

**Understanding Masculine & Feminine by Don Corne**

Strong or sensitive? Leading or nurturing? Homebuilder or homemaker? What does it mean to be masculine or feminine? While these two terms are common, little is said about what truly defines them. We're familiar with the cultural stereotypes: men don't cry, love sports, understand cars and are muscular; women enjoy decorating, shopping, dolls and are expected to be slim . Still, when asked to define masculinity and femininity, most people have difficulty explaining the differences apart from cultural roles and expectations. Do men have a feminine side, and vice versa? I would like to help clarify the differences, while exploring how understanding these terms can help us with relational skills, especially to the person struggling with their sexuality.

Back to the Basics

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." Genesis 1:27.

You know the story, but what does it tell us about masculinity and femininity? From this account I believe we can logically conclude two things. First, since we are created in the image of God, then God possesses both the masculine and feminine. These are characteristics and qualities of God that He has bestowed upon us. We know that God created Adam first in His image, which would mean that Adam possessed both masculine and feminine qualities.

Second, when God created a helper from Adam's rib, the result was an interdependent pair. Rather than making a clone of Adam, he created another human that would complement the other. While each possessed both masculine and feminine qualities, based on physical differences, the two are designed to express one more predominantly than the other.

Differences Defined

Below are words that help define what is masculine and feminine. Keep in mind that I am not talking about male and female at this point. Both men and women have the ability to express terms used in each column. This list is also not exhaustive, but hopefully gives clarity to what distinguishes one from the other.

Masculine	Feminine
Doing	Being
Outward focused	Inward focused
Factual	Intuitive
Authority	Power
Proverbs	Psalms
Lead, direct	Nurture
Initiate, Assert	Respond
Mechanical	Relational

These differences go beyond culture and are reflected in our physical and psychological make-up. For example: muscular and skeletal development allow men to become stronger 'doers' than women overall. However, it is the female's physical and psychological make-up and emotional capacity to 'be' pregnant, 'be' better at relational activities, and to 'be' more intuitive.

This idea is backed by recent research. "Simon Baron-Cohen, Chair of Psychology at Cambridge University, has been researching sex differences in brain and behavior. Baron-Cohen characterizes male and female brains as being respectively better at 'systemizing' (understanding how systems work) and empathizing (understanding what and why people feel). A more convincing study was done on babies of 24 hours old. It found that boys looked more often and for longer at a mobile than at a human face, and girls did the opposite. Baron-Cohen concluded from this that girls are more predisposed to look at the social stimulus rather than the mechanical, and vice versa for boys".<sup>1</sup> This does not mean that men are always more muscular and mechanical, while women always are more social and intuitive. But it does appear to indicate that part of God's design in creating man and woman was to give basic differences in biological make-up that would distinguish yet complement one another and express certain characteristics explicitly.

A difference in genitalia further illustrates my point. The male genitals are outwardly extended, while the females are inward directed. The design of the male/female sex organs allow for the most natural and pleasurable sexual expression. Furthermore, it is the giving of man's seed and the woman's responsiveness to nurture the seed that work together to produce life. It is these natural complementary designs that I believe validates God's intent for sexual intercourse to be only between a male and female in a marriage relationship. While many argue over scripture references, such innate observations lend credibility to the traditional theology that homosexuality is not God's intent. Homosexual activity and any sex outside of marriage have the potential to produce much physical, emotional, & psychological harm. The medical community has well documented the health risks for these types of behaviors, especially for those who engage in homosexual activity.<sup>2</sup>

### Complementary vs. Competitive

Since the fall in the Garden of Eden there has been conflict between man and woman. We see this throughout history, along with contemporary circumstances. Sermons which attempt to address scriptures about how husband and wife are to relate to one another can produce tension and disagreement. They sometimes teach or imply that one is superior to the other. Looking at the above list, however, we see the masculine and feminine are designed to complement one another. Competition has replaced complementarities in many situations. Masculine traits are esteemed over the feminine in our culture and many others. However, it is only as the two works together that you have genuine masculinity and femininity expressing itself. Exploring the relationship between power and authority gives greater clarity to this concept.

Power (feminine) is the ability to bring various elements and components together to create energy. For example, power is created when lawmakers come together to decide governing rules; people forming an alliance have more power than a single individual in most endeavors. Conversely, authority (masculine)

is the ability to enforce and act upon power. Police officers have the authority to enforce the law, but do not have the power to create those laws.

Think of electricity and the power plants that send energy to our homes. Power, or energy, is created by the union of various elements coming together. However, that energy does little good if it does not get carried into homes and businesses, but has no ability to do that within itself. Therefore, power lines are designed to carry out this duty. It is the "authority" of power lines that lend shape, protection, and boundaries when delivering electricity.

Imagine what would happen if these two tried to function without the other. As energy builds with no outlet it may cause an explosion. Or if the power line is broken, electricity will go in many different directions. Likewise, what would happen if those lines had no electricity to deliver? For the sake of illustration imagine them attempting to force appliances to work with no electricity. In human terms, this often results in using physical force or dominance to abuse authority with no power to back it up. Thus we can see that it would be quite dangerous for the two to function independently.

Putting this in perspective for this discussion, it is the power of the feminine to use intuition, to nurture information, and lend emotion, which in turn gives us the authority to act with wisdom, to lead honorably, and do what is right. For example, a Pastor's wife may pick up on body language and other signals that tune her into the needs of the congregation. She may sense that someone is really hurting even though they say they're okay. Communicating this to her husband allows him to lead and minister more effectively to his congregation in ways that she may not have the authority to do.

To further explain how these complement one another, consider Psalms and Proverbs. Psalms is a wonderful display of emotions being expressed. This feminine characteristic is beautifully displayed from a male. David didn't always do the right thing, but he was responsive to God and desired to know His heart. He freely expressed his worship in creative ways, such as dancing in the streets. How powerful to read about David's relationship with the Father. On the other hand is the wisdom we receive from Proverbs. The rational masculine way of thinking is boldly laid out as we repeatedly read logical ways to live our lives. Proverbs seems to convey, "if you do this, then this will result". Psalms and Proverbs do not compete, but each provides great insight into living a balanced life surrendered to God.

And finally, the beauty of the masculine and feminine working together also brings about personal wholeness. Andy Comiskey explains it best:

"Human beings are created to reflect this fullness of being in right relationship with the opposite-sex. Before that can occur, however, we must make peace with the masculine and feminine dimensions of our individual personalities. The closer we operate out of union with the Creator, the more nearly we reflect both the masculine and the feminine in balance, in a manner appropriate to our sexual identities as male and female.

We need to be grounded in the gender identity tied to our biological sex. An affirmed child is always one who has been adequately blessed and built up as a distinctly male or female person. Security in our respective gender identities as male or female grants us the freedom to own the gender qualities most closely tied to our biological gender, e.g. a boy embracing the masculine. That security frees one to make peace with those qualities within oneself that are typically associated with the opposite gender, e.g. a girl accepting her capacity to initiate and give form, a boy's capacity to connect with others meaningfully.

### Differences Distorted

Hindrances for many people to live with this peace occur when concepts of the masculine and feminine are distorted. Masculine traits of doing, initiating, & acting in authority are often replaced with overdoing, behaving aggressively, and using physical force. Likewise, feminine abilities to be receptive, use power, and be relational can turn into passivity, manipulation, and emotional dependency. When this happens, masculinity or femininity can be perceived as something undesirable.

Men born with more sensitive personalities tend to pull away from the rough and tough images and activities of associated with the male world. Women often see femininity as a liability when they experience responsiveness as passivity, and physical differences as a weakness. Ironically, a natural desire to connect with the true masculine or true feminine in part leads one into homosexual relationships. For example: for a homosexual male, it is safer to connect with masculinity in others who also have same-sex attractions; there is less risk of encountering rejection from condescending macho attitudes.

I can testify to this in my own life. Even before I began seeking help with sexual conflict, I often felt that if I were to have sex with another male, I would feel more affirmed in my own manhood. Moreover, one only needs to read the gay ads in a "Personals" section of any newspaper to see the appetite for "masculinity" and how it is revered.

On the other hand, women who are more assertive, often project strong, tough personalities while seeking feminine comfort through lesbian relationships. These women may also appear less feminine physically in order to feel/appear less vulnerable to men (especially if rape or sexual abuse has occurred).

No matter one's sexual orientation, it is a challenge we all face to affirm and make peace with the masculine and feminine within us. Sexual promiscuity is often portrayed in our society as a means to make this happen. I know of men who were sexually addicted and falsely believed that hiring female prostitutes or having numerous illicit sexual encounters with women made them feel more like a man. It never satiated their hunger, however. Likewise, I've known women who use their bodies to attract men, thus hoping that their feminine self-esteem would grow. One woman I knew would dress up in sexy, revealing outfits and go to the mall. The more heads she turned, the more affirmed she felt. Yet once home alone, the emptiness would set in.

This dilemma can manifest itself in other ways as well. Consider another quote from Andy Comiskey:

"Sons who grew up untouched by their fathers often become parents who can't meaningfully engage with their own kids. And the cycle continues. Though all children are negatively impacted by the absence of good fathering, boys are especially hard-hit. They must hear and respond to the masculine voice if they are to rightfully separate from mother and make peace with their uniquely masculine identities. Without that voice, the boy will have great difficulty finding a reference point through which his own masculinity can be given form and direction.

Like a vine without a trellis, a fatherless boy will be vulnerable to launching out into a void. No positive male image may exist for him. Thus, he may learn that becoming a man means little more than not being feminine. What results are fallen expressions of masculinity that are an outworking of his heartless, fatherless inheritance."

There is hope in all of this, however, by looking to the One who bestowed these traits upon us. Our Creator knows our need to look to Him for security and affirmation. He can mirror back to us the good of the masculine and feminine. The steps to achieving this will not usually be spiritual or mystic experiences, but learning to face fears leading to our misconceptions and sinful behaviors. We can learn also from one another. It has taken healthy relationships with other men and women that have helped me and many others overcome gender insecurities. Healthy relating to God and others is at the core of living out our Father's desire and intent. to be made in His image.

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### Footnotes:

<sup>1</sup> Men and women: like chalk and cheese. Sex differences in brain and behavior, by Lucy Maddox.

<sup>2</sup> Medical Consequences of What Homosexuals Do, by Paul Cameron, Ph.D.  
<http://www.biblebelievers.com/Cameron2.html>