

Gender of ME and WE

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In most traditional societies, men's activities focus on hunting and defending the community while women attend to the closer in activities of child rearing, gathering, and gardening. The proportions and functions of major hormones [estrogen higher in women and testosterone higher in men] in the two sexes support these role assignments. Accordingly, women are more WE oriented [cooperative, giving] while men are more ME oriented [competitive, taking].

Women's traditional WE orientation begins with child bearing in which they are outstanding physiological givers – supplying nutrition through gestation to the developing fetus. Child bearing is then followed by nursing which continues the nutritional WE function and adds the social WE function of providing the infant with an intimate, regular relationship of ongoing, positive human contact.

In most cases, men only secondarily instill WE principles of behavior in their young children. Instead, they encourage boys to engage in competitively oriented play and to develop initial skills using construction and hunting tools. Men and boys have to learn ethical principles of appropriate social [WE] behavior while women live WE values and behaviors required by their physiology. Of course, “more or less” rather than “either or” captures this differential orientation of the sexes more accurately.

In modern complex society these traditional divisions between the roles of males and females have lessened – especially with the advent of birth control for women. But the differential physiological predispositions remain along with the continuing conservative assignment of traditional cultural roles. One can argue that in our technologically advanced modern societies where the armaments of conflict can be horribly destructive, the aggressive, competitive ME orientation of men has become a liability. Instead, the cooperative WE disposition of women can be more productive in a whole range of modern social institutions from defense to economy to politics to social service. But, it is also the case that as women have gained access to most professional and leadership roles, many have adopted more aggressive male-like orientations and behaviors in order to compete and be successful.

Whatever orientation may be more appropriate in the modern context, ME and WE values and perspectives in human societies have their origin in the traditional gender based division of the sexes and the different roles associated with this division. Achieving well-balanced ME – WE input should be the goal.