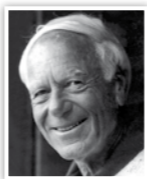


MIND & EMOTIONS / By Walter M Bortz II



Women bend, men break. Women cry, men throw chairs. Women express their emotions. Men suppress their emotions and tears and this cover-up often leads to frustration, which leads to aggression.

In his popular 1992 book, *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*, American author John Gray proposes that women complain about problems because they want their problems to be acknowledged, while men complain about problems because they're looking for solutions.

Gray further suggests that men's suppression of emotion represents a "retreating into their cave" motif in that they withdraw from stress, while ruminating about it. This leads too often to the hopeless/helpless syndrome [we quit trying because we believe nothing we do matters] described by psychologist Martin Seligman. Is this male brittleness the reason behind the general fact that women live longer than men?

The topic of gender inequality is loaded with emotional overtones. There can be little argument raised about the wonderfully different anatomic and hormonal aspects of the two sexes. It is in the behavioural and cultural realms where frictions arise. Freud and many psychologists after him have weighed in on the differing male/female patterns. The psychological inventory lists many differences. **Females rank higher in agreeability, empathy, happiness, emotional lability, and communication skills.** Most workers agree that females exhibit superior

inter-personal sensitivities. Males rank higher in aggression, mathematics and spatial awareness. The rare savant syndrome, in which other-worldly mathematic or musical capacities astound, is invariably found in males for which no clear brain development miscuing is suggested. Up for grabs is intelligence, although most authorities rate this as a tossup. Further, anthropologists have had a field day providing rules, which derive from our jungle existence as precursors for our current behaviour differences.

Much of male aggression is rooted in sexual jealousy. Even in those few remaining aboriginal cultures today, murder over sexual issues is extremely high. In fact, 67 per cent of the married women in New Guinea described themselves as 'battered' with one in five suffering injuries severe enough to require hospitalisation at least once. A survey of the murders

in Detroit, Michigan in 1972 shows that over 80 per cent of them are precipitated by a jealous man.

This activity goes back into prehistory, as it is recorded that Paris's seduction of Helen was the proximate cause of the Trojan War. Innumerable duels and thousands of lives have been caused by infidelity, imagined or real.

In his book *Demonic Males*, Harvard anthropologist Richard Wrangham suggests that men fight neither because they are aggressive, nor because they are acquisitive. They do so because they reason or think they reason that there are some dangers that can be surmounted if they are addressed before they become real. He suggests further that **fight or lust for imperial dominion exist largely because of pride.** He notes that in the chimpanzee world, once a male has been accepted as the alpha, this tendency for violence falls. In fact, they may actually become benign leaders, but before this time, there is considerable intertribal competition and aggression.

But for every rule, there are exceptions, which make the male-female interface more complex. The bonobo chimpanzee of Congo, West Africa, is a notable exception because of the matriarchal society in which it exists. There, when the male starts to cause a rumpus, the females gang up, and beat him into submission, thereby generating a society, which is termed 'gentle' by anthropologists. This is in contrast to the ordinary violent pattern of most other animal species.

Men have been aggressive; and it's linked to their testes. But is it really just testosterone? My Stanford colleague, neurologist Robert Sapolsky studies his own personal baboon colony in Kenya. He has written a book titled, *Trouble with Testosterone*, in which he features the high amount of mischief that can be tied to this male hormone. Robert, however, says that aggression is far more tied to behavioural issues than hormonal ones. In this regard, the ranking in the tribe seems to be the more critical issue. A similar set of observations goes with the important Whitehall study in Great Britain, in which instead of baboons, the psychologists surveyed British civil servants to find that once again it is the relative rank in the social strata that appears to carry most influence in creating strife.

Most of us are aware of couples that have suffered from what is commonly termed as 'testosterone toxicity' in which a seemingly sober male suddenly engages in dangerous behaviour, which has wide repercussions. 'Sex crazy', seems appropriate as an epithet.

A striking difference between men and women and one that really concerns me is the observation that upon death of a spouse, men and women react in opposite ways. There are many more widows than widowers. **When the wife of a man dies, the widower does poorly, and**

often dies soon thereafter. I would predict a similar result were my wife of 57 years to die. In contrast, when the husband dies, the widow carries on without evidence of apparent life-shortening. My mother was a widow for 24 years after my father died.

The woman is the nurturer and peacemaker. She is there to repair the damage of us men. Men are here for the moment, for the sporadic episode, whereas women must preside in life over its entire course.

An important corollary behavioural observation is that depression is noted to be twice as common among women. A slick reason for this may be that the neurotransmitter molecule known as adrenalin is more apparent in the male. Adrenalin is the alarm signal; it is what makes you more alert and your heart go pitter-patter. In depression, the levels of adrenaline in the brain are low and almost all of the antidepressant medications essentially represent cousins of adrenaline, to replace the chemical deficit. **The male exhibits spikes of adrenaline secretion, whereas the female pattern is more modulated.** Thanks to the excess adrenalin and testosterone, the macho male contrives to base his existence around confrontation, challenge, and dominance.

Further, it appears that the testicle is not the only gland that burdens the male. The adrenal gland, the source of the stress hormone cortisol, is dominantly involved in the hierarchical and gender issues of dominance. The male seems to be immersed in cortisol, which has a list of harmful effects on the body. A little stress is probably good but when chronic stress and its overload of cortisol is prominent, much of the body is susceptible to harm. **The male animal swims in cortisol, adrenalin, and testosterone.**

The Darwinian basis for this is clear and leads not only to reproductive advantage, but to economic outcomes as well. The epic battles between rival males for alpha-dom pervade the animal world.

Then we could ask why is there such inequality with income and political power in a civil society? I am personally embarrassed that in America the voting rights for women were only so recently come by. And yet today employment disparities pervade our world. In large segments of the globe the gender gap remains huge.

The female of the species is the more successful and imperative partner in our evolutionary history. Certainly her longevity speaks to that effect. However, males are slow to acknowledge any second rank. As we mature, let us hope that these gaps minimise and equality reigns.

Stay Well

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The great gender divide

In the battle of the sexes, women often outlive men. Men's behavioural tendencies prove to be their killer

