

# [Sex and temperament essay](https://assignbuster.com/sex-and-temperament-essay/)

Anthropologist Margaret Mead addressed the differences in temperament found between men and women in her book Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies (1935). In this study she concluded that sex has no bearing on social traits and the temperament of an individual. Her research looked at whether masculine or feminine traits are innate or learned. She also questioned whether men and women differ because of nature (heredity) or nurture (socialization). She concludes that cultural conditioning is more important than biology in shaping the behavior of women and men.

The observed differences in temperament between men and women are not a function of their biological differences. Rather, they result from differences in the socialization and the cultural expectations held for each sex within a society. However, Meade makes a point about the role of deviance in the societies. Deviance is defined as any behavior that violates social norms. When women are naturally gifted or better than men in their own field of expertise, this causes the men to doubt their own manhood.

This is one of the reasons why men who conform most closely to accepted “ temperament for males in their society are most suspicious and hostile towards deviating women who in spite of a contrary training, show the same temperament traits” (306). It is certainly possible for one to be female and identity themselves as masculine or to be a male and identity themselves as feminine. For example, gender roles might include women investing in domestic life and men investing in the worker role.

The concept of gender identity is also different from gender stereotypes, which are shared views of personality traits often tied to one’s gender such as instrumentality in men and expressiveness in women. In western culture, stereotypically, men are aggressive, competitive and instrumentally oriented while women are passive, cooperative and expressive. Early thinking often assumed that this division was based on underlying innate differences in sex traits, characteristics and temperaments of males and females.

In this older context, measures of femininity/masculinity were often used to diagnose what were described as problems of basic gender identification, for example, feminine males or masculine females. In her book, Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies, there are sections that concentrate on how particular cultures in the Pacific regions view femininity and masculinity. Her anthropological examination of these Pacific island tribes examines in detail the different dynamics involved in the evolution of some of primitive cultures.

She contrasts these Pacific island tribes and their societies with America’s modernized perception of the term “ male and female. ” Mead disagreed with the theory that masculine and feminine roles were innate and unchangeable. She is led to the conclusion that the society influences different patterns of temperament. Among the Arapesh people, both males and females displayed what would be considered a “ feminine” temperament. The Arapesh were passive, cooperative and expressive. Among the Mundugamor people, both males and females displayed a “ masculine” temperament. These Mundugamor were active, competitive and instrumental.

Finally, among the Tchambuli, men and women displayed temperaments that were very different from each other. The women in Tchambuli society were shown to be dominant and impersonal, and managerial. The males on the other hand were less responsible and more emotionally dependent on their female counterparts. Another example, among the Arapesh people is that both men and the women are gentle and nonaggressive (40). Men are equally responsible for nurturing of children, as are the women. “ The baby is never left alone; comforting human skin and comforting human voices are always beside it” (42).

This shows that both the parents will take turns watching the baby and never leave its side. The way in which men and women treat their children is one of the most significant things about the “ adult personality” of any people (40). They believe that the child will as adults show the same general personality traits that their parents have shown before the in the past. In the Mundugumor societies, they have standardized the behavior of both men and women as “ actively masculine, virile, and without the softening and mellowing characteristics that we are accustomed to believe are inalienably womanly” (165).

The Mundugumor women disliked childbearing and even disliked children. Unlike the Arapesh, both sexes of the Mundugumor people were angry and aggressive. The Tchambuli personalities ideally “ oppose and complement” the Arapesh and the Mundugumor (265). The Tchambuli women were unadorned, brisk and efficient, whether in childrearing, fishing, or marketing, while the men were decorated and vain, interested in art, theater, and gossip. Mead is speaking about the personalities, or the temperamental differences between these selected societies.

She realizes that in most cultures male and female behavior does conform to their traditional expectations she had experienced in her upbringing. Even though Mead does not claim to be advancing a feminist argument, in many peoples eye’s there is a feminist text. She elaborated how being female is expensive and has changed through time. She accomplished this in her own life by doing things her own way. During Mead’s time, she brought back the practice of breast-feeding. This procedure had been frowned upon in society and seen as only done by the lower status individuals in society.

She traveled with male anthropologists to the pacific region and earned their respect and was given credit for her accomplishments. She had grown up as a tomboy. Her earliest experiences included many of the “ physical and aggressive activities” associated with boys (292). She explains in her book what we consider deviance, meaning growing upon a tomboy, is quite ordinary in other societies. Through her hard work and research, Mead demonstrated that women should be able to take part in more social activities especially those associated with men. Others before her had called for more freedom from their sex role stereotypes.

“ In society that recognizes gradations in wealth or rank, women of rank or women of wealth have been permitted an arrogance which was denied to both sexes among the lowly or the poor…a step towards the emancipation of women but it has never been a step towards the greater of freedom of the individual (320). Temperamental attitudes that have traditionally been associated with sex seem to be easily reversed depending on the social upbringing of the individual. Meade proposes that these traits are not innate.

If in one society women act like men and in another men act like women we no longer have any basis for explaining these aspects of their behavior as being sex-linked. This statement is supported when we consider the role reversals in the Tchambuli position of dominance between the two sexes, in spite of the existence of formal “ patrilineal” institutions (107). The material suggests that we can say that many, if not all, of the personality traits which we have called masculine or feminine are as lightly linked to sex as are the clothing, the manners, and the form of head-dress that a society at a given period assigns to either sex.

“ We are forced to conclude that human nature is almost unbelievably malleable, responding accurately and contrastingly to contrasting cultural conditions” (280). The differences between individuals who are members of different cultures, and the differences between individuals within a culture, are almost entirely attributed to differences in their conditioning, especially during early childhood. The form of this conditioning is culturally determined. Standardized personality differences between the sexes are of this order.

Margaret Mead first says that three different cultures suggest the malleability of sex roles, she concludes that culture conditioning determines sex behavior differences almost entirely, “ we are forced to conclude that human nature is almost unbelievably malleable” (280). She believes sex roles are imposed on the sexes through cultural forces. I believe Margaret Meade was a feminist even though she did not want to be considered one. Through her experiences and studies of other cultures she determined that what defines a woman and their in society is relative and culturally constructed, as opposed to natural.

She did this through a comparative method, which revealed the different gender roles found in New Guinea. Her research and life experiences showed that women were capable of doing what men could do. The environment they were raised in was more the determining factor on their behavior than whether they were born male of female. Margaret Mead could be considered one of the first and more influential feminists since she used data she collected to prove her theories and did not let the culture or the suggested norms of the day determine her behavior.