Expressing Our Feelings: a Rendered Look At Mood and the Process of Mood Management

Jacqueline J. Kamm, University of Michigan-Dearborn

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/15618/gender/v03/GCB-03

[copyright notice]:
This work is copyrighted by The Association for Consumer Research. For permission to copy or use this work in whole or in part, please contact the Copyright Clearance Center at http://www.copyright.com/.
Expressing Our Feelings: A Gendered Look at Mood and the Process of Mood Management

Jacqueline J. Kacen, University of Michigan-Dearborn

Depth interviews with six men and six women revealed similarities and differences in negative mood experiences and the management of a negative mood. For both male and female informants, negative moods were discomforting experiences associated with unpleasant physical sensations and psychological uneasiness. However, uniquely gendered differences were revealed in the ways in which men and women expressed their feelings. Men were more reluctant to talk about their emotional responses to unpleasant events and preferred to talk about their efforts at resolving the problem which led to the feelings. Also, men were more likely to express a desire for physical violence in response to negative arousal while women were more likely to talk to someone about their feelings.

It is likely each of us has experienced a bad mood at one time or another, and we may have engaged in certain consumption activities as a result of that mood. We may have treated ourselves to a nice dinner after a bad day or gone to the gym to work out our frustrations. Psychological research indicates feelings are the primary motivators of human behavior (Tompkins 1970). If so, our bad moods have important implications for our consumption behaviors. However, the question of whether men and women experience moods in the same manner, and whether moods motivate similar consumption behaviors in both men and women, is unanswered.

Prior research suggests that men and women have different ways of expressing their feelings and that the expression of one's feelings is less acceptable for men than for women (Conway, DiFazio, and Bonneville 1991). Perhaps this leads men and women to manage their mood-related feelings in different ways. Studies have shown that women are more likely to ruminate about their negative mood and the possible cause of the mood. Men, on the other hand, are more likely to engage in distracting behaviors to reduce (or mask) their negative feelings (Nolen-Hoeksema 1987). The findings in the psychological and sociological literatures that explain gender differences regarding emotional and affective mood states are important, but they do not investigate the impact of gender on consumption patterns due to moods. The study presented here was undertaken to determine whether there are differences in the way men and women experience various moods and whether there are differences in the ways they choose to manage those moods through their consumption behaviors.
choices from a consumer behavior perspective.

Moods are transient internal feeling states. They can be described as temporary affect-laden feeling states whose effects are nonspecific and pervasive in nature (Gardner 1985; Isen 1984; Morris and Reilly 1987). Moods are easily influenced by many things—the weather, personal interactions, happenstance events, or our physiological state. The ubiquitous nature of moods differentiate them from emotions. Emotions have object references toward which feelings are directed; moods are omnipresent.

Negative mood experiences were the focus of this research since they tend to be more heterogeneous (Isen 1984) and more aversive (Morris and Reilly 1987) than positive moods. Also, because we generally try to resist negative moods (Schwarz and Clore 1982), we are more likely to engage in self-regulatory mood-managing processes (i.e., behaviors that will repair our mood) when we are in a “bad” mood. Further, since moods prompt similarly valenced thoughts automatically (Clark and Isen 1982), the actions we engage in to improve our negative mood may be more conscious and more controlled than actions related to positive moods (Morris and Reilly 1987).

GENDER ISSUES RELATED TO MOODS

The experience of mood may be gender-related. A large body of psychology research indicates that women are more prone than men to depression (see, e.g., Boyd and Weissman 1981; Weissman and Klerman 1977). It is often mentioned in the clinical psychology literature that women tend to respond to negative events with depression while men tend to respond to the same events with alcoholism (see, e.g., Williams and Spitzer 1983). Hull’s (1981; Hull and Young 1983) findings that alcohol interferes with the efficiency of self-referent information encoding processes may shed light on some of the differences between men’s and women’s handling of negative experiences. If negative events increase self-focus, those who amplify this self-focusing (often women) are at increased risk for depression, while those who attempt to block increased self-focusing through alcohol consumption (often men) are at risk for alcoholism (Ingram et al. 1988).

In her review of the findings on depression, Nolen-Hoeksema (1987) suggested that the reason for gender differences is that men are more likely to engage in distracting behaviors (e.g., alcohol consumption) that reduce their mood when they are depressed, whereas women are more likely to amplify their negative moods by ruminating about their depressed states and the possible causes of these states. A study by Conway, DiFazio, and Bonneville (1991) produced findings consistent with Nolen-Hoeksema’s argument. The authors suggest that norms play a role in response styles—men may generally assume that expressing their sadness is inappropriate, or that it will be perceived more negatively than women’s distress (see also, Hammen and Peters 1977). If it is less acceptable for men to express their sad feelings, then they may be more motivated to quickly eliminate these undesirable feelings, perhaps by engaging in distracting consumption behaviors.

Ingram and his colleagues (1988) suggest that gender differences in depression may not necessarily be due to differences in the experience of depression, but rather to differences in reporting depression. In other words,
men and women may actually experience depressive states in about the same proportion, but women may be more likely to acknowledge and seek help for their depressed state. Daily stressors, such as work deadlines, interpersonal conflicts or transportation problems, appear to be more upsetting to women than to men judging by survey responses (Bolger et al. 1989). Yet, men have greater physiological reactivity to stress than do women (Gotman and Levenson 1988). Perhaps women are more comfortable than men discussing their feelings and reporting them. Men have reported more reluctance to disclose feelings of depression relative to women (Snell et al. 1989). High-masculine respondents (individuals who scored high in masculinity on the Bem Sex Role Inventory [Bem 1981]) reported significantly lower scores on self-report measures of depression and anxiety than did low-masculine respondents (Nezu and Nezu 1987).

Alternatively, men and women may have different susceptibilities to factors or stimuli that precipitate moods. In an early research study on mood, women were more susceptible than men to mood induction techniques (Velten 1968). Radloff's (1975; Radloff and Rae 1979) survey of adults indicates women may be more susceptible to situational or environmental stress factors. Endocrinological differences may also make women more vulnerable to depression (Akiskal 1979; Weissman and Klerman 1977).

A third possibility may be that men and women use different cues in defining their own emotional states. In their study of perception of emotion, hunger, and other bodily states, Pennebaker and Roberts (1992) found that males were more accurate than females at detecting variable physiological signals such as blood glucose levels, heart rate, and blood pressure levels (symptoms which accompany many emotional experiences) when situational cues were experimentally controlled (i.e., in a laboratory setting). However, in naturalistic settings, where multiple situational cues were available, women and men were equally accurate in detecting their biological states. These findings led Pennebaker and Roberts to propose a "his and her theory of emotion." They suggest that men's perceptions of emotion derive from their ability to detect specific internal physiological changes. Women, on the other hand, appear to rely primarily on external situational cues—a general state of arousal prompts a search for related cues in the environment (e.g., behavior of others, perceived coping abilities) by which women appraise how they are feeling. Differences in men's and women's reported measures of mood or emotion may arise because men and women use different signals to perceive their emotional states.

GENDER ISSUES RELATED TO MOOD-MANAGEMENT BEHAVIORS

Bristor and Fischer assert that "consumption activities are fundamentally gendered" (1993:519). In other words, our experiences and behaviors are necessarily influenced by the social "filter" of gender in the same way our experiences are influenced by the culture in which we live—gender is simply a part of our socialization process. Several studies have found that behavior is consistent with a person's masculine-feminine self-image (see, e.g. Aiken 1963; Fry 1971). Research studies on hostile or aggressive behaviors and selective exposure to television demonstrate that women tend to dislike violent or hostile entertainment fare and avoid exposure to it. Men, especially after exposure to aggression or when annoyed, tend to
It has been suggested that many behavioral differences between men and women are the result of conscious self-presentational strategies (Deaux 1977, 1984). The repertoire of behaviors available to men and women is basically the same, but men and women select different actions in response to situational events. Differences in social behavior "will be minimal when self-presentation is not at issue and when differential familiarity with the task cannot be established" (Deaux 1977: 371). In other words, the less "social" the situation, the less likely gender differences are to emerge. Gould (1987) found that females scored higher on a public self-consciousness scale, but both genders measured about the same on a private self-consciousness scale. It may be that men and women chose different activities consistent with their public self-image but that the mood-managing behaviors available to men and women are the same.

These studies suggest that gender issues are important to the study of moods and mood-related behaviors. They raise the question of whether men and women experience--and manage--their feelings and moods differently. In a study of depression and self-management of mood, males were more likely than females to defer unpleasant events until a later date and to accept small immediate rewards rather than receiving a large delayed reward (Wertheim and Schwarz 1983). The men in the study placed more importance on alleviating their current mood than on maximizing their reward over the long term. Perhaps men feel less comfortable with unpleasant mood states which may lead to gender differences in motivation and choice. If so, women and men may have different strategies for managing their moods, which would have implications for their mood-related behaviors.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study consisted of depth interviews with 12 adults concerning their negative mood experiences and the strategies they used to manage their moods. In an effort to establish a depthful, meaningful focus with each informant, while at the same time talking with enough people to uncover the differences that exist between the genders, the number of informants was limited to 12 (six men and six women). In qualitative studies of this nature, the intent is to keep the number of informants low so as to allow in-depth examination of the concepts under study (McCracken 1988), but also to have enough participants to bring out the dimensions of comparison and contrast more sharply (Miles and Huberman 1984).

The objective of the depth interviews was to gain deeper insight into the differences between men’s and women’s experiences of three different negative moods--depressive, anxious, and irritated. Gender differences in the patterns of mood-related consumption behaviors were also explored.

Depth interviews offer a perspective and methodology to achieve this objective by focusing on a person’s experiences as they are lived in a social context, and by allowing a thick description of the phenomenon to emerge (Denzin 1989; Miles and Huberman 1984; Thompson, Locander, and Pollio 1989; Valle and King 1978). Unlike a laboratory manipulation of mood that, it can be argued, removes mood from our everyday experience of it, the depth interview methodology approaches the phenomenon of mood from a more social perspective. This methodology
seeks an understanding of mood in its everyday context as a human experience (see, e.g. Thompson, Locander and Pollio 1990). Depth interviews provide a detailed understanding of mood and the process of mood management based on knowledge obtained from individuals who have experienced this phenomenon as part of their daily lives.

THE PARTICIPANTS

Twelve participants, six men and six women, agreed to be interviewed as part of a study that sought "to understand people's feelings and what they do with those feelings." Participants were identified via social contacts: all the participants were casual acquaintances of the author or friends of people the author knew. An effort was made to select participants on a range of characteristics, such as age, marital status, children and occupation, using variety and contrast as criteria (cf. McCracken 1988; Miles and Huberman 1984). The 12 participants ranged in age from 32 to 72 years old. All informants were middle class; all except one were Caucasian. A descriptive summary of the participants is provided in Table 1.

INTERVIEW PROCEDURES

The interviews were generally conducted in the home of the informant (one interview was conducted in the home of a mutual friend, and one was conducted in the author's home). All interviews were taped and transcribed verbatim. Interviews ranged in length from 30 minutes to over two hours. Before beginning, participants were told that the purpose of the interview was to gain insight into individuals' experiences of different feelings and what they do with those feelings. Each interview began with the question, "Tell me about a time recently when you were feeling depressed [or anxious, or irritated]." The choice of negative mood first discussed was randomized across informants. All other questions emerged spontaneously from the ensuing dialogue. The behaviors engaged in as a result of the mood and participants' feelings after engaging in those behaviors were also discussed. A detailed description of each of three types of negative mood experiences (depression, irritation, anxiety) was obtained in these interviews.

Participants were also asked to describe a recent good mood experience ("Tell me about a time you were feeling good") toward the end of the interview, both to provide comparison data for the negative mood behaviors and to end the interview on a positive note.

According to Schouten (1991), this unstructured approach allows for more rapid development of rapport, maximizes informants' opportunities to introduce topics in a manner comfortable to them, and permits participants to develop the discussion at their own pace. In previous research of this kind, rapport developed quickly during these interviews, as evidenced by the candor with which personal information was shared (see, e.g. Compeau 1991; Kacen 1993; Mick and Buhl 1992; Schouten 1991; Thompson et al. 1990).

DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

Analysis was an iterative process of transcribing, coding, and categorizing (cf. Geertz 1983; McCracken 1988; Miles and Huberman 1984). To begin, each interview transcript was examined individually and notes were made regarding the cause of a specific negative mood experience, the feelings and specific adjectives used to describe
the experience, the activity or behavior engaged in as a result of the negative mood experience, and the resulting "end state," that is, how the informant felt after engaging in the stated behavior. Where appropriate, some informants were also asked what they would have liked to have done, if they could have chosen to do anything, as a result of the negative experience. The notes compiled from the transcripts were then examined and differences across the informant's three negative mood experiences were compared.

After each interview transcript was examined, a list of causes, specific feelings associated with a particular negative mood, and the activities engaged in as a result of the negative mood was compiled in an attempt to uncover common themes. A summary analysis of shared feelings and common characteristics among mood-managing activities for each negative mood was then created. At this point, the findings were discussed with an independent auditor.

An external auditor, someone unfamiliar with the purpose of the study, and someone of the opposite gender, was hired to aid in establishing confirmability of the findings (see Wallendorf and Belk 1989), and to provide an alternative perspective on potential gender differences in the data. After the interviews had been transcribed, the auditor was given a copy of the interview transcripts and a general understanding of the study. The goal in his analysis of the transcripts was to discover: What are the differences between men's and women's experiences of depressed, anxious, and irritable moods? Is there a pattern to the activities and behaviors men and women engage in as a result of those moods? The auditor worked independently and developed his own understanding of the data separate from the main researcher.

When both the main researcher and the independent auditor had reviewed the transcripts and developed a general interpretation of the data, they discussed their findings. This resulted in a revision of the findings to include aspects of the mood experiences not included in the initial findings. In general, however, both the auditor and the main researcher interpreted the data in a similar way. The distinctions that resulted were due to different emphases on the unique aspects of each mood experience.

GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE FINDINGS

Gender differences were not readily apparent in the data. Contrary to popular myth, the men interviewed in this study did experience anxious, depressed, and irritable moods, and they were able to talk about those experiences in detail. Their experiences were just as personal, potent, and disquieting to them as were the women's experiences to the women.

Matt: I was pretty mopey. I kind of had this cloud over me where I was kind of kicking myself... The feelings are just your own. It goes to the core of your happiness.

Interviewer: Did you do anything to make yourself feel better?

Matt: I may have, like, ordered a pizza or something to make the day end a little simpler. You know, like where you're tireder, you just don't feel like cooking.

Compare Matt's depressive mood to Sarah's similar experience:

It was like a heavy weight. I couldn't even move. That's when I
didn’t want to get up in the morning. I’d have a glass or two of wine in the evening and just go to bed... We didn’t eat as well. It was just macaroni and cheese.
(Sarah)

For both male and female informants, depressive moods made them feel lethargic, “mopey,” and “blue.” Activity was limited; the focus was on the self. For many, a good way to overcome their “blue funk” was to find a distracting activity that would take their mind off their negative feelings. Both Matt and Sarah found relief at the movies.

I guess you try to divert your attention. You go and do something that’s pleasurable, like go to a movie. I’m a movie fan of all types -- musicals, classic comedies, Laurel and Hardy, the Marx Brothers, the Three Stooges. Yeah, I love classic comedies. And knowing you’re going to be laughing... maybe I’ll go and pull Abbott and Costello off the shelf and watch that. (Matt)

I stopped thinking about it and I went out to a show. I love shows. With that I can escape. I could see a movie like *The Fugitive*, an action movie without a lot of violence. Or a kid’s movie. I love taking [my daughter] to the movies. She really liked *Secret Garden* and *Free Willy*. She’s excited about movies and that makes me feel real good. (Sarah)

While depressed moods reduced informants’ energy and generated self-focused thoughts, anxious moods were highly arousing and produced real physical discomfort in the form of rashes, upset stomachs, and sleeplessness. Similarly, irritable moods were negatively arousing, leading to a more outwardly focused restlessness. Informants talked about ignoring others, being “cute and short” with people, and making nasty comments to others. These distinguishable characteristics of each negative mood were common for both the men and women interviewed. So, too, were the consumption activities engaged in to manage a bad mood. Reading a book, watching a favorite show on television, taking a walk, cooking, shopping, exercising, and eating were all mentioned as activities that helped informants feel better. As can be seen in Table 2, no profound differences were found in the activities chosen by men and women to manage their negative moods. The repertoire of consumption behaviors used by the men and women in this study were more alike than dissimilar, consistent with Deaux (1977, 1984). The activities mentioned by only the men or only the women (e.g., sleeping, playing with my kids, jogging, or going out to dinner) are not gender-specific. It is easy to imagine either gender engaging in any of the activities listed in Table 2. The fact that a given consumption activity was not specifically discussed by both men and women may be a phenomenon of the data rather than a significant insight into gendered mood-management behaviors.

However, certain gender differences among this sample of 12 adults became apparent. In handling their emotional experiences, women were more inclined to talk about their feelings and repairing those feelings, while men more often talked about the problem that gave rise to the feelings and their efforts to resolve the problem. Apparently, men feel that once the problem is solved the feelings will dissipate. This finding echoes earlier research that found that women were more likely to ruminate about their negative mood and the possible cause of that mood, while men were more likely to engage in distracting behaviors to reduce or mask their negative feelings (see, e.g.
Another finding was that male informants were more likely to express the desire for physical violence, that is, getting back at the individual who was the source of their negative feelings (particularly with irritable mood experiences). Women, although they experienced the same negative arousal as men, were not prone to thoughts of physical violence, perhaps due to cultural norms that discourage such actions by women or, perhaps, simply due to their nature. This is consistent with prior studies (Zillmann 1979; Zillmann and Bryant 1985; see also Fenigstein 1979; Medoff 1979), which found men liked violent entertainment fare and sought it out after exposure to aggression or when annoyed, while women avoided exposure to it.

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN EMOTIONAL EXPRESSIVENESS

Informants' ability to express their emotional response to a situation seemed to be as much a function of personality differences as of gender differences. Discomfort with discussing their feelings occurred across both sexes. However, when discussing their feelings, male informants, more often than female informants, used the pronoun "you" rather than "I," perhaps unconsciously distancing themselves from this public acknowledgment of their feelings. Several times during the course of the interview, male informants switched from a first-person voice to a second-person voice when describing their experiences. For example,

Last week [my wife] and I were disagreeing on whether she should sleep with the children every night of her life. And so what happens?

Well, when that happens then you get an attitude, you get angry.

(Jack)

Whenever we go back to Texas to see relatives, the one's you haven't seen for a long time and that have children that you've never met and they don't know you, that's kind of anxious. You don't know how to deal with someone who is supposed to be an intimate person to you and blood relative but whom you've never met. So you're a little anxious to know if you will come across well enough so they will like you. (Matt)

The female informants were more likely to describe their feelings in a first-person voice:

[My brother and his wife] were avoiding the family and I was kind of mad at him because it seemed like his wife was calling the shots. So I was pissed. I was angry. (Sarah)

I found myself feeling anxious and when I woke up—my stomach is my barometer—in the morning I was still anxious. . . more of a churning feeling. (Diane)

Compared to the women who were interviewed, male informants also seemed more reluctant, or less able, to discuss their emotional responses (whether in a first-person or second-person voice) to negative events. When specifically asked to describe the feelings they experienced as part of their negative moods, several of the men found this difficult to do.

Joseph: I made an error on something I was working on and the thing went out.

Interviewer: How did you feel? What was going on inside then?
Joseph: I was saying “I don’t understand how this happened” and “somebody else should be checking things” because I told them to double-check stuff but they don’t want to double-check.

Interviewer: But just talking about your feelings, what are the thoughts about yourself that are going on?

Joseph: Oh well, no matter what, I should have caught it. But I always think to myself, there’s nothing against somebody else picking up a letter and looking at it too. Why not? Why doesn’t somebody else do that besides just me? ... I always feel that somebody could have caught it, including myself. If I would just have looked I would have seen it and that really bothers me.

Similarly, Matt didn’t want to talk about the feelings that arose in response to a bad business decision he made.

Well, it’s just reality; part of life. You are just going to have clients and projects where things will go wrong so you just deal with them like anybody in any kind of business, I suppose, kind of put them on a shelf and deal with them as best you can. Anything that’s irritating has to be put on that shelf because you’re doing your very best. I look upon roadblocks, or things that make people depressed as really something to get over with or go around or it’s just another challenge, a part of life. (Matt)

Dan also tried to put his feelings aside:

There’s always a problem [at work] that doesn’t go smoothly and that’s the nature of the business. There’s always a problem where I get mad at someone and you get used to it every day and you just move on. (Dan)

Victor didn’t want to talk about his emotional responses at all. Discomfort with the topic of feelings prompted him to seek the comfort of a group association; he talked about how “men” deal with their problems.

[My wife] sometimes says she thinks I don’t care, but what I do is internalize everything. I don’t show any emotions. I don’t get myself wrapped up in emotion over the incidents. I think about what needs to be done to correct this. What do I have to do in order to get this taken care of? I think that a lot of the time, we men get so involved in dealing with the task and getting the work done, that we don’t think about the emotional aspects at all. (Victor)

In general, it was difficult to get the men to talk about their feelings. The female informants had few problems talking about their negative mood experiences or the things they did to make themselves feel better.

When I’m feeling depressed, sometimes all of that can be taken care of by buying a bunch of flowers at the grocery store. I actually feel better because it’s something that I always like. It’s really an extravagance. You don’t really need flowers—you don’t eat them and you don’t wear them—they’re just decorations. But it’s nice to be able to say “I’m going to spend four bucks for me, and it’s for me, and I want them.” (Julie)

For the men in this study, talking about their feelings and their mood management strategies was not easy. Consistent with prior studies that reported greater reluctance on the part of men to disclose their feelings (e.g.,
Snell et al. 1989), most of the male informants preferred to talk about their efforts to correct the problem that gave rise to the feelings rather than the feelings themselves.

If I see I’m depressed, I also see that it’s ridiculous to waste my time moping about it. So you attack it head on with the realization that nothing is going to be gained by anger, shuffling your feet, and walking around. You make things happen. It doesn’t happen by itself. You have to do whatever it takes to make that happen. (Matt)

It’s just...you don’t enjoy anything. I just don’t like having unresolved conflicts hanging over my head. It doesn’t make me go sit in a tavern and drink my problems away. It doesn’t make me suicidal or sulking where I go, “Oh God, life is so terrible.” It’s just another issue that has to get handled before you move on to something else. (Jack)

Sometimes when I get bent I just walk away for five minutes and compose myself. Meantime, I’m thinking about how to solve the problem. Meanwhile, I get ‘em out of my hair by going away. (Victor)

This finding that men focus on the problem and try to ignore their feelings is consistent with earlier research studies that found that men were more likely than women to try and reduce or mask their feelings by engaging in distracting behaviors (see, e.g. Conway et al. 1991; Ingram et al. 1988; Nolen-Hoeksema 1987). Perhaps, as Victor says, “men get so involved in dealing with the task” that they “don’t think about the emotional aspects at all.” Or, perhaps, they ignore the feelings because they feel better able to handle the problem than their emotional response. It’s a sensible strategy—

solving the problem will likely eliminate the discomfort caused by negative feelings. On the other hand, not acknowledging their feelings may increase men’s physiological discomfort.

But, I would sometimes wake up in the middle of the night, not because of that, but because of having a craving, and I would have to have some ice cream or something. (Joseph)

It is unclear from this study whether women have an advantage in being able to admit to certain feelings and to address the discomfort caused by their feelings. It is also possible that interviewer gender bias accounts for the differences between men and women in this study. The interviewer was female; it may have been easier for the female informants to talk to another woman and more difficult for the men to share their feelings with someone of the opposite sex. Studies that have investigated nonverbal forms of emotional expression by men and women found more extreme gender differences when people interacted with their own gender (Brody and Hall 1993).

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN PHYSICAL EXPRESSIVENESS

When feeling irritated or frustrated, male informants had a greater tendency to express the desire for aggressive physical contact than did female informants. Several of the men interviewed stated they were provoked enough to want to hit someone.

My job is really frustrating. We have a lot of silly people in the messenger business. Working is not high on their list of things to do. I’ve heard so many stupid excuses.
A guy told me he couldn’t come to work because he was locked out of the house. I wanted to reach into the phone and slap him in the head and say, “you stupid guy, come to work.” (Dan)

Jack’s anxiety over negotiations for a boat he wanted to buy made him feel aggressive.

You call the idiot with the boat and say, “hey look, I’ll give you the money, but I may not have it by Saturday” and listen to some stupid drunken hillbilly tell you “well, you know, you made a deal...” So when that all came about, I had the money Wednesday, three days early. Then you call the same drunken stupid hillbilly up and say, “let’s do the deal Friday” and he says, “Well, I’m kinda busy...”

You just want to jump through the phone and grab him by the throat. (Jack)

Joseph’s problems with a coworker generated similar thoughts of physical hostility.

One of the stewards worked in our office and he was just verbally harassing everybody and shouting and what I should have done is just haul off and popped him. Just hit him. (Joseph)

While none of the men actually carried out this desire to hit someone, it is worth noting that they fantasized about displaying their physical power and aggressiveness. This is quite different from the women who were interviewed. None of the female informants ever mentioned wanting to strike another person. They did verbally express their frustration and irritation when provoked, but such expression never involved thoughts of physical contact with another person.

I was just wild. I was so wild that I couldn’t stay in the same room with my daughter. Like, I was cursing to myself and she heard me talking to my brother on the phone and I slammed the phone down and called him a motherfucker. I was . . . so mad and I didn’t want her to hear me. (Sarah)

Perhaps this difference is due to socialization—adult women have learned to behave in accordance with traditional social stereotypes that hold that the expression of anger is less acceptable for women than for men, especially any form of physical aggression. Talking with others was a common way female informants handled their negative feelings.

I think being able to talk to some people and talking about how I feel and having people say, “well, that’s not really your problem, that’s his problem” feels good. I usually feel better, more inclined to get my mind on something else. (Diane)

I try to jog with two or three of my friends and we’ll be talking while we’re jogging and I really find that a relief. I feel much better because we’ll have a good conversation. We can gossip about work and that’s a relief. (Sarah)

One of the things [my husband] will do when he gets very frustrated he will throw things, which I find just appalling. It’s almost like a two-year-old. You know, they bite and they throw things. They don’t know how to get it out. I don’t throw things and I don’t holler and I don’t scream. Very rarely do I ever explode. I kind of work it through in my mind, or [my husband and I] talk about it. I guess my mood goes away when we’re able to talk about it. (Noreen)
Talking about their feelings may be why women do not feel the need for physical aggression. They are able to relieve their discomfort through vocal expression. Children who learn to say, "I'm angry" are less likely to hit, bite, or act out in anger (see Brody and Hall 1993). Given that girls learn verbal language earlier than boys (Gleason et al. 1989), it may be they learn to curb aggressive behavioral modes of emotional arousal more readily than boys through verbal expression. This tendency may carry over into adulthood. By talking about their feelings with others, the women in this study found a nonviolent means for relieving their mood.

Both the men and women in this study needed to relieve the negatively charged feelings of arousal that occurred when they became irritated or anxious. For men, thoughts of physical aggressiveness often came to mind as a way to rid themselves of their problem (both physiological and psychological). For women--perhaps as a result of behaviors learned through socialization processes in childhood--talking about their feelings or constructive physical activities such as jogging or cooking were engaged in to help dissipate their emotional response.

On the days that I was able to go swimming at the YMCA, that always relieved the tension for me. And I find cooking a real help. I like to get into the kitchen and make things. It distracts me and when I'm done, I've got something to show for it. (Eileen)

CONCLUSION

This study has contributed to our understanding of the phenomenon of mood as it affects both men and women. All of the informants were sensitive, feeling individuals, able to recount negative mood experiences in some detail. Based on the small sample of adults interviewed for this study, it would be fallacious to make any generalizations about men or women, or to talk about male or female methods of mood management. However, some findings were significant and deserve further research attention. All of the informants in this study appeared to experience negative moods with the same discomfort and intensity. That is, the physical effect of a bad mood was the same for men and women and, although it is difficult to measure, the psychological impact of a bad mood appeared to be equally unsettling for both genders. Although the men in this study preferred to talk about their problem-solving abilities rather than their feelings, they were able to discuss their mood experiences openly and honestly. Their moods were as physically and psychologically discomforting to them as were the women's to the women. Thus, the experience of a negative mood appears to be the same for both men and women.

Secondly, both genders also appear to be successful mood managers. Each informant was able to repair his or her negative mood state through some kind of distracting or expressive consumption activity that restored psychological harmony. No significant differences were found in the consumption activities chosen by the male and female informants to relieve their negative feelings. The chosen mood-managing behaviors were more alike than dissimilar--both groups liked reading, watching TV, going to the movies, eating, and listening to music. Differences in the specific consumption activity chosen to manage a bad mood are more likely to be accounted for by individual factors (personality, financial resources, interests), or specific circumstances (age, presence of...
In terms of negative mood experiences, the main difference between men and women seems to be in the way they demonstrate their emotional response. From the data in this study, it appears that men and women share similar experiences of negative moods and similar mood-managing strategies. The gender differences that arose were due to differences in expression. As found in previous studies, the men in this study initially were more reluctant than the women to talk about their feelings. Additionally, men were more likely than women to want to physically strike someone when negatively aroused; women generally found someone to talk to about their feelings. This is consistent with evidence that indicates females primarily use nonverbal cues and verbal expressions to express their emotions while males primarily use physiological processes and behavioral acting out (Brody and Hall 1993).

It is unclear from this study whether the gender differences identified here are culturally specific and therefore socially learned, or whether they reflect universal tendencies. Cross-cultural studies of mood may reveal uniquely "American" socialization aspects not evident from this study. Further, utilizing both male and female interviewers might eliminate the potential bias in this study that was due to gender interactions. Perhaps different findings would result from a male interviewer talking with men and women about their feelings.

What this study does show is that moods are pervasive feeling states that do affect our consumption behaviors. Activities such as eating, watching TV, reading a book or listening to music help to relieve our negative moods. The process of mood management was shown here to be a robust phenomenon. More research is needed to understand how men and women come to choose the activities they do—and whether those choices can be influenced by marketing efforts. The concept of mood and mood management deserves further attention because of what it may reveal about differences—and similarities—in the psychological make-up, motivations, and consumption activities of men and women.

NOTE

1. Gender is a social concept referring to psychologically, sociologically, and culturally based traits, attitudes, beliefs, and behavioral tendencies (Bristor and Fischer 1993). It is distinguished from the term sex, which implies inherent biological differences between women and men.

REFERENCES


Radloff, Lenore S. and Donald S. Rae (1979), "Susceptibility and Precipitating


Table 1

A DESCRIPTIVE SUMMARY OF INFORMANTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Number of Children</th>
<th>Current Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dan</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Messenger service dispatcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diane</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Elementary school teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eileen</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>8 (6*)</td>
<td>Retired secretary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Elevator constructor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janice</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Tax accountant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>City government department supervisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Typesetter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Graphic designer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noreen</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2*</td>
<td>Curriculum coordinator, private elementary school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Graduate student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Attorney, police officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victor</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>4*</td>
<td>Nurse coordinator</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Children no longer living at home
Table 2
INFORMANTS' MOOD-MANAGING CONSUMPTION ACTIVITIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities Mentioned by Both Men and Women</th>
<th>Activities Mentioned Only by Men</th>
<th>Activities Mentioned Only by Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Doing job-related work</td>
<td>Playing with my kids</td>
<td>Calling friends or family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eating &quot;junk&quot; food (ice cream, cookies)</td>
<td>Sleeping</td>
<td>Cooking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going to a movie</td>
<td>Taking a walk</td>
<td>Going out to dinner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a glass of beer or wine</td>
<td></td>
<td>Jogging/swimming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening to music</td>
<td></td>
<td>Shopping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading a book or magazine</td>
<td></td>
<td>Smoking a cigarette</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking about pleasant things</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watching TV</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>