Sample Exit Exam

The differences between men and women is a topic that almost always stirs up controversy when mentioned. There are so many different angles one could take, and copious amounts of evidence to support each angle sufficiently. Some of the most important questions that prevail in most debates are the questions of nurture vs. nature, and also better-off vs. worse off. Deborah Blum’s “Heart to Heart: Sex Differences in Emotion” and Daniel Goleman’s “Emotional Intelligence” both attempt to explain some of the emotional differences that separate men and women.

Deborah Blum’s article draws on evidence and studies that would imply a strong biological link to the emotional differences between the sexes. One study showed that both right-handed and left-handed mothers instinctively hold their babies on their left side, close to their hearts. This implies a biological inclination to comfort the babies with sounds they heard in the womb.

In another study, women and men were shown photographs of other women and men, varying substantially in their emotional expressions on their faces. The study found that men are much less aware than women of recognizing facial expressions, especially in women’s faces. The conclusion drawn from this study is that there is a pattern of dominant and submissive, dating all the way back to the beginning of evolution, “where males hung out together and negotiated for power, it was vital for men to be able to read men’s faces; they might have had far less need to be tuned to the expressions of a female face” according to Blum. She also infers that it may have been essential to women’s survival, as well as to submissive monkeys and apes survival, to be able to read the subtlest of expressions in men to avoid the wrath of their anger and outburst.

Deborah Blum’s article implies her inclination to relate sex differences mainly to biology, however she is very careful to avoid stating any superiority that either sex may have over the other. She states only that possibly boys have an unfair emotional disadvantage because “our culture has misread the realities of our biology.”

Daniel Goleman’s article draws conclusions from much of the same evidence as Deborah Blum’s, including the studies done on reading facial expressions, and even referring the same book, Deborah Tannen’s You Just Don’t Undestand. Although the authors’ sources are similar, some of the conclusions they’ve drawn are quite different.
Daniel Goleman, while admitting that differences can be partly biological, mostly blames childhood (i.e. nurture) for the significant gap in emotions “and to the separate emotional world boys and girls inhabit while growing up.”

He relates a study in which 3-year-old children claim that half of their best friends are those of the opposite sex, whereas by the age of 5, the percent drops to 20, and by the age of 7 it is almost none. He implies this to mean that boys and girls are taught to be different, and that the emotional gap that exists between men and women can be directly correlated to “these separate social universes” we are taught at very young ages.

Goleman not only draws very different conclusions than Blum, but offers much more personal opinion in his article than Blum does. While Blum carefully avoids stating which sex may be better off, Goleman has no quams about announcing his theory.

He refers to men as being “less sophisticated than the opposite sex in the byways of emotional life” and states that “women, on average, experience the entire range of emotions with greater intensity and more volatility than men—in this sense, women are more ‘emotional’ than men.”

Both authors firmly state the vast differences in emotions between men and women, however their conclusions are a world (or even a sex) apart. Blum focuses largely on nature and a certain biological predisposition that men and women have to act certain ways. Goleman, on the other hand, relates these differences directly to nature and the societies we are taught by. Either way, the implication of this gap have been firmly set, and both speculations help to offer insight into an ever intriguing paradox: men and women.

Questions:

1.) Do you think this is a passing exit exam? Why or why not?

2.) Find two places where the writer quotes from the articles—do you think these are effective quotations? Why or why not?

3.) What are some key words/ phrases the writer uses to compare and contrast the two authors?

4.) What else stands out about the essay: