

Masculinity and Femininity

Geert Hofstede is a Dutch researcher and social psychologist who dedicated himself to the study of culture. Hofstede sees culture as "broad patterns of thinking, feeling and acting" in a society. In Hofstede's view, Masculinity and Femininity differ in the social roles that are associated with the biological fact of the existence of the two sexes. Masculinity and Femininity refer to the dominant sex role pattern in the vast majority of both traditional and modern societies: that of male assertiveness and female nurturance.

-Femininity: "Femininity stands for a society in which social gender roles overlap: Both men and women are supposed to be modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life"

-Masculinity: "Masculinity stands for a society in which social gender roles are clearly distinct: Men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success; women are supposed to be more modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life"

Hofstede's Feminine and Masculine Culture Dimensions: "Masculine cultures expect men to be assertive, ambitious and competitive, to strive for material success, and to respect whatever is big, strong, and fast. [Masculine cultures] expect women to serve and care for the non-material quality of life, for children and for the weak. Feminine cultures, on the other hand, define relatively overlapping social roles for the sexes, in which, in particular, men need not be ambitious or competitive but may go for a different quality of life than material success; men may respect whatever is small, weak, and slow." In feminine cultures, modesty and relations are important characteristics. This differs from in masculine cultures, where self-enhancement leads to self-esteem. Masculine cultures are individualistic, and feminine cultures are more collective because of the significance of personal relationships. "The dominant values in a masculine society are achievement and success; the dominant values in a feminine society are caring for others and quality of life."

Questions for small group discussion:

1. What do you think of Hofstede's definitions for masculine and feminine cultures?
2. Would you say the society of the Ibo people in *Things Fall Apart* is primarily masculine or feminine? What masculine elements do you see? What feminine elements do you see?
3. Do you think modern culture in America is primarily masculine or feminine? What masculine elements do you see? What feminine elements do you see? How does our culture compare and contrast with the culture described in *Things Fall Apart*?
4. What kind of factors (social, environmental, economic, political, etc.) do you think could influence a culture to be more masculine or more feminine?