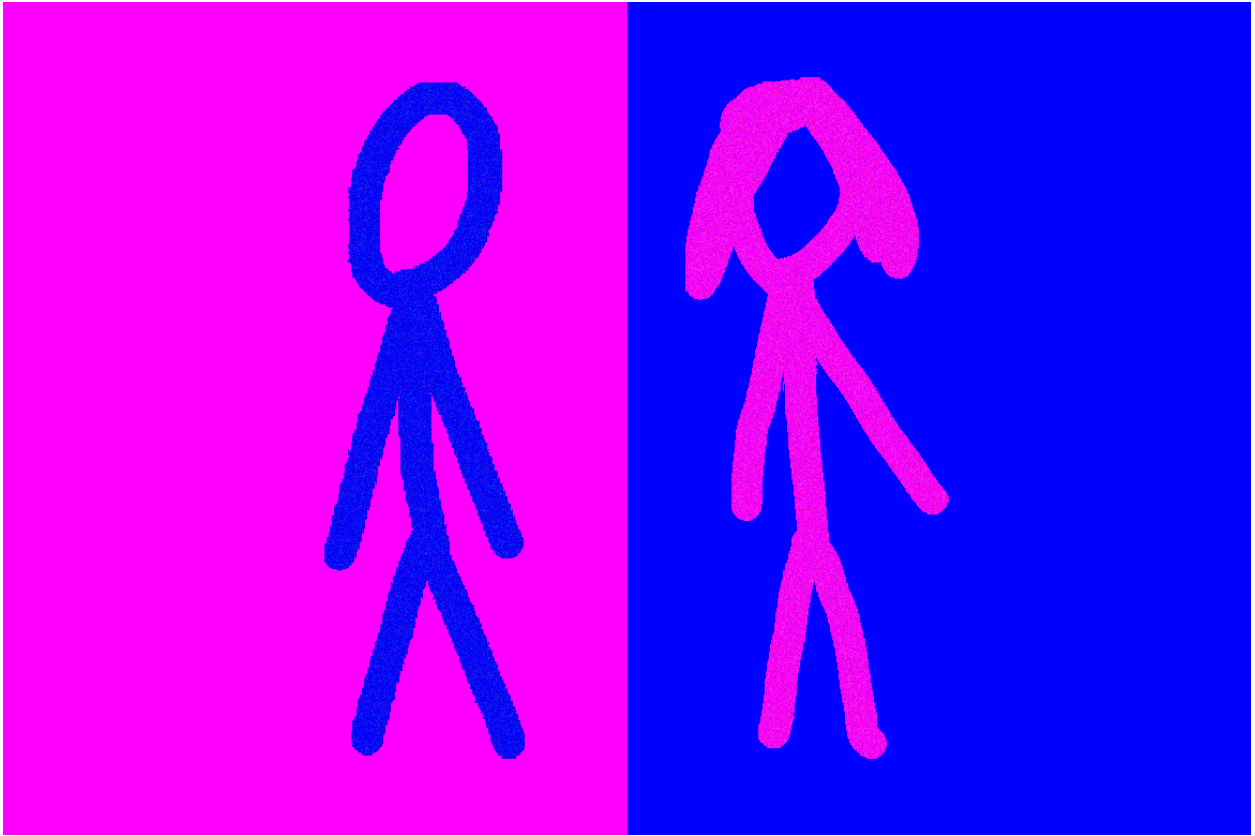


Stick Figures

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Keywords: *gender theory, sociology, philosophy*

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Essense: Gender is a social structure

Abstract: My musings on gender, how I've observed it through the years, and how stick figures can betray the best-kept secrets of society's most structured element. I go over why men aren't able to be expressive, why women are encouraged to, why the word "woman" is written like it is, and why the idea of defaults is the cause to all this, all in just under 10 pages. This is the best essay I've written.

Table of Contents

1. To Be Expressive	3
2. Defaults	6

1. To Be Expressive

s a child, I was oddly in-tune with my perception of the gender norms of the world around me. In kindergarten, I watched as my classmates divided themselves by gender and chanted rhymes about the other. I noticed how boys would continually insult and belittle girls, so I joined the girl's team as an honorary member. I disliked how we were separated, so I said I liked pink better than blue.¹ I listened to both sides' opinions during petty fights and tried to hang out with the girls as much as I did with the boys. In doing so, I discovered that the girls were no better than us. When I crouched down to look at a bug, the air would be filled with pleas not to squish it, despite me being perhaps the least likely kid there to squish a random bug.

My rebellious efforts, as you may have guessed, were fruitless. I learned at that moment that gender is among the most tightly reinforced social constructs, and one child loudly proclaiming that they like the color pink will not change anything, even to a group of kindergarteners. It's funny how fluctuous the traits we assign each gender really are. As late as the early 1900s, pink was largely seen as a strong, powerful, masculine color, blue vice versa, but nowadays it is strictly feminine. We instruct our young ladies to be mild-mannered and graceful, but we assign the prefix "gentle" when formally speaking about men. In an effort to promote "strong women" in cinema, we make women more masculine and make them strong, emotionless leaders.

¹ I distinctly remember two girls giving each other a glance of astonishment when I said that. In general, I remember an odd amount from my kindergarten year, even for my extremely detailed long-term memory. I was very young, but I feel like it happened yesterday. I'm too young to be feeling this, help.

Oh, and if you're wondering which I really do like better, it's blue. Pink can be too garish too easily and is a little too strong for my taste. Blue is calm and elegant. Wait a second...



When the idea for this article first rooted itself in my mind, I was thinking about my clothes. A rather odd topic for me to be pondering about, since I'm not a fashionable person and never have been. But I felt a distinct desire to dress in a way that might suit me better. But there was something looming over that desire, enshrouding it in shadow and refusing to budge.

Why can't [men](#) be expressive?

The answer to that question is a lot more nuanced than it originally appears, so I won't give you the answer immediately. Instead, I'd like to offer some [handwave](#) answers that some folks like to provide, and address each of them.

[Handwave](#) #1: They just can't be. It's rooted in their DNA.

This is scientifically untrue. As my sociology teacher likes to say, there is nothing on the Y chromosome telling [men](#) to like blue, or, in this case, to not be expressive. This also assumes that there aren't any expressive men, which... [Michael Jackson](#)? [Freddie Mercury](#)? [Stephen Sanchez](#)? [Tyler, The Creator](#)? [David Bowie](#)? [Harry Styles](#)? [MF DOOM](#)? (I have no idea why they are all musicians. You get my point.)

I made light work of that one, let's move on.

[Handwave](#) #2: There's nothing stopping them. They just don't want to.

I could be annoying and start throwing the list of cool [men](#) back at you, but I will instead simply point out the monolithing of [men](#) this [handwave](#) and many others do. Also, there *is* something stopping us from being expressive (which we're getting to, I swear).



The third one:

Handwave #3: They are, in their own way.

Oh please. Are you seriously calling jeans and a T-shirt expressive, especially when compared to the six quadrillion options² girls have? Yes, girls *can* and often *do* wear jeans and a T-shirt, but at least they have the option to choose! Our range of clothing choices is very limiting; being expressive as a **guy** is about a thousand times harder than being expressive as a **girl** because of the lack of choice alone.

And finally:

Handwave #4: They shouldn't be.

Apparently misandry does exist, because I have heard this one a surprising number of times. Anyways, with this all out of the way, we can finally answer the question of why **men** can't be expressive, and the answer to that lies in the idea of *defaults*.

² Seriously, sometimes I hear girls discuss clothing that I've literally never heard of before. Then again, I didn't know what a blouse was until eighth grade, so this might just be me...



2. Defaults

When I was in the sixth grade, I had a very good social studies teacher. (Social studies is just history in a trench coat.) He was very **masculine**; he was very tall, strong, and had a very man-like chuckle. He was a huge fan of the Mets, so much so that he got the announcer of the Mets to voice him an intro for his video lessons during the pandemic. It was very cool. During that class, the **boy** who sat next to me raised his hand with an amused expression on his face. He asked a question that has stuck with me strongly all these years later.

"Yes, **Sam**?" the teacher asked, sighing. (His name is not **Sam**, I've changed it to protect his privacy.)

"So, like, technically... isn't everyone a **man**? Because **wo-men**, you know?"

Sam was asking this as a joke, but he's not wrong, because why *does* the word "**women**" have the word "**men**" in it? It's so weird! But it's not just a strange oddity. In fact, the first two letters of the word "**woman**" have a staggering amount of societal impact, so much so that I believe that they are the direct cause for the **male** inability for expression, and many other structures of gender.

Do you ever think about stick figures? (I promise all this is going somewhere.) I think stick figures are pretty neat. I drew my first few stories using them. But they're also a huge calling card for gender roles. Don't understand? Okay, let me bring out a friend of mine.

Come out, buddy.

M



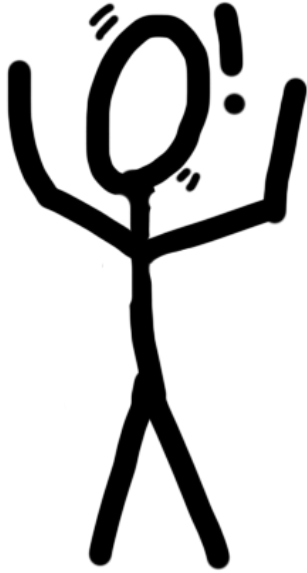
Say hi!



Hold on, let me increase your size a little. Are you ready?



Okay, here you go.



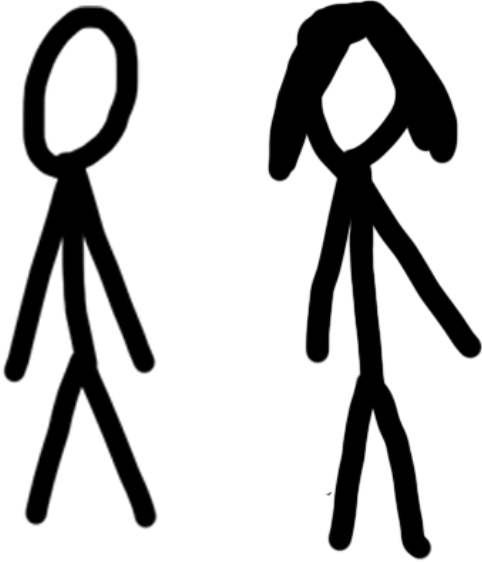
Hold on to your socks.

Masculinity is the *default gender*. This is one of those ideas that makes you hesitate when you first hear it, consider it, and then feel everything clicking into place as you think about it more.

That's why men can't be expressive, it's because they're the default. The standard package.

Women are expected to be more expressive, because they're an *addition*. Why else is traditional **male** hair short, and traditional **female** hair longer? It's because **femininity** is something *added to masculinity*, as traditionally feminine hair is *added to* traditionally masculine hair. That's why the word for "**woman**" *adds to* the word for "**man**" by putting those two little letters at the start.

That's why a **man** in a **dress** feels so much more shocking and strange than a **girl in a suit**. It's because in our minds, **masculinity** is the default, and a **girl wearing a suit** is simply a human reverting back to *its original state*.



And yes, that is also why a stick figure with no hair, the default, is [male](#), and it is only once we *add* hair that the stick figure becomes [female](#).

[Masculinity](#) is the default, and it sucks. I rest my case.