

Gendered Affective Restoration and the Spiral Logic of Equilibrium: A Pilot Study Integrating Gender Schema, Role Congruity, and Affective Regulation Theories within the Integrated Equilibrium Model

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Abstract:

This pilot study investigates gendered emotional restoration through an integrative framework comprising Gender Schema Theory, Role Congruity Theory, and Affective Regulation Theory, situated within the recursive architecture of the Integrated Equilibrium Model (IEM). Ten semi-structured interviews, analyzed thematically, reveal patterned emotional disruptions linked to internalized gender expectations, role incongruence, and cultural narratives of burden and duty. Male participants expressed covert emotional dissonance around competitive norms and diminished opportunities, while female participants described affective overextension, symbolic role substitution, and intra-familial resource inequities. Findings offer preliminary empirical validation of the IEM's spiral logic and highlight pathways for culturally embedded emotional regulation strategies

Keywords: Gender Schema, Role Congruity, Affective Regulation, Emotional Restoration, Integrated Equilibrium Model, Spiral Logic, Gendered Roles, Cultural Psychology.

1. Introduction

Emotional restoration—returning to affective equilibrium following disruption—is increasingly recognized as a socio-culturally embedded process, shaped by identity scripts, role expectations, and regulation mechanisms. In patriarchal and collectivist societies such as India, gendered norms infuse emotional experience and behavioral coping, exerting nuanced pressures across developmental stages.

Theoretical perspectives offer unique lenses into this phenomenon:

Gender Schema Theory (Bem, 1981) posits that internalized gender beliefs shape cognitive and emotional processing.

Role Congruity Theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002) highlights psychological strain when personal actions diverge from socially prescribed roles.

Affective Regulation Theory (Gross, 1998) explains intrapsychic strategies used to manage emotional responses.

However, these frameworks often fall short of capturing the recursive, multidimensional nature of emotional restoration. The **Integrated Equilibrium Model (IEM)** addresses this gap by modeling emotional restoration as a **spiral cycle**—where affective disruption initiates a recursive journey of cognitive reappraisal, behavioral adaptation, and symbolic realignment.

This pilot study empirically explores how individuals negotiate affective states within gendered constraints, employing the IEM to illuminate recursive restoration pathways shaped by culture, identity, and emotional labor.

2. Methodology

2.1 Participants

Ten adult participants (6 female, 4 male), aged 25–45 years, from Visakhapatnam, India, participated in the study. Selection was purposive, ensuring gender diversity and relevance to emotional and role-based themes. All participants self-identified within binary gender categories, though gender role expression varied.

2.2 Instrument Design

A **semi-structured interview protocol** was designed to elicit reflective narratives around:

- Gender-role expectations and lived identity
- Emotional disruption and coping strategies
- Perceptions of role-based justice and obligation
- Symbolic actions linked to affective regulation

Items drew conceptually from the three guiding theories and mapped onto the spiral logic of the IEM.

2.3 Procedure

Interviews were audio-recorded (MP3 format), transcribed verbatim, and translated where necessary. Participants responded in English or Telugu. The interview environment was conversational and reflexive, encouraging emotional depth.

2.4 Analysis

Data were analyzed using **Thematic Analysis** (Braun & Clarke, 2006) with iterative coding. Codes were synthesized into higher-order themes reflective of emotional restoration cycles, role incongruity, and symbolic appropriation. A matrix aligning participant narratives with IEM stages supported model validation.

3. Results

Three dominant thematic clusters emerged:

3.1 Role Incongruity and Male Emotional Ambivalence

Male participants expressed emotional strain in navigating job competition and lack of systemic support. One noted:

“If I were female, maybe things would be easier—at least emotionally. Being male, everything feels like a fight.”

This narrative juxtaposes perceived societal privilege with personal emotional deprivation. Restoration occurred through cognitive reframing, albeit tinged with resignation and suppressed vulnerability.

3.2 Symbolic Role Substitution and Female Overextension

Female participants revealed emotional fatigue from performing dual roles—caretaker and wage earner. One respondent identified as “the son” of the family:

“I didn’t take rest. I saw myself as their son—I had no right to pause.”

Symbolic substitution became an adaptive strategy, allowing emotional continuity through culturally legible roles. However, such regulation often led to depleted affective reserves, indicating a partial, externally validated restoration.

3.3 Resource Injustice and Emotional Rivalry

Participants described material inequities in access to food, education, and property:

“My brother got more because he will carry the family forward. I had to accept it silently.”

These narratives underscore how emotional suppression is learned and legitimized through systemic inequality. Restoration strategies here included silent resilience or deferred aspirations, rarely matched with affirming feedback.

4. Discussion

4.1 Validating the Spiral Logic of the IEM

The IEM posits that emotional restoration involves recursive, symbolic modulation shaped by cognitive reframing, role negotiation, and socio-cultural interaction. This study affirms that:

Disruption emerges from incongruent gendered expectations.

Regulation is enacted through symbolic substitution and role conformity.

Restoration is cyclical, with participants oscillating between resistance and resignation.

4.2 Gendered Pathways and Restoration Strategies

Men navigated suppression-based regulation, often reframing emotional constraint as structural reality.

Women engaged in over-regulation, assuming multiple roles to validate emotional worth. These patterns reflect differentiated restoration paths mediated by societal scripts and internalized gender schemas.

4.3 Cultural Embeddedness and Emotional Labor

Cultural metaphors—burden, sacrifice, sonship—emerged as restoration anchors. Emotion regulation was not merely intrapsychic but socially constructed and culturally endorsed. The IEM's emphasis on symbolic resonance aptly captures these complex dynamics.

5. Conclusion

This pilot study offers empirical grounding for the Integrated Equilibrium Model's spiral logic in gendered affective restoration. Participants demonstrated recursive emotional regulation strategies shaped by gender schema, role expectations, and sociocultural narratives. These findings reinforce the need for culturally embedded models of emotional wellbeing that transcend linear recovery frameworks.

Further research should expand to include non-binary participants, deploy mixed methods for triangulation, and examine long-term restoration trajectories across diverse cultural settings.

References

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