

and masculine traits) are more emotionally expressive than are individuals who claim themselves only as highly masculine. That finding appears to be true regardless of the type of emotion being displayed. Androgynous people have also been shown to be more expressive than people who are only highly feminine when it comes to certain emotions, such as happiness, sadness, and disgust.<sup>119</sup>

Why might gender role affect the expression of emotion? Some scholars believe that traditional femininity encourages women to express emotions that help them form relationships (such as happiness) and make them appear vulnerable (such as sadness) but to suppress emotions that make them appear dominant (such as anger). Conversely, traditional masculinity is thought to encourage men to express anger but discourage them from expressing most other emotions.<sup>120</sup> The scholars' observations don't mean that women and men always communicate in those ways. They do suggest, however, that traditional gender roles may encourage that type of differentiation.

There is evidence that gender roles affect not only the expression of emotion but the experience of it as well. In one study, for instance, highly feminine women were more likely than highly masculine women to experience negative emotions, including guilt, sadness, pessimism, and self-dislike. In comparison, highly masculine men were more likely than highly feminine men to report experiencing social withdrawal, dissatisfaction, and suicidal thoughts.<sup>121</sup> In both instances, that is, masculine women and feminine men reported more positive emotions.

The "Fact or Fiction?" box further explores the influence of gender on emotional expressiveness.

## Personality

In the Communication and the Self chapter, we explored how personality profoundly influences many aspects of life. The experience of emotion is no exception. Research suggests that three particular aspects of personality affect the emotion experience: agreeableness, extroversion, and neuroticism.<sup>122</sup>

**agreeableness** One's tendency to be pleasant, accommodating, and cooperative.

**extroversion** One's tendency to be sociable and outgoing.

**neuroticism** One's tendency to think negative thoughts about oneself.

**emotional intelligence** The ability to perceive and understand emotions, use emotions to facilitate thought, and manage emotions constructively.

**Agreeableness** relates to how pleasant, accommodating, and cooperative you are. Compared with the average person, highly agreeable people are happier and are better at managing both stress and emotions in general.<sup>123</sup> They're also more likely than others to use constructive styles for managing conflict and are more willing to "lose" an argument to preserve a relationship with someone else.<sup>124</sup>

**Extroversion** refers to how sociable and outgoing you are. Extroverted people enjoy social interaction and are often talkative, assertive, and enthusiastic. Extroverted people tend to focus on the positive aspects of other people or situations.<sup>125</sup> Perhaps as a result, extroverted people are happier, on average, than the typical person.<sup>126</sup>

Finally, **neuroticism** is the tendency to think negative thoughts about oneself. Unlike extroverted people, people who are highly neurotic tend to see the worst in situations, and to focus much of their attention on negative events.<sup>127</sup> Thus, they are more likely than others to experience negative emotions such as anger, guilt, anxiety, and depression and are less likely to report being happy.<sup>128</sup> They also manage their emotions less successfully than do their less neurotic counterparts.<sup>129</sup>

## Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence refers to a person's ability to "perceive and accurately express emotions, to use emotion to facilitate thought, to understand emotions, and to manage emotions for emotional growth." People with high emotional intelligence are aware of



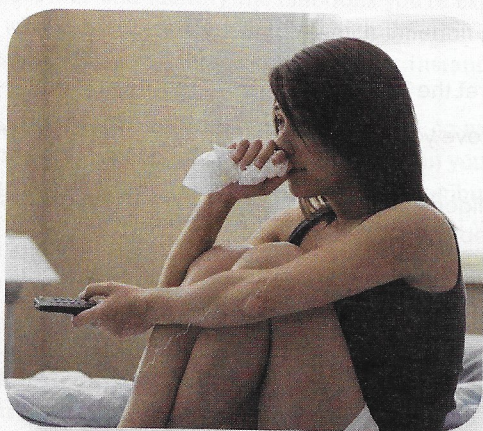
## fact OR fiction?

## WOMEN ARE MORE EMOTIONAL THAN MEN

A common stereotype, at least in North American cultures, is that women experience emotions more intensely than men do and that women are more likely to express their emotions than men are. Is that stereotype true?

The answer is yes and no. In a now-classic study, psychologists Ann Kring and Albert Gordon looked at whether women and men differ from each other on how emotionally expressive they are and what their physiological responses are to emotional situations. Participants in their studies watched movie clips designed to evoke strong emotional reactions.

Consistent with the stereotype, women in both studies expressed more emotion than men did.



Rubberball/Mark Andersen/Getty Images

However, women did *not* experience their emotions more intensely than men did, a finding that is contrary to the stereotype. In fact, men were more physiologically reactive than women, but only to the emotion of fear—reactions to other emotions did not differ between women and men.

It therefore appears that women *are* more emotional than men when it comes to expressing emotion, but *not* when it comes to how intensely they experience emotions.

## FROM ME TO YOU

Because men usually aren't as emotionally expressive as women, the media often portray them as emotionally *deficient*. They aren't, though. There are certainly benefits to expressing your emotions, a skill at which many women excel.

There are also benefits to controlling your emotions, however, a point that is often lost in pop psychology books and talk-show discussions. Controlling emotions may give people an advantage in social situations. By not letting others know how they feel, those who control their expressions may avoid having their emotions exploited by others. Therefore, don't think of men's lesser expressiveness as a deficit but rather as a characteristic that can be advantageous in some circumstances.

Source: Kring, A. M., & Gordon, A. H. (1998). Sex differences in emotion: Expression, experience, and physiology. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 74, 686–703.

their own emotions as well as the emotions of others and pay attention to their emotions when making decisions about how to act.<sup>131</sup>

Few studies have investigated the association between emotional intelligence and emotional expressiveness. Those that have tend to report that individuals with high emotional intelligence are more likely than those with lower levels to express warmth, affection, and other positive emotions.<sup>132</sup> Given what we know about sex differences in emotional expression, it may not surprise you to learn that women score higher than men on measures of emotional intelligence.<sup>133</sup>

How emotionally intelligent are you? Take the short quiz in the “Assess Your Skills” box to find out.

One condition that inhibits emotional intelligence is **alexithymia**, a personality trait characterized by a relative inability to understand, process, and describe emotions.<sup>134</sup> Studies indicate that the prevalence of alexithymia in the general population is approximately 5 to 9 percent and that it is equally common among women and men.<sup>135</sup> Those with alexithymia do not understand their own emotions and often seem

**alexithymia** A personality trait limiting a person's ability to understand and describe emotions.





## assess your skills

### HOW EMOTIONALLY INTELLIGENT ARE YOU?

Read the following statements, and indicate how much you agree or disagree with each by writing a number between 1 and 10. A response of 1 means you completely disagree, and 10 means you completely agree.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ I think about and reflect on my emotions.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ I can express my emotions to others.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ I understand the causes and effects of my emotions.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ I use my emotions to improve my relationships.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ I am able to experience both positive and negative feelings.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ I can accurately identify the emotions other people are feeling.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ I know the difference between emotions and moods.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ I can reorganize my thoughts on the basis of what I'm feeling.
9. \_\_\_\_\_ I understand how emotions change over time.
10. \_\_\_\_\_ I can manage my own emotions effectively.

When you're done, add up your responses. Here's how to interpret the results:

- If you scored between 10 and 40, then you probably can improve your emotional intelligence. Learning more about this topic may help you.
- If your score was 41–70, you are moderately emotionally intelligent, meaning you have the skills to express and perceive emotions accurately, but you can also improve that ability.
- If you scored between 71 and 100, you have high emotional intelligence, which probably benefits your interpersonal communication with others.

Source: Mayer, J. D., & Salovey, P. (1997). What is emotional intelligence? In P. Salovey & J. D. Sluyter (Eds.), *Emotional development and emotional intelligence* (pp. 3–31). New York, NY: Basic Books.

stone-faced, distant, and unconcerned with others' feelings.<sup>136</sup> As a result, they may avoid developing emotionally close interpersonal relationships.<sup>137</sup> For people in established relationships, alexithymia can impair relationship satisfaction by making it difficult for partners to understand what each other is feeling.<sup>138</sup>

**LEARN IT** How do people from individualistic and collectivistic cultures differ in their expression of negative emotions? What are the five display rules for emotion? How does communication technology influence the expression of emotion? How do women and men differ in their emotional expression? Which aspects of personality influence emotion?

**APPLY IT** To identify how gender roles might influence the communication of emotion, spend five minutes with a few other classmates brainstorming about which emotions women are encouraged to express and discouraged from expressing. Then do the same for men's emotions. What patterns do you see?

**REFLECT ON IT** In what situations do you intensify or de-intensify your emotional expressions? In what ways does your gender role influence your experience and expression of emotion?





## 4 Sharpening Your Emotional Communication Skills

As is the case for many communicative behaviors, we can manage the expression of our emotions in either positive or negative ways. Denying and suppressing your emotions isn't healthy. In fact, medical research shows it can actually exacerbate a host of health problems, including asthma, heart disease, and cancer.<sup>139</sup> On the other hand, overreacting to your emotions isn't good for you, either.<sup>140</sup> The best strategy for dealing with emotions is to find a balance between those two extremes. This section offers some suggestions for improving your ability to manage emotional expression in productive ways.

### Identifying Emotions

Perhaps the most important emotional communication skill you can develop is the ability to recognize and identify the emotions you're experiencing.<sup>141</sup> Research shows that people who can accurately identify which emotion they're feeling—whether it's anger, nervousness, sadness, shame, or guilt, for instance—are best equipped to manage emotions in productive ways.<sup>142</sup>

To illustrate that point, let's say that a new co-worker has joined your team and is receiving a great deal of praise and attention from your supervisor. As a result, you begin to feel jealousy, which, as we have seen, is a combination of anger, sadness, and fear. What would happen, though, if you recognized that you were feeling only anger and not sadness and fear as well? In that situation, you'd respond only to your anger, perhaps by speaking harshly to your supervisor or co-worker. You wouldn't also deal with your fear of losing your supervisor's favor or your sadness that others might like or respect your co-worker more than they like or respect you. As a result, your sadness and fear would go unaddressed, and your expressions of anger would likely be counterproductive.

If you find it difficult to identify your emotions in a given situation, there are at least three techniques that might help: Listen to your body, pay attention to your thoughts, and take stock of the situation.

**LISTEN TO YOUR BODY** First, try paying attention to what your body is doing. Recall that emotions cause physiological changes. Although different emotions can have similar effects on the body, thinking about how your body is reacting to the situation may help you determine which emotion you're experiencing. On the basis of your experiences, for instance, you probably know that jealousy causes different sensations in your body than joy, disgust, and surprise do. Reflecting on how you feel physically can therefore help you determine which emotional experiences you are going through.

**PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR THOUGHTS** Emotions affect the mind as well as the body, so paying attention to your thoughts can help you clarify your emotional experiences. Let's say you're questioning whether a particular situation is

When you're uncertain about which emotion you're feeling, pay attention to how your body is reacting to the situation. *Brand X Pictures/PunchStock*





making you angry or sad. If you're feeling angry, your thoughts most likely are focused on hurting or punishing whoever is the source of your anger. For instance, if you notice that you're imagining yelling or speaking sternly to the person, those thoughts probably arise out of anger. In contrast, if you're feeling sad, your thoughts probably are focused on whatever you feel you're losing, whether it's a cherished friendship, an enjoyable time in your life, or a job you enjoy.

**TAKE STOCK OF THE SITUATION** Earlier in this chapter, you learned that emotions are reactions to events that you perceive to interfere with your goals. Unlike a mood, therefore, every emotion has a cause. A third strategy you can use to identify your emotions is to try to determine what is happening in your situation that you're reacting to.

Suppose, for example, you're upset but can't figure out whether you're anxious or envious. Take stock of what's occurring in your environment. Often, you can identify which emotion you're experiencing by considering what might be interfering with your goals. Has a recent illness caused you to fall behind in your schoolwork? If so, that situation might make you anxious because it's interfering with your goal of completing your work. From a different perspective, has a close friend recently become engaged? Although that situation might make you happy, it might also make you envious if you perceive that your friend has a better romantic relationship than you do—a perception that interferes with your goal of having the relationship you want.

## Reappraising Negative Emotions

When you experience a negative emotion, emotional reappraisal is a productive strategy for dealing with it. **Emotional reappraisal** involves changing the way you think about the situation that gave rise to the negative emotion so that the effect of the emotion is reduced.<sup>143</sup>

Let's say you're upset with the grade you received on a research paper. Although you felt your work was highly original and well written, your instructor's evaluation didn't reflect that opinion. Going to your instructor's office while you're angry and distraught, however, may cause you to say or do something that will only make the situation worse. Instead, you could wait until you're less upset to reappraise the situation and then consider the best way to express your thoughts. You might think more analytically about your paper and what you might have done to make it better reflect the assignment. You might remind yourself that your grade isn't your instructor's evaluation of you as a person but rather of your performance on this one task. You might also remind yourself that your instructor was just doing his or her job by grading you or that this grade will have only a modest effect on your overall academic record. Such exercises help you to reappraise an emotional situation and to consider it from a broader perspective. Adopting a reappraisal strategy can also reduce your negative emotions and help you communicate more effectively.<sup>144</sup>

A technique that is closely related to emotional reappraisal, called *reframing*, involves changing not only the way you *think* about a negative situation but also the way you *talk* about it. Check out the "Got Skills?" box to learn more about this useful strategy.

## Accepting Responsibility for Emotions

You learned in the Language chapter about the importance of *owning* your thoughts and feelings—that is, the importance of acknowledging that you determine your own thoughts and emotions by describing them with I-statements ("I feel angry") rather than you-statements ("You are making me angry"). Accepting responsibility for emotions is

### emotional reappraisal

The process of changing how one thinks about the situation that gave rise to a negative emotion so that the effect of the emotion is diminished.





## got skills?

## REFRAMING

Deal with negative situations by reframing.

### What?

Learn to reframe the meaning of a negative interpersonal situation.

### Why?

To make your emotional response to a negative event—such as an extended visit from your very loud young nephews—more constructive.

### How?

1. Suppose you're babysitting your three nephews, and they are requiring every bit of your energy. Describe the situation.

**EXAMPLE:** *My nephews are hyperactive and they won't let me have one minute of peace.*

2. Identify the words with emotional connotations.

**EXAMPLE:** *hyperactive = negative connotations, identified as something present in your situation; peace = positive connotations, identified as something lacking in your situation.*

3. Rephrase in less negative terms.

**EXAMPLE:** *My nephews are very energetic and they definitely keep me busy.*

### Try!

1. Think about a recent negative or difficult interpersonal interaction you've had.
2. Describe the situation briefly in writing.
3. Identify any words you used in your description that have emotional connotations.
4. Now, rephrase your description by changing only the emotion-laden words into words with positive connotations.
5. By changing the language you use to talk about your situation, you can often improve your own thoughts and emotions about it.

**CONSIDER:** *How does reframing force you to see your situation differently?*

challenging because emotions are, after all, reactions to events that affect you. When someone teases or insults you, for instance, you probably feel hurt. You don't choose to feel hurt, however. Instead, you're simply reacting to that person's behavior.

The problem with describing your emotions with you-statements is that such statements fail to acknowledge the part you play in determining how you feel. Instead, they simply blame the other person for your emotions, without any prescription for change.<sup>145</sup> A more productive approach is to say "I feel hurt when you insult me." This statement acknowledges that your emotions are your own (I feel hurt . . .), but it also identifies the specific event that causes them (. . . when you insult me), making it clear to the receiver which behaviors you are asking him or her to change.

## Separating Emotions from Actions

Emotion and behavior go hand in hand, and most emotions have specific action tendencies associated with them. Yet experiencing an emotion doesn't mean you have to act on it. Feeling angry with someone, for example, doesn't necessarily mean you must yell at that person. Likewise, feeling love for someone doesn't necessarily mean you must express it. Just as you "own" your emotions, you also "own" your behaviors. Part of being a competent interpersonal communicator is being able to determine the most appropriate and most effective way for you to act on your emotions.





Most emotions motivate us to act in certain ways. However, experiencing an emotion doesn't necessarily mean you have to act on it.

*Glow Images/Getty Images*

Before you act on your emotions, it's generally best to stop and think about the possible effects of your actions. Let's say Gerard is worried about how much weight his brother-in-law Marcus has gained in the last year. Because of his fear, Gerard feels he should talk to Marcus about the health dangers of obesity and encourage him to exercise and adopt a low-calorie diet. Before Gerard does so, however, he weighs the pros and cons of acting on his fear in this way.

From a positive perspective, Marcus may appreciate knowing how much Gerard cares about him. He may also be motivated to reduce his weight, saving himself from potentially life-threatening health problems. From the opposite perspective, however, Marcus may resent Gerard's interference. He may tell Gerard to mind his own business and even more stubbornly refuse to change his behaviors, a stance that would put his health at even greater risk.

Although Gerard's primary concern is for Marcus's health, he also does not want to embarrass Marcus or jeopardize their relationship. In the end, Gerard decides to share his concerns with Marcus's wife in the hope that she might be able to persuade Marcus to lose weight.

Identifying and reappraising emotions, accepting responsibility for emotions, and separating emotions from actions are all skills you can learn. The more you practice those skills, the more adept you'll become at managing your emotional communication.

**LEARN IT** How can you identify emotions accurately? When is it helpful to reappraise an emotion? What does it mean to accept responsibility for your emotions? Why should you separate emotions from actions?

**APPLY IT** Emotional reappraisal is very useful, but it takes practice. The next time you experience a strong negative emotion, force yourself to stop and reappraise the situation before you act. This strategy will give your emotion time to cool down, and it will help you to understand the situation differently. You'll then be in a much better position to decide how best to act.

**REFLECT ON IT** When do you tend to blame other people for your emotions? For which emotions do you have the hardest time accepting responsibility?

## MASTER the Chapter

### 1 Emotion in Interpersonal Communication (p. 251)

- An emotion is your body's reaction to any event that enhances or inhibits your goals.
- Three classes of emotion are particularly relevant for interpersonal communication: joyful/affectionate emotions, hostile emotions, and sad/anxious emotions.
- Joyful/affectionate emotions include happiness, love, passion, and liking.

- Hostile emotions include anger, contempt, disgust, jealousy, and envy.
- Sad/anxious emotions include sadness, depression, grief, fear, and social anxiety.

### 2 The Nature of Emotion (p. 259)

- Emotions have physiological, cognitive, behavioral, and sociocultural components.
- Emotions vary in valence and intensity.