

Define femininity and masculinity.
In your opinion, where do traditional gender roles come from?

1. Introduction

—“One is not born,
but becomes
a woman.”—

- Simone de Beauvoir

Masculinity and femininity are socially accepted and widely practiced set of traits traditionally associated with males and females. Though, typical masculine and feminine traits remain universally same, they may vary from region to region and culture to culture. Feminist philosophers, along with many other scholars of social sciences believe that masculinity and femininity are socially constructed roles and qualities that may have little to no relation with one's biological sex.

2. Definition of Masculinity

Masculinity, also known as Manhood or Manliness, is a set of attributes, behaviors and roles traditionally associated with boys and men.

Masculinity is a combination of biological (male reproductive organs, facial hair and high pitched voice etc) and socially constructed (strong, assertive, courageous) factors

Masculinity differs from male anatomical sex as both males and females can have masculine characteristics.

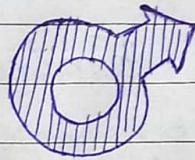
2.1 Traditional Masculine Traits:

Although, traditional masculine may vary depending on the region, religion, culture, ethnicity and other factors, common masculine features include:

Dominance over women and other men, outspokenness, emotional stoicism and leadership

2.2 Masculinity in Symbolism:

A circle with an arrow placed roughly at 2:00 O'clock position on it represent Mars, (Greek Ares), the god known for strength and war. Hence, the symbol stands to represent men and masculinity.



3. Definition of Femininity

Femininity, also known as Womanhood or Girlhood, is a set of socially constructed traits, behaviors and roles traditionally associated with girls and women.

Femininity, just as masculinity is a fluid and multifaceted concept which does not have a constant shape or recognition. Traditional feminine traits may vary across cultures, regions and religions.

Example: In orthodox Hindu culture, it was believed

that a woman should devote her whole life to his husband, even after his death she should be burned alive with the husband's corpse. This practice is not common in other religions or cultural practices.

3.1 Traditional Feminine

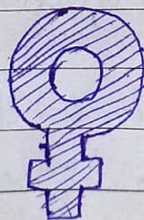
Traits:

Although, traditional feminine traits may vary across regions and cultural practices, some widely accepted and practiced feminine roles are:

Nurturiveness, beauty, cooperation and subordination.

3.2 Femininity in Symbolism:

A circle with a cross placed upside down, placed on the bottom represents Venus (Greek Aphrodite), the goddess of beauty, and a symbol of femininity and women.



4. Critical Analysis of Masculinity and Femininity

4.1 Socially Constructed Roles:
Masculinity and femininity are socially constructed roles and hence, do not shape one's biological make up.

4.2 Dynamic And Everchanging:
Masculinity and femininity are plurals and dynamic. There are many forms of masculinity and many forms of femininity, and may vary across location, climate and cultural practices.

4.3 Masculinity And Femininity
Are Learned:

Masculinity and femininity are learned. Messages about masculinity and femininity are fed via entertainment, media, literature, and other everyday activities.

4.4 Variability In Gender Expression:

A man and a woman may engage in many forms of masculinity and femininity in a given culture depending upon their economical conditions and other factors.

Example: A man taking care of a new born child all by himself may not be considered a part of hegemonic masculinity and yet be practiced.

5. Historical Context Of Traditional Gender Roles

5.1 Agricultural Societies:

Throughout history, the division of labour was done on the basis of difference of biological sexes. Men were involved in hunting, herding and protecting since it required physical strength and endurance whereas women were engaged

in domestic activities such as looking after children and household as well as cooking and cleaning.

5.2 Industrial Revolution:

The industrial revolution opened up many economic opportunities for both men and women. The focus shifted from production of agriculture to production of value added goods and supplies. Traditional gender roles drastically shifted since women also started participating in manufacturing of goods usually in garment industry.

5.3 Colonialism And Imperialism:

The European colonialism affected traditional gender roles significantly in 18th and 19th century. These colonies promoted fast production which required immense labour. Men were given privileges and perks while women were either pushed in domestic sphere or were deeply exploited. Poor working environments and unpaid or low-paid work was

common issues.

5.4 World Wars And Post World Wars:

During World War 1 and 2, women were actively taking part in industrial labour to replace men. After the wars were over, they were sent back to homes to make room for the employment of men returning from wars.

5.5 Feminist Movements:

Throughout 20th and 21st centuries, both men and women are collectively challenging gender roles by actively participating in revolutionary movements of 1st, 2nd and 3rd wave of feminism. These movements have significantly changed the notion of binary perception of gender and construction of traditional gender roles. They have fought for the rights of women, LGBTQ+ individuals and other marginalized communities around the world.

6. Construction of Traditional Gender Roles: A Nature vs Culture Debate

One of the great debate of gender studies have been nature vs nurture debate.

Feminist philosophers and scholars argue whether the traditional gender roles are part of one's biological make up or are learned behaviors. Let us dig deeper to understand where these traditional roles come from and how do they develop.

6.1 The Nature Debate: Biological Factors OF Traditional Gender Roles

a) Chromosomes:

Homo sapiens have 23 pairs of chromosomes. The 23rd pair determines the sex of a human being. The XX chromosome is responsible for the development of female genitalia, ovaries, uterus and milk ducts in breasts. The XY chromosome

is responsible for the development of male genitalia, testes and scrotum.

According to UNHRC, 1.0% to 1.7% universally born children are neither biologically fully male nor female.

Those people who are neither biologically fully male nor female are known as Intersex.

This chromosomal abnormality is traditionally considered a biological anomaly.

b) Hormones:

The hormones are chemicals in human body responsible for normal functioning of the body. The dominant sex hormone responsible for the reproductive activities in females is estrogen. Estrogen can trigger emotional sensitivity, maternal feelings and makes them low on energy depending on the phase of their menstrual cycle.

The testosterone, on the other hand is the dominant sex hormone in males which makes them aggressive and strong since testosterone also helps a male body develop more lean mass hence contributing to physical strength.

c) Brain Size:

Male brain size is 10% larger than the female brain size. ~~The~~ The human brain is divided into two parts i.e. left-hemisphere and Right-hemisphere. The right-hemisphere triggers mathematical and problem solving skills while the left hemisphere develops social skills. Women use both left and right side of their brain but mostly left while men use right side of their brain.

6.2 The Nurture Debate: Theories of Social Construction of Gender

— " Before 1960s, gender was

largely ignored by the scholars of social sciences especially sociology. The main people it focused were men and the topics discussed were significant to the daily life of men, i.e. paid work and social conduct. Women were largely described in their domestic roles such as mothers and wives. —

(Rosemarie Tong, Feminist Thoughts)

The common phrase "we live in a man's world", is a fundamental descriptor of how half of the world's population was not even included or considered to be part of the world throughout history. The main focus of civilizations was to equip men enough for their future prosperity. However, women were often presented as supporting characters for the sustenance of men.

— "Men to Command
and women to obey;
all else confusion." —

- Alfred, Lord Tennyson
1842

a) Structural Functionalism:

Functionalists hold a very radical approach towards the construction of gender roles. This theory was largely developed by Talcot Parson's view of nuclear family structure. The proponents of this theory believe that division of labour based on the difference of sex promote stability in a society on macro-level.

When men earn and women look after children and household chores, it contributes to the collective good of the society. They solely deny the existence of gender discrimination and oppression. Nevertheless, in contemporary times,

70% of the adults say its equally important for new babies to bond with their mother and father, according to Pew Research Center in United States.

b) Gender Performativity:

Judith Butler, in her book "Gender Trouble", states that there is no inherent truth to gender. It is a set of roles pre-defined by the society for males and females. Men and women are always "doing" or "performing" gender. This performance of gender gives an illusion of neutralized society.

— "All Masculine and feminine traits are socially constructed and stereotyped. " —

— Alan G. Johnson — Patriarchy

c) Conflict Theory:

Conflict theory argues that society is based on the systemic division of power. The powerful group wants to keep the weaker group in subordination to maintain their power and the privileges that come along. Proponents of this theory believe that marriage and family largely benefit men, therefore they have always kept

women in subjugation to keep their dominance maintained.

—“ This stereotyping (of gender roles) is done to get power. ”—

- Alan G Johnson - Patriarchy

c) Social Learning Theory:

This theory was developed by Albert Bandura and is quite popular among scholars. The theory suggests that when an individual is launched in a society, they get exposed to their family, peers and schools from where they observe and mimic the roles.

This theory is based on a system of Rewards and Punishments also known as stick and carrot method.

When a child does something socially acceptable, ~~they~~ ^{he is} ~~are~~ praised and rewarded. This is also known as positive reinforcement.

When a child does something socially unacceptable, he is punished, also known as negative reinforcement.

The proponents of this theory suggest that learning of gender roles is a continuous process from childhood to adulthood on different levels.

Gendered colors: Pink and blue.

Gendered toys: Cars and dolls.

Gendered textbooks: Beautiful girl and brave boy.

Gendered media: Male superhero saves weak girls.

Gendered professions: Female nurse and male plumber.

Gender roles in family: Father earns and mother looks after children.

Construction The diagram shows construction of gender on different levels by daily life activities and beliefs.

7. Conclusion

Traditional gender roles have long been debated for whether they are biologically inherent, socially constructed or both.

These traditional gender roles defined for males and females in a given society are known as masculinity and femininity.

Hegemonic masculinity and femininity are largely criticized by feminist philosophers and scholars.