, a child acquires behaviors deemed appropriate for their sex and learns culturally accepted values regarding what is considered masculine or feminine. Gender socialization not only contributes to the formation of gender difference awareness but also the recognition and social acceptance of gender-based social stratification in any society (Rodat 2017). Differences between genders are often regarded as natural (and "naturalized") and can manifest in the form of habits, skills, behaviors, practices, activities, shared knowledge, etc., not applicable to all women or all men, and are unrelated to physiological characteristics. They often take the form of stereotypes at the level of common sense (Glick 2004).

The feminist movement's main objective is precisely to equalize social norms between women and men and implicitly to eliminate gender/sex stereotypes. Gender/sex stereotypes are defined as overgeneralized beliefs that women and men have predetermined and limited characteristics and roles based on their gender/sex. With the French Revolution, actions were focused on the emancipation of women. In contrast, there was no unified effort to drive a change in men's roles in society, despite the need for it (Zimbardo and Coulombe 2020). There is an increasing number of young people who have low academic achievement, fail socially with girls, and struggle sexually with women. We believe that the development of both women and men involves a third parameter, namely personality, which leads us to a multitude of human typologies.

Given my interest in gender equality, I must acknowledge that it's a bi-directional process; men are raised differently from women, and being a man is not exactly a walk in the park (Zimbardo and Coulombe 2020). Zimbardo and Coulombe illustrate this argument with examples such as the circumcision that some boys must endure (compared by some men to genital mutilation), the Spartan education practices—such as delaying the comforting of crying baby boys and exposing them to fewer songs and stories. These attitudes teach boys to suppress their suffering, which impacts future relationships by diminishing the value placed on emotions.

During adolescence and puberty, Zimbardo and Coulombe argue that boys learn to cope with pain through team sports. At the same time, they discover societal expectations of men, particularly financial ones, which leads them to prioritize earning money and often to start working early, sometimes at the expense of their education. Young men are taught that they need well-paying jobs to financially sustain wife and children, while young women do not receive the same lesson. In my opinion, this lesson aligns with social norms as well as biological realities, where women often interrupt their careers after childbirth and, until very recently, have been primarily involved in child-rearing, especially during the first year of life. With the encouragement for men to participate in child-rearing, including sharing parental leave with their partners, they have faced stigmatization, which becomes even more severe if they choose to leave their jobs to take care of the child(ren). For many men, the role of caregiver is still not seen as a viable option, despite the fact that there are many boys/men in vulnerable situations where a male presence could be more comforting. For women, stigmatization occurs if they choose to return to work instead of staying home during this period.

Different roles in society provide greater financial stability for men compared to women, while they, along with their families, learn what it means to love from distance, which is a disadvantage for their roles as husbands and fathers. Another negative effect is the rapid decline after retirement, as many men experience a sense of uselessness. Men who have dedicated themselves solely to their careers or specific jobs, without engaging in other complementary activities or cultivating hobbies, often struggle to find their place in this new phase of life upon retirement. This can lead to a higher susceptibility to depression, alcoholism, and a sedentary lifestyle, ultimately resulting in deteriorating health.

Men who choose to stay at home for caregiving, on the other hand, are often considered "beta males", which implies that they appear insecure, sad, anxious, sensitive, and sexually unattractive and that they do not hide their vulnerability. Despite this, the beta male has qualities that women appreciate when deciding to start a family. A beta male is willing to take on responsibilities and make commitments, is empathetic, and is open to communication.

A study from Columbia University (Bosshart 2023) identified three types of masculinity, thus replacing the outdated alpha-beta binary. The study, conducted on 93 men aged 19-43, found the following three types of masculinity:

- Neo-traditionalists, who adhere to traditional gender roles, taking on the roles of provider and protector.

- Egalitarians, who advocate for an equal relationship with an emphasis on reciprocity.

- Progressives, who focus on building a fair relationship and are open to communication to achieve this goal.

It is only a matter of time before gender roles will be re-learned equitably between women and men. When we talk about equality and equal rights, it is also essential to discuss the equal responsibilities that come with it.

The Difficulty of Repressing Emotions

The different ways in which we teach girls and boys about expressing emotions reflect our gender perspectives and roles. When we tell a boy who is suffering and crying—i.e., expressing an emotion—that he "cries like a girl," we reinforce gender stereotypes that teach him only the wrong lessons: boys shouldn't do what girls do, crying is a sign of weakness, girls are allowed to cry and thus are recognized as weak by society, etc. Conversely, physical fighting among boys is often accepted and even encouraged as a normal part of growing up—"boys will be boys." Physical violence is condoned and encouraged, teaching them that real men should be tough and violent. As a result, men lose connection with their sensitivity, which they will need later in life. I remember a conversation with a colleague (a graduate of a military high school, where girls were not admitted at the time). He believed that the women in our department were vindictive, passive-aggressive, and did not cooperate well with each other. He wished they would resolve their issues and have better cooperation between colleagues. I asked him how he thought this could be achieved. His response was, "I don't know, with men it's simpler! A few punches and then a beer." I laughed loudly and invited him to imagine such a scene among women. It didn't fit, and in fact, it wouldn't even fit among men.

The effects of this emotional restraint and introversion will surprise young men who may be accused by the women in their lives of being cold and lacking empathy. They also often struggle to ask for help in difficult situations and tend to face risky experiences alone because the most frequently heard advice in their childhood was that they must handle things on their own and solve their problems. Asking for help and admitting that they don't understand something is not considered "manhood".

Men who have been harassed in childhood, even if they seemingly overcome the violent situation, are subconsciously affected and may experience self-devaluation. Male victims tend to avoid reporting the abuses they have endured, including sexual abuse, due to shame, stigmatization, and perceived failure related to not conforming to the strong male stereotype, fear of not being believed, denial of their victim status, and lack of support from society, family, and friends (Zimbardo and Coulombe 2020). Even as men have started to speak out about violent situations, including sexual harassment, society often does not know how to respond. This is partly because the phenomenon of experiencing sexual relations against one's will is not well understood, even though 50% of the population is male. As with women, understanding and respecting consent and real boundaries are crucial.

In some areas, the status of being a mother is considered superior to that of being a father, which disadvantages the male perspective in family dynamics. Applying gender analysis to the U.S. judicial system in the late 1980s revealed that courts often granted women longer probation periods compared to men accused of similar offenses. Further examination of these cases showed that men in such situations had shorter probation periods but a higher likelihood of being sentenced to prison. Consequently, fathers were twice as likely as mothers to be incarcerated for the same charges. Thus, the extended probation period for women effectively represented a lighter punishment compared to that applied to

men. In prisons, numerous programs are developed for female inmates, focusing on parenting, personal development for rehabilitation, and facilitating reintegration into the community, among other areas (Zimbardo and Coulombe 2020). The goal of these programs is to provide more opportunities for women to reduce female incarceration rates and enhance public safety. This objective would have been achieved more equitably if similar projects had also been developed for men.

Given the legislative changes in the U.S. regarding the rights of transgender individuals in the prison system, transgender women, even before undergoing gender-affirming surgery, are transferred to women's prisons, as it is considered that they face real danger in men's prisons. Critics have argued that these policies disadvantage cisgender women (Sturgeon 2023). Authorities have prohibited the transfer of individuals with a history of violence against women, a policy also implemented in Scotland (Bundock 2023). Men with a history of violence against women or those convicted of sexual offenses have attempted to persuade the system by declaring themselves as women and seeking to be treated as such once incarcerated. Another issue that has arisen in women's prisons after accepting transgender female inmates with male genitalia is the occurrence of pregnancies (Rogers 2022).

A second example comes from Germany (Pușcaș 2024), where there are severe penalties for defamation. In this case, a woman received a harsher sentence than a group of nine men convicted of gang-raping a 15-year-old girl. The woman's crime was defaming one of the rapists on social media. Even though both sentences were suspended, none of the men showed any remorse for their actions. By reversing the rules between women and men, both can learn about objectification and rejection, family maintenance, and caregiving work. While societal expectations for women and girls, particularly in Western societies, are undergoing significant transformation, expectations for boys remain unchanged: they are expected to be upright and determined citizens who take personal responsibility and work alongside others to improve the community and the nation. However, these potentials have also become applicable to women too. In contrast, Zimbardo argues that society does not provide boys with the support, guidance, opportunities, or space needed to motivate or inspire them to aspire to these goals (Zimbardo and Coulombe 2020).

It is beneficial for both women and men, girls and boys, for societal anticipations to be similar for all. Significant strides have been made in accepting active women's participation in all fields of societal life. However, recent trends show an increase in violence against women. As we can see, the rights women have gained are not permanent, and many of their freedoms have been rolled back. For instance, the apartheid-like conditions imposed on women in Afghanistan with the Taliban's return to power, and the conservative movement in the U.S. that has nearly banned abortion—thus denying women control over their bodies-are clear examples. Additionally, there is a worrying trend where men dictate what women should do, further restricting their rights. From politics to the media, classrooms to our families, society contributes to this decline by stifling the intellectual, creative, and social abilities of young people from the outset. Ironically, the current failures of men have broader implications, as they undermine the potential success of future generations of boys.

When we seek to understand and explain complex human behavior, it is crucial to conduct an analysis that encompasses three levels: individual characteristics, the influence of the situation on behavior within a specific social or physical context, and the impact of the political system, specifically whether it creates, maintains, or changes these situations. Among the factors associated with the system, we should consider the political and economic consequences of legislation that recognizes the needs and rights of women while potentially overlooking those of men, physiological changes related to the environment that decrease testosterone levels and increase estrogen levels, media influences, economic

regression leading to a reduction in job opportunities, and the failure of the educational system to create challenging environments that stimulate boys' curiosity. Many boys lack guidance and fundamental social behavior skills.

Across countries and continents, there exists an ideological gap between young men and young women. Tens of millions of people living in the same cities, holding similar jobs, sharing classrooms, or even homes struggle to understand each other.

Society still upholds a hegemonic view of masculinity, where men believe their only socially acceptable roles are that of warriors or providers for their families. They perceive any alternative roles as a threat to the traditional concept of masculinity. Men who adopt these new roles often receive less respect from other men and fewer social and romantic opportunities from the opposite sex. Examples: Fathers who choose to stay home are often viewed as failures or less successful, "nice guys" are left out; stigmatization related to parental leave; women's dissatisfaction who express frustration over the lack of respectful and kind men, while simultaneously, nice and respectful men seeking advice or support because they have been rejected by women, who may view them as too nice, passive, or desperate, according to traditional gender norms.

This blockage of male roles does not encourage a desire for change among boys, nor does it encourage young people of both sexes to relate to each other as equals. This results in movements like *Men Going Their Own Way* (ADL 2024), which promotes white male supremacy and views the feminist movement and its supporters as primary adversaries. Mature men may consciously choose to withdraw from societal expectations, but for young men, it is often an unconscious decision. They find safety and validation in video games and pornography, which provides them with a privileged status among other participants. When used excessively, especially in conjunction with social isolation, these can impact boys' ability and interest in developing necessary social skills for face-to-face interactions (as of 2015). Excessive use of video games is associated with obesity, violence, anxiety, poor academic performance, social phobia, shyness, increased impulsivity, and depression.

The intensity and variety of video games can make social life seem dull in comparison with virtual and may necessitate medication for managing Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), which contributes to the creation of a vicious cycle.

It has been observed that the percentage of men not engaged in work has increased. Researchers have identified a new phenomenon: some men have a sense of absolute entitlement simply for being men, believing they do not need to make any effort for this privileged status. Many men settle into living with their parents or within marriages/partnerships, refusing to work to earn money or participate in household chores. Women's tolerance for living with these types of men is due to the difficulty of finding a partner from the same background, with the same level of education, who understands the nuances of interpersonal communication. Men need to learn how to communicate with educated women. They require time to practice being sociable, to be more concerned about those around them, and to find common topics with others. All relationships involve a negotiation of rights and responsibilities. This results in a noticeable lack of a sense of duty.

Traditionally, shyness involves a fear of rejection due to social inadequacy, particularly in interactions with certain groups, such as people in positions of authority or those whom someone wishes to impress, like members of the opposite sex. The profound fear of social rejection has increased, partly due to technology, which reduces face-to-face social interactions, such as conversations with others, requesting information, shopping, going to the bank, borrowing books from the library, and so on. This has been further exacerbated by the 2020 lockdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Establishing social connections requires both desire, self-confidence, and resilience to rejection. A lack of desire to have an active social life is caused, on one hand, by a lack of knowledge on how to engage socially, and, on the other hand, by a low tolerance for

rejection, which fosters inhibition. This shyness becomes stronger as it is internalized and, worse, not even acknowledged, even though it leads to the absence of contact with most other people. Odd or inappropriate behavior from some colleagues towards their peers or superiors highlights shy individuals in unfamiliar situations and in direct interactions with someone of the opposite sex. Shyness characteristic of young men is more related to general social awkwardness—they do not know what to do, where, when, and how. They do not know how to find common conversation topics, approaching the realm of social relationships as if it were a journey to a foreign country where they do not know the language and are unable to ask for directions. Many of them are not familiar with facial expressions and the rules of nonverbal or verbal communication that allow a person to feel comfortable when speaking or listening to someone and then responding kindly. This is especially evident in the presence of attractive women. The absence of these essential social skills for managing close social relationships encourages withdrawal, which gives the illusion of safety.

We define the Syndrome of Intense Socialization (SIS) as a common set of attitudes and values among many men: an intense preference for male company, to the detriment of relationships or partnerships with women. Another definition of the Syndrome of Intense Socialization (SIS) is the intense preference for social contexts predominantly involving the presence of other men. This attraction to such social contexts is stronger when the nature of the relationship is more intense, and the group becomes increasingly exclusive regarding the tolerance of outsiders or those who do not meet the criteria for membership. Each included man is perceived as better integrated (military groups). This could explain the slow inclusion of women in the military. Men experience a form of positive stimulation—due to cortisol secretion, activation of the adrenergic system, or increased testosterone levels—when they feel they belong to such exclusively male social groups. Gradually, men adapt to this level of social intensity, which begins to become their preferred type of interaction.

The positive aspect is that many organizations teach men to work together, which is crucial for organizing society. The negative aspect is that, over time, this level of social intensity becomes a desirable operational standard, operating unconsciously. Men with SIS experience a sense of social isolation, followed by boredom, immediately after leaving the intense male environment and being required to socialize in mixed-gender groups or within the family. They may exhibit withdrawal symptoms when exiting these intense social contexts, with these symptoms becoming stronger the longer the time spent in such environments.

Sometimes, soldiers manage this stimulation deficit by requesting a new mission or by accessing environments where there are other soldiers. SIS is characterized by a weakening of family bonds; individuals with this syndrome tend to exhibit abusive behavior, especially when consuming alcohol, and have an increased likelihood of divorcing and separating from partners with whom they had a positive relationship before joining the male group. Additionally, they may develop negative attitudes towards women, viewing them as their opposite (the "other") who do not understand them, preferring destructive relationships over healthy ones.

Paradoxically, although men may become accustomed to a certain level of generalized stimulation from the presence of other men in group contexts, acknowledging these feelings of closeness is strictly forbidden. In mixed-gender settings, they might experience anxiety, and when approaching a woman, the opposite reaction might occur: they may not feel sexual stimulation. As Zimbardo and Coulombe (2020) noted, while men's social norms are evolving, old rules remain desirable, and those who remain stuck in the past feel deceived (Hayward 2022).

Even though child custody/parental authority legislation has been amended to grant equal rights to both parents (EU Resolution 2079), the residential arrangements for children

are made solely in their best interest. Many men feel that they are working for people (their children, note) who despise them and have been turned against them. Some of these men end up in prison for failure to pay or delays in child support.

Men face general dissatisfaction from their families. For instance, if they work long hours to provide more money for the family, they are considered neglectful and feel misunderstood; if they have a history of reprehensible actions, they are deemed unsuitable for the role of parent; if they invest in a personal passion, they are considered selfish; and if they avoid forming new relationships to avoid repeating past failures, they are seen as irresponsible. The suicide rate among men after divorce is ten times higher than that of women (Zimbardo and Coulombe 2020). Because men are taught not to seek help and not to open up to others, they suppress their emotions and tend to resort to more drastic actions in times of crisis.

Due to the "lack of modernity" in the institution of marriage, the qualitative time boys spend with their fathers, mentors, or older role models has decreased. As a result, they have fewer opportunities to observe and learn about healthy male behavior. Often, they only learn about competitiveness, aggressive behavior, or deceit to win at any cost.

Conclusions

The absence of a father figure or male role models significantly impacts boys, leading them to seek masculine identity elsewhere, such as in gangs, terrorist groups, drugs, alcohol, gambling, or the objectification of women (Zimbardo and Coulombe 2020). Another secondary effect of an absent father is the increased incidence of attention and mood disorders, according to a study conducted in Sweden with children raised in single-parent families.

In my volunteer work with neurodivergent and hearing-impaired children and adolescents, there is a notable absence of men within our group. Despite a higher proportional number of institutionalized boys, the teaching staff and volunteers are predominantly female. As noted by Craig McClain, co-founder of the *Boys to Men Mentoring Network*, men often fear working with adolescents because it reminds them of their own painful, suffering-filled, and lonely teenage years. This sentiment has also been shared with me by the father of a classmate of my son. Yet, there must be something else that holds them back. Adolescent girls face similar challenges, along with additional ones, suggesting that the same ethic of care that is instilled in girls is not as strongly applied to boys. While there have been some developments in addressing this issue, much more remains to be done. The lack of physical presence around young people is often replaced by social networks and various groups, which, while providing some form of connection, fail to offer the necessary psychological and emotional support and can sometimes even lead to criminal behavior under the guise of anonymity.

In this fast-paced era, with multiple simultaneous obligations, not everyone is managing well. Not only is it challenging, but the process is also stressful, characterized by constant distractions and transitions from one task to another. This disorganization affects memory and impairs analytical reasoning. This state of perpetual alertness also impacts eating habits. Eating on the go, in front of the computer, or while doing something else, has a negative effect on both the quality and quantity of food consumed. There is an obesity epidemic impacting health, exacerbated by environmental degradation. Given the adipose tissue's capacity to retain toxins, problems arise when it starts to break down and these accumulated toxins are released into the bloodstream.

In conclusion, emotions are not determined by gender, race, or status; they are universal and intrinsic to the human experience. Recognizing and naming emotions is the first step towards managing them effectively.

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