

STAYING WELL



IT'S A BOY GIRL THING

Historically, women have been repressed, subjugated, and considered inferior to men in all spheres, except perhaps the domestic one. Over the past 50 years, women have been playing catch up in all public arenas, including the educational and professional. This forced inferiority and oppression is reflected in all aspects of society. **By Mira Khreino**





Some of the most evident examples can be demonstrated through the use of language, especially slang. The female has often been referred to in derogatory terms whether to mean weak (fragile), emotional (hormonal), stupid (airhead), or mean (b****). There is a multitude of words that are only used to refer to women that just would not apply to men. Such is the extent of female degradation that it extends to the most private aspect of her being, her sexual organs, whose slang terms are used as the strongest of insults.

When a man is said to be in touch with his feminine side, he is regarded as not being a “man,” but rather soft and weak in some way. In opposition, whenever a woman shows strength in character, competence, and ability, she is ripped of her feminine identity and said to be altogether masculine.

More often than not, women who are successful in male-dominant spheres are considered to have taken on male characteristics, namely drive, perseverance, ruthlessness, and aggression. Common perception agrees that these characteristics de-feminize her. This begs the question, do women need to match men like for like? Must women become more like men in order to compete in a male oriented world? And how can women maintain their femininity as they continue to achieve in public spheres?

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NATURE VS. NURTURE

Our biology plays a huge part in influencing specific social roles. For example, pregnancy, childbirth, and lactation lend women to nursing their babies. However, if biology were the only determinant in thought and behavior, women’s roles around the world would all be the same. Cross-cultural studies show that gender roles can vary greatly from one culture to the next. Moreover, within the same society, separate ethnic groups, social classes, and religions demonstrate different gender roles. Even though international similarities in gender roles are unquestionable, there is a large enough variety in responsibilities and sense of purpose among women to indicate the influence of more than just the physical or biological factors.

So, while sex is the biological aspect of our genetic make-up, which includes hormones and body parts, gender is our social and legal status and it is how we feel about and choose to express ourselves. Biology determines sex and culture determines gender. Gender, therefore, refers to identity, beliefs, behaviors, and characteristics, which

then influence the way we present ourselves through appearance, clothing, etc. Gender is an internal feeling and the external expression of it.

Gender roles are learned very early on in life. Children absorb information on how to think, behave, and dress from their parents, siblings, caregivers, television, magazines, and even cartoons. As children grow up, they adopt behavior, that has been reinforced through praise, compliments, and love. They cease or hide behavior that is punished or ridiculed. Feminine traits are behaviors that our culture associates with being a woman and girls are praised for exhibiting such behavior from childhood, much in the same way, masculine traits are valued behavior in men and are commended throughout their life span. The opposite is often punished in some way. Seeking praise or pleasure and avoiding punishment or pain is a natural human tendency and that’s how a child’s gender is formed.

In order to distinguish between the traits we are referring to, we must agree on the definition of feminine and masculine.



Words Often Used To Express Femininity	Words Often Used To Express Masculinity
Dependent	Independent
Emotional	Non-emotional
Passive	Aggressive
Sensitive	Assertive
Weak	Protective
Compassionate	Competitive
Intuitive	Strong
Relational	Active
Inexperienced	Experienced
Soft	Hard
Nurturing	Self-confident
Innocent	Sexual
Accepting	Rebellious
Empathetic	Logical
Affectionate	Disciplined
Tender	Focused
Gentle	Reliable
Patient	Stable
Loving	Controlled
Creative	Leading





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STRIKING A BALANCE

We all have both feminine and masculine traits within us, which are expressed by each of us according to need, circumstance, and situation. Even though what is masculine and what is feminine are often referred to as opposites, no one is purely one or the other. Embodying both aspects makes us more similar than different.

TIPPING THE SCALES TO THE MASCULINE

The more balanced our masculine and feminine energies are, the more harmonious we feel. But wanting to get ahead in a male-dominated world and seeking gender equality sometimes forces women nowadays to connect a little more strongly to the masculine side. The top five indicators that a person is operating from their masculine side:

- 1) They always step in and save the day when things go wrong.
- 2) They are independent and don't need anyone.
- 3) Romantic interests are often intimidated by them.
- 4) They tend to deter people by coming on too strong.
- 5) They feel lazy if they are not working or being productive in some way.

Classically masculine characteristics are more about "doing," while feminine characteristics are more about "being." So, if a woman is very action-oriented, she may come across as masculine. Paradoxically, many determined, feminine women end up moving further into their masculine energy in an attempt to prove themselves in a male-dominant world. As a result, in their presence, men who lack confidence in their masculinity may feel unnecessary and be deterred.

THE FEMININITY WITHIN

Top three tips for men and women to get in touch with their feminine side:

- 1) While giving is more of a masculine characteristic, receiving is more feminine. Stop giving so much and allow yourself to receive. Whether it is receiving help, saying yes to people offering to do something for you, or receiving a compliment, receiving will make you start to reconnect with the feminine.
- 2) Being nurturing to others and yourself will also put you in touch with the feminine side within. The tenderness and emotionality of being a woman is far from a disadvantage; it is a huge asset and should be viewed as such. You should use this innate quality to care for yourself as well as others.
- 3) Engage your creativity. This could manifest in many different ways like writing, drawing, singing, dancing, or dressing-up. An expression of the creative will not only make men and women feel better about themselves, but will also make them feel more relaxed when assuming the stereotypically feminine. ■