Gender Response Care-Gender Expectations

**David Stanley** 00:00

This is just a slide I inserted here because I see gender reveal parties all the time. And I always cringe when I see them because sex at birth is not gender, gender is up to the individual and it is an identity. So you're not revealing the gender of your child, you're revealing the sex at birth of your child. So more accurately, they should be sex at birth parties, reveal parties, and it also sets up unreasonable binary expectations. So again, going back to the whole cisgender, male, female, it really says this child is going to be a girl, and she's going to be a girl for her entire life, and she's not going to have any other identity other than being a female. And we know what we know about human nature and humanity is that again, we're all on a spectrum, and what your gender identity might be when you're a child may change as you progress through your teenage years and adolescence and begin to develop an adult identity and a sexual identity for yourself. So gender expectations just to give you, you know, how these expectations can impact with how we treat boys and girls. It was a study that done with babies, they said some babies were girl babies, and some babies were boy babies, but they asked people to interpret the behavior of the children based on whatever gender that they thought. And when they saw baby boys crying, or they perceived it to be a baby boy, they were more likely to see that baby as angry or distressed. If they believe that baby was a boy. They perceive male infants as more happily and socially engaged when they mistakenly believe they are girls. So when they thought they were boys, they saw them as angry and distressed. But when they perceive them to be, with the same behavior, a girl they perceive them to be happy and socially engaged. So the perception was that when females cry, they're scared. When male babies cry, they're angry and distress. So you can see how the behavior of a child whether it's male or female isn't really that changing, but how we perceive that behavior definitely is changing based on those gender norms and expectations. So nature versus nurture, some people say all boys will be boys, they're always going to have anger management issues, and that it's just, yea boys will be boys, we've heard that 1000 times, right. And let's take an example of this young boy who seems to be having a lot of trouble with his teddy bear, and he seems to be taking his frustrations or about to take his frustrations out on the bear. So if we kind of pan out, when we take a trauma informed perspective, what we'll find here is that the child might be experiencing trauma. And because of the trauma, it often feels people, whether they're male, female, identifying whatever, it leaves you with a sense of feeling weak, vulnerable, a sense of fear, and a sense of despair. So then that might be what the child is experiencing. But as a child is experiencing this weakness, vulnerability, the fear and despair, he's also being sent messages from his primary caregivers, and from those around him that say, don't be a sissy boys, don't cry. So there's a conflict between what he's feeling on the inside, his feelings, and what he's being told to do in order to get in line with those gender norms and expectations. So the child cannot get rid of those feelings of weakness, vulnerability and despair, they have to be transformed somehow. What happens is that if he's feeling this, and he's being told, you shouldn't feel this way, feeling this way is bad for boys, then what he's going to experience is a lot of shame. And shame is one of the central components of a lot of the behaviors that we see that get funneled out and get expressed as anger. So the child is experiencing all of this and then needs to do something, needs to transform those weak, vulnerable emotions because they bring so much shame. But anger, if the child expresses anger, we see that as being stereotypically male behavior, and it's okay for men that, society kind of tells us this implicitly, that it's okay for men to be angry. It's not so okay for men to cry, and to show those vulnerable emotions. So what the child does then is holds those emotions but transforms them to anger, and then often externalizes the source of the anger towards something that's weaker and more vulnerable. The teddy bear in a sense in this situation has become a symbol of the feelings that are inside of him. So he's then externalizing, it's not me, that's the problem. It's these feelings and externalizes that and tries to go after the source of those vulnerable feelings.

**David Stanley** 04:43

So the functions of anger seems to energize people, it gets you going. That's why it's used so much in politics, because an angry group of people that are going to vote were more likely to get out and vote than people who are not angry. So it energizes you, it kind of gives you a boost, like an adrenaline rush. It also expresses something. So we know humans have a built in need to express what we're going through, to take it from the inside of bring it to the outside. So it helps to express, I'm angry, I'm upset, this is what I'm going through. It's a form of communication and expression. So again, communication that communicates to others something and oftentimes the point of anger and violence is often to say to other people, it's a protective thing. It's, it's kind of like saying, don't mess with me, don't hurt me because I could hurt you. So oftentimes, the anger and the violence is communicated in a way to try to get rid of the, to try to defend oneself against perceived outside threats or sources of shame. It also provides a sense of strength. So if you ask men, when do you feel stronger when you're crying, or when you're, you know, angry. And I think most men would say, when I'm angry, I feel stronger. Because it's more associated with those ideas of strength and what it means to be "masculine". Ultimately, it may remove the adverse stimulus. So if I go in, and I have a client, say, I'm working with a client, every time I see him, he gets mad at me and starts yelling at me, I'm very likely to avoid interacting with him. And that might be exactly what he's looking for. He's looking to push other people away because what he may have learned is that when people get close, that's when you get hurt. So a lot of times it's to push away and to discredit those weaker feelings, and to push away others that might be perceived as a threat. All of this might leave a guy or a man with a sense of safety. You know, I might not have a lot of people in my life, but I know that no one's going to, you know, mess with me and no one's going to do something bad to me. Hey, I'm alone, I walk alone, I don't have any friendships. But that's the way I like to do it, because I like to be safe. So all of this results in a sense of safety that actually isn't very safe for men or for those around them. But it does give people a perceived sense of safety. Oftentimes, I've worked with men and you know, you're, you know, the shaved head, the tattoos, the six foot five, you know, but those sort of hardcore criminal guy, you know, "criminal" men that you work with. I worked with a lot in the prison system years ago. And a lot of it I found, this is my observation as a clinician, working in those settings is that, some of the men who had those most scariest kind of behaviors, were some of the ones that had the most vulnerable feelings that they were afraid that other people would hurt them. So they put on this sort of exterior front of don't mess with me, I'm dangerous, because they had so many vulnerable feelings, and that's what they were protecting. So when you see people like that, I often wonder, jeez, you know, where is that person underneath all of that front?