

Gender, Emotion, and the Workplace

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Abstract

To further the research on gender and emotion, researchers should question under what conditions gender matters, thereby contextualizing the interpretation of people's experiences (Shields, 2002). Research on gender differences in expressivity at work has demonstrated alignment with cultural gender stereotypes. Women tend to express more happiness (Sloan, 2012) and more powerless emotions such as fear (Fischer, 1993). Emotion in the workplace has been receiving more attention recently, because properly decoding emotional messages appears to be fundamental for organizational productivity (Härtel, Zerbe, & Ashkanasy, 2005; Muchinsky, 2000). Studying rules that govern emotional display to a supervisor may facilitate recognizing followers' emotional states and may help to manage employees toward organizational goals more effectively (Kaplan, Cortina, Ruark, LaPort, & Nicolaidis, 2013). This research project sought to understand what specific display management strategies would be endorsed by men and women toward male and female supervisors in the workplace (formal vs. informal setting) for the following emotions: happiness, fear, and surprise. Participants were recruited through the university's online participant pool website, a site through which the study was posted. Two hundred and sixteen undergraduate students (107 male; 109 female) who were employed part-time participated in the study. The mean age of the males was 22.94 and 22.45 for females. Emotional display rules were assessed using a modified version of the Display Rules Inventory (DRAI; Matsumoto et al., 2005). The participants were given the following options for display management strategies of the three emotions, which were transformed into a continuous scale in the following order (greatest to least on the scale): amplify (showing more than one's feels), express (expressing the emotion as felt), qualify (showing the emotion while smiling at the same time), deamplify (showing less than felt), mask (hiding feelings by smiling), neutralize (showing nothing).

	Formal Context (Meeting Room)			Informal Context (Break Room)		
Male Supervisor	Fear*	Male	Neutralize>Deamplify>Mask>Amplify>Qualify>Express	Fear**	Male	Neutralize>Deamplify>Mask>Qualify>Amplify>Express
		Female	Neutralize>Mask>Deamplify>Amplify>Qualify>Express		Female	Neutralize>Deamplify>Mask>Amplify>Qualify>Express
	Happiness	Male	Amplify>Deamplify>Express>Neutralize>Qualify>Mask	Happiness	Male	Amplify>Deamplify>Express>Neutralize>Qualify>Mask
		Female	Amplify>Deamplify>Express>Qualify>Neutralize>Mask		Female	Amplify>Deamplify>Express>Qualify>Neutralize>Mask
	Surprise	Male	Amplify>Deamplify>Neutralize>Express>Qualify>Mask	Surprise**	Male	Amplify>Deamplify>Neutralize>Express>Qualify>Mask
		Female	Amplify>Deamplify>Neutralize>Qualify>Mask>Express		Female	Amplify>Deamplify>Neutralize>Qualify>Mask>Express
Female Supervisor	Fear	Male	Neutralize>Deamplify>Mask>Qualify>Amplify>Express	Fear	Male	Neutralize>Deamplify>Mask>Amplify>Qualify>Express
		Female	Neutralize>Deamplify>Mask>Amplify>Qualify>Express		Female	Neutralize>Deamplify>Mask>Amplify>Qualify>Express
	Happiness	Male	Amplify>Deamplify=Express>Qualify>Neutralize>Mask	Happiness**	Male	Amplify>Deamplify>Express>Qualify>Neutralize>Mask
		Female	Amplify>Deamplify>Express>Qualify>Neutralize>Mask		Female	Amplify>Deamplify>Express>Qualify>Neutralize>Mask
	Surprise	Male	Amplify>Deamplify>Neutralize>Express>Qualify>Mask	Surprise**	Male	Amplify>Deamplify>Neutralize>Express>Qualify>Mask
		Female	Amplify>Deamplify>Neutralize>Qualify>Mask>Express		Female	Amplify>Deamplify>Neutralize>Qualify=Mask>Express
* (p<.05) gender differences in preferred display strategy						
** (p<.01) gender differences in preferred display strategy						

Results and Discussion

- 1) Fear expressivity: males reported it to be less appropriate to display fear when dealing with a male supervisor in the work place; no gender differences in interaction with female supervisor; no gender differences by context (informal vs. formal); 2) Happiness expressivity: females were more likely than males to express happiness when interacting with female supervisor, as well as in the informal context; and 3) no gender differences in surprise expressivity
- Results show that there were some gender differences in display of fear, happiness, and surprise. These results help contextualize men's and women's experiences of emotion.
- Future research should examine whether there are differences depending on power roles as well as the age of participants.