

Traditional gender views and the exceptions

[Sociology](#), [Feminism](#)



Gender is a factor of an individual's being that permeates all aspects of his or her life. From the moment a person is born into the world, he or she is classified either as a female or a male. The way society treats and reacts to this person is then treated accordingly to that initial categorization. What is it then that epitomizes the masculinity and the femininity of an individual. How does American society view a feminine individual and how does this differ from how the same society views masculine individuals?

Masculinity refers to a human's personal level or degree of manliness. Chafetz (35-36) describes masculinity as being distributed over seven areas: physical, functional, sexual, emotional, intellectual, interpersonal, other personal characteristics.

A masculine individual is said to be virile, strong, able to provide for his family, sexually aggressive and experienced, unemotional, practical, dominating, free, demanding, and success-oriented. Thus an individual who is more able to take risks and who is better able to exhibit a sense of confidence and independence is considered to be more masculine. Physical attributes such as facial hair, toned muscles, and large body frames are also more characteristic of individuals who are considered to be masculine.

Femininity, on the other hand, is directly linked by the 1996 Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language to traits such as gentleness, kindness, and patience (708). Feminine characteristics are usually associated with nurturing and life-giving characteristics. The woman's traditional role as a mother and wife are the most emphasized qualities of a feminine individual. Thus a female who is demure, obedient,

and able to display physical attributes that are favored in the life-giving process, such as large breasts, wide hips, and full lips, is considered to be more feminine than most.

Studies have shown that a man's traditional view of a female or feminine individual is based heavily on masculine ideology, which focuses centrally on the sexual aspect of a woman's breasts and bodies. The propagation of these masculine ideologies were even more stressed by the fact that media continues to portray females as beings whose primary roles are focused on their sexual bodies. (Ward et al, 712)

Many can see, however, that the barriers of traditional gender roles are being broken by modern American males and females. More and more females are found in the workplace, becoming the breadwinners for their family. Females are also seen engaging in extreme and traditional sports. Women's roles in American society were seen to drastically change in the late twentieth century as a result of the new opportunities given to them (Mackey & Immerman, 271)

There are also men who have opted to become the stay-at-home parents. It is has become more acceptable for men to show their emotions. And a new breed of men have come to be called metrosexuals, males who indulge in their physical appearance in the same way that was previously only attributed to feminine individuals. The breaking of stereotypes of masculinity and femininity has become rampant in the United States and this may well prove to be the beginning of the end of the reign of traditional views of masculinity and femininity in American society. Even though sex and gender

are clear categorical divisions established upon birth, the long-established ramifications of being male or female and the parameters that these traditions set can be overcome.

Works Cited

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