



## Traditional Gender Norms

A good way to think about social norms and values is by looking at what the *expectations* of a man or woman are i.e. what people with traditional values and beliefs think of how men and women *should* behave.

### Traditional male values - "A man should....."

- put more effort into work than intimate relationships
- strive for success and victory – enjoy competition
- believe that looking after children is a woman's responsibility; but be fiercely protective of his own children (like territory)
- value the respect and admiration of male peers – seek status amongst them
- distrust traditionally feminine traits, even in women
- distrust men with feminine traits (especially homosexuals)
- use confrontation – not negotiation - to solve problems
- express upset with anger rather than tears; or by trying to escape problems in drink or drugs
- be reluctant to share emotions with other men (or women)
- hide vulnerability and doubt – sees them as weakness
- prefer action to discussion
- prefer simplicity to complexity
- display physical/mental strength and endurance
- feel that changing one's mind or compromise is a sign of weakness
- value sexual success as a source of strength - feel weakened when without a sexual partner
- territorially 'own' wife/girlfriend/sexual partner – or, more positively, engage in 'gentlemanly' defence of women
- be logical - and assume rationality makes him 'right'.



### Traditional female values - "A woman should...."

- believe personal relationships (friendships, family, romantic) are more important than work
- be competitive with other women – which can turn into 'bitchiness'
- be nurturing – intrinsically ('naturally') able to care for, protect and bring up children (or anyone or thing weaker than they are)
- deal with problems through negotiation and compromise
- believe a male partner's opinions are more important than her own
- believe a male's sexual role is to initiate, and hers is to respond – women who are too sexually-forward are seen as 'sluts'
- accept and acknowledges complexity
- show vulnerability – both physically and emotionally
- feel it is acceptable to change one's mind
- be emotionally articulate (esp. to other women)
- make decisions based on emotion rather than rationality
- enjoy solitude as opportunity for 'self-care' (though feels she has no entitlement to this)
- feel comfortable with not being important or in leadership role (esp. compared to males).

Think about real men and women that you know, or from the media. What typically masculine/feminine traits or values do they have? Do they have traits which also include some from the other gender?



## Progressive Gender Norms

What are some more 'modern' or liberal views about gender?

The first is that the traits identified as 'naturally' male or female by traditionalists are in fact *socially-constructed*, and that most people (and characters in the media) are a mixture of *masculine* and *feminine* traits.

Many of these ideas were first proposed by feminists and then by other gender identity theorists.

How did the following theorists challenge traditional gender norms?

**bell hooks:**

**Judith Butler:**

**David Gauntlett:**



### Some other progressive views:

- men and women should take an equal role in raising children - and other domestic responsibilities
- women have as much sexual desire and enjoy sex as much as men
- men's bodies can be sexually objectified
- women should have equal opportunities for education, employment and pay
- transgender people have the right to *identify* as male or female, regardless of what genitals they have
- gay couples are as nurturing and capable of having children as heterosexual couples
- sexuality is a 'sliding scale' with no-one 100% 'straight' or 'gay' ("There are no such thing as hetero- or homosexual people, there are only hetero- or homosexual *acts*" - Gore Vidal).

Note: just as some 'traditionalists' may believe in some progressive values, so there may be 'progressive' people who disagree with one or more of the beliefs above. (E.g. feminists who don't accept trans-women as truly 'female').