

Anger by gender

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Popular stereotypes typically do not associate females with the direct expression of anger. Brody and Hall (1993) reviewed research on gender and emotion and found that people very clearly see females as more expressive than males when it comes to many emotions, but not in regard to anger, which was associated with males.

They cite studies that indicate the consistency of such beliefs; people from various socioeconomic and age backgrounds share the belief that anger is expressed more often and more intensely by males. Cultural norms encourage or at least allow males to respond angrily when provoked; cultural definitions of femininity make it difficult for females to be openly hostile or angry. If women fail to restrain their anger, they tend to be viewed as emotional or hysterical (Buss, 2001).

These assumptions are reflected in the research literature, which focuses primarily on male-to-male or male-to-female hostility and aggression, rather than hostility and aggression on the part of females directed at either at men or other women.

This double standard is beginning to erode. Some observers believe that women can be more aggressive and assertive today, although they are still subject to more limits than men (Averill, 1992).

Francesca Cancian and Steven Gordon (1988) document a normative shift in the twentieth century, which actually encourages women today to express emotions such as anger. Their research linked marital emotion norms to political and cultural events and found that in periods of social upheaval, women are encouraged to be more open with their anger.

Research presents mixed findings in regard to gender and various measures of anger and hostility.

For self-reported hostility, paper-and-pencil measures such as the Buss-Durkee Hostility Inventory have not revealed sex differences. Barefoot, et al. (1991), using a large national sample, found that men outscored women on cynical hostility regardless of age. James Check and Neil Malamuth (1985) assessed hostility in Canadian women and men and found that the men's average score was slightly higher than the women's (8.79 versus 7.57).

When men and women were asked to keep track of specific anger experiences, Campbell (1993) found no significant differences in the frequency of such experiences: over a one-week period, men reported that they became angry between six and seven times, and women between five and six times. (Buss, 2001)

Tavris (1989) examined sex differences in anger and found no differences in how anger is experienced, how it is expressed, how well it is identified, or what categories of things arouse anger. She believes, however, that although women do not feel anger any less strongly than men, they are less likely to express it because of the costs associated with their lower social status.

Tavris points out that men and women become angry about the same categories of offenses, such as condescending treatment, injustice, and attacks on self-esteem, but they often disagree about what they consider to be condescending treatment, injustice, or attack.

Frodi and Macaulay (1977) found that both women and men were angered by condescending treatment: women regardless of the provoker's sex and men by a superior attitude on the part of a female. Men were more angered than women by physical and verbal aggression on the part of another male.

Brody and Hall (1993) reviewed studies showing that there are fairly clearcut differences in regard to positive emotions (with women experiencing and expressing them more), but in regard to negative emotions, especially anger, the findings are less consistent. Females were more likely to feel and express " intropunitive" emotions (such as shame, sadness, and guilt), and men were more likely to feel and express " outward directed" emotions (such as contempt).

However, for anger, differences between the sexes are often very small or males are more angry than females. Kopper and Epperson (1991) looked at the relationship between sex and sex role identity on anger expression and found sex not to be an important factor in the expression or suppression of anger (however, sex role identity was).

Some research finds more anger on the part of females. The review article by Brody and Hall (1993) cites research by Brody that found more anger on the part of women toward imaginary male protagonists.

Mirowsky and Ross (1995) investigated whether women's greater distress accounts are a function of women's greater expressiveness (they are not) or whether they truly experience more distress (they do). In the process of their work they found that females experience various feelings, including anger, more often than males.

Reiser (1994) explored respondents' feelings of anger toward the other sex using a random sample of North Carolina residents and found a significant sex difference, with female respondents reporting greater anger than male respondents. Conger et al. (1993, cited by Miroswky and Ross 1995) surveyed 451 married couples who lived in the rural Midwest and found that the women reported significantly greater levels of marital hostility than the men.