

Masculine-feminine differences are more like differences in perspectives (how we see things) than differences in skills (for instance, reading maps) or traits (for example, nurturing). Once you are shown a perspective different than your own, one that you didn't see initially, you can accept and validate it. You now have *two* valid perspectives: In other words, more than one way to get to 4. With practice, we can all become more open to different perspectives and their value.

MASCULINE AND FEMININE AS APPROACHES

I use the shorthand “approach” to refer to different styles or ways of thinking, seeing things, or behaving. To define “masculine” and “feminine,” I use the framework of a continuum—from extremely masculine to extremely feminine. Before we learn more about this continuum, it is important to understand that feminine does not equal “women,” and masculine does not equal “men.” No woman is exclusively feminine, no man exclusively masculine. All men and women have a mixture of masculine and feminine perspectives, values, and behaviors. We all operate at points along “the masculine-feminine continuum.” We each tend to have a preference or gravitate to a “default” point on the continuum that influences our thinking and shows up in our behavior in certain situations. Also note that I am defining the terms masculine and feminine in a North American context.

Many women, particularly in the business workplace, operate in ways seen as more masculine than feminine. Maybe women with a strong masculine approach are drawn to the business world. Maybe women adapt to what is modeled and rewarded in their environment and so become more masculine. Women who operate in masculine ways can run up against a phenomenon known as the “double bind.” In the double bind, women are seen as weak when they operate in a feminine way and yet incur criticism when they operate in a masculine way. (We'll explore this phenomenon further particularly in chapter 8.)

Men often operate in ways we could call feminine, yet some men are less than thrilled to be seen as feminine. Perhaps they worry that others will see

their use of feminine approaches as having something to do with their sexuality (it clearly doesn't). Perhaps this reluctance is just an indication of what is most valued in our culture. I'd like to eliminate the phenomenon of the "double bind" *and* have men be proud to have feminine as well as masculine strengths. But having men claim their feminine strengths, and call them that, matters much less than having both men and women use, appreciate, and leverage both approaches—regardless of what they call them.

As we work with the continuum in the upcoming chapters, we will look at how women *in general* tend to see things and behave as a way of understanding what is "feminine"—and the strengths and shortcomings of the feminine approach. We will look at how men, *on average*, behave and see things as a way of understanding what is "masculine"—and the strengths and shortcomings of that approach.

If we placed any group—in this case, the U.S. population—on a continuum, we would most likely find two overlapping bell curves, one representing masculine approaches, the other representing feminine approaches.

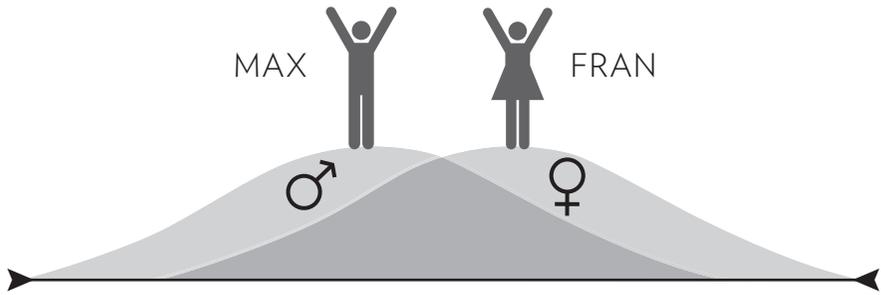


The bell curves overlap significantly because men and women are more alike than they are different. Any one woman may have very similar perspectives, values, and behaviors to any one man. Any one woman may demonstrate a more masculine approach than any one man and vice versa. The centers of the bell curves represent how *most* men think or behave and how women are more *likely* to think or behave. When we generalize, we refer to the centers of the bell curves. Each bell curve has very long "tails," so there are many exceptions outside of the generalized norm represented by the centers of the two curves.

Let me introduce some characters who operate at various points along the continuum: Max, Fran, the Bully, the Bimbo, and the Sage.

INTRODUCING MAX AND FRAN

To make it clear that I am not talking about any one man or woman, I will talk about one hypothetical person who operates, in all areas, smack dab in the middle of the masculine bell curve. I will call that person Max, who could be Maxwell or Maxine. And I will talk about one hypothetical prototype who, always and in every way, operates right in the middle of the feminine bell curve. That person's name will be Fran, who could be Frances or Francis. We'll be getting to know them, how they see and do things, throughout the book. I will often call Max "he" and Fran "she" with the understanding that Max may also be a she and Fran a he. Although we may have a behavioral preference, none of us operates the same way every day and in every circumstance; Max and Fran do, however, because they are helping us define their respective approaches.



To establish an understanding and appreciation of masculine and feminine approaches, I will mostly talk about Max's approach and Fran's approach. For variety, I may use shorthand statements like "the average man does ____," or "women tend to prefer ____." Obviously a literal reading of such statements is simply false. In this context, I am talking about our prototypes, Max and Fran. The point is not to make literal statements but to increase our understanding of how the genders differ in general and, from that understanding, align on common meanings for the terms "masculine" and "feminine." Generalization is principally a time saver. We generalize consciously (studying Max and Fran) just to understand masculine vs. feminine so we can see both perspectives. Again, only if we understand the differences can we observe, appreciate, and leverage both.

Occasionally I will talk about *women*, not Fran. I will let you know when I am doing that: For example, when I address double binds, how women who