Masculine and Feminine Traits

by Sophia Tutorial

WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, we'll discuss how different cultures tend to label particular traits as either male or female. The specific areas of focus include:

1. Gendered Traits
2. Gendered Traits in Conflict

1. Gendered Traits

In previous lessons, we've discussed culture, and how it shapes the way we see the world, and what we perceive to be normal, proper, or correct.

In that same vein, culture can influence our views on gender. Many cultures around the globe have a third gender in addition to man and woman. In the United States, we are slowly expanding our views to include additional genders. Related to these views, one way in which cultural influence occurs is the designation of masculine traits and feminine traits.

Masculine traits are behaviors or traits that a given culture thinks is appropriate for men to display but inappropriate for women.

Conversely, **feminine traits** are behaviors or traits that are considered appropriate for women to display but inappropriate for men.

There's a difference between the perception of masculine traits and feminine traits in any given culture, and all cultures identify some particular traits with each gender.

While any individual, male or female, is certainly able to express any of the wide variety of traits or behaviors that are sometimes assigned to either gender, cultures have their own opinions about this.

IN CONTEXT

In the United States, young boys have traditionally been dressed in blue, while young girls have been dressed in pink. It's been considered inappropriate for boys to do certain activities that are perceived as feminine, and for girls to do activities perceived as masculine. However, that is supposed to change when they reach a certain age.

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Over the last 30 or 40 years, there has been a lot of change regarding our cultural perceptions of gender. However, some views still remain.

In the United States, it is still pretty common for many people to associate certain traits with a particular gender.

Traits traditionally designated as:	
Masculine	**Feminine**
Competitive	Emotional
Strong	Weak
Thick-skinned	Sensitive
Forceful	Graceful
Self-directed	Submissive
Tough	Nurturing
Leading	Supportive
Aggressive	

These traits are often used as stereotypes, yet they are derived from cultural ideas about gender that have been around for a long time. Even so, communities are challenging these stereotypes and imposed limitations in pursuit of equity.

Women have challenged the narrative of what they can and cannot do as they further their leadership across workplaces and societal roles.

The LGBTQ+ community has made progress in the representation and expression of identity beyond the gender binary of man and woman. For some, this involves a fluid expression of traditionally gendered traits and belief in gender identities beyond man or woman, including nonbinary or genderqueer.

TERMS TO KNOW

Masculine Trait
A trait considered by a given culture as "right, normal, or proper" for men to have or display but not for women to have or display.

Feminine Trait
A trait considered by a given culture as "right, normal, or proper" for women to have or display but not for men to have/display.

2. Gendered Traits in Conflict

When someone of a particular gender steps out and acts in a way that is considered gender inappropriate, this can lead to conflict. Depending on the context and environment, like in the United States, this conflict can be considered discriminatory against this person and lead to legal conflict.

Gender inappropriate behavior is a term used when, for example, a woman begins to be more forceful or self-directed. That might still be considered gender inappropriate in some cultures. Likewise, a man acting more submissive or sensitive might still be perceived as gender inappropriate in certain cultures.

Because they are exhibiting traits that are seen as being attached to the other gender, the man might be

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considered weak for expressing emotion, whereas the woman could be considered pushy for speaking up for herself.

The concept of particular traits being viewed as gender inappropriate behavior means that any number of negative terms could be applied to people of either gender when they step out of what's considered an appropriate role.

There are also traits that are **gender neutral traits**, or traits considered appropriate for both genders to express, such as being respectful or seeking self-esteem.

These are things that we would expect from either gender, and there's not a weight carried to them as being more appropriate for one gender over another.

However, any particular trait could be revealed during the conflict resolution process as the underlying issue in a conflict.

> EXAMPLE When trying to solve a work conflict, two people bring a tangible issue into the resolution process. Underneath the issue, you, as the conflict-resolver, find that the woman who is in a management role is thought to be inappropriate because she's portraying some traits that have traditionally been considered masculine. People think she's too competitive or forceful.

> EXAMPLE Or you could have a domestic conflict of some sort between spouses. The woman thinks that the man is being too weak because he's not doing what a man should be doing in the traditional view of gender roles.

Either gender can view the other gender in ways that are prescribed by these masculine and feminine traits. Yet, there have been a fair amount of cultural changes to the perception of these gendered traits.

> EXAMPLE There are a number of stay-at-home dads who are certainly exhibiting nurturing and supportive behavior towards their children, whereas more and more women are taking leadership roles in the workplace. In terms of cultural perception, both of these situations have become increasingly normal and acceptable.

Changes such as these have happened over time, and they're not fully accepted at all levels by everyone.

Within many cultures—and in some more than others—the traditional attribution of masculine and feminine traits is still persistent.

TERMS TO KNOW

Gender Inappropriate Behavior
Behavior displaying traits or assuming roles considered "not normal or proper" for one's gender.

Gender Neutral Trait
A trait considered by a given culture as "right, normal, or proper" for either gender to display.

SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that depending on the culture, there are certain **gendered traits**, or traits that are considered masculine or feminine depending on what the culture deems appropriate for each gender. You now understand that **gendered traits can be present in conflict** when one or both parties

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express a trait that is considered gender inappropriate. While these gendered traits are often stereotypical, they have been ingrained in different cultures for a long time. The perception of certain traits as either masculine or feminine is changing over time, but this change is not universally accepted among all cultures. Good luck!

Source: Adapted from Sophia tutorial by Marlene Johnson.

TERMS TO KNOW

Feminine Trait
A trait considered by a given culture as "right, normal, or proper" for women to have or display but not for men to have/display.

Gender-Inappropriate Behavior
Behavior displaying traits or assuming roles considered "not normal or proper" for one's gender.

Gender-Neutral Trait
A trait considered by a given culture as "right, normal, or proper" for either gender to display.

Masculine Trait
A trait considered by a given culture as "right, normal, or proper" for men to have or display but not for women to have or display.

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