

## The Feminization of Miss Piggy: Margaret Mead and Gender Ideology

Miss Piggy: What are you reading, Kermie? *Sex and Temperament* by Margaret Mead? Is that a spicy romance novel for *moi* just in time for Valentine's Day?

Kermit: Uh... Uh, not not exactly. Mead was an anthropologist who studied three tribes in New Guinea—the Arapesh, the Mundugumor, and the Tchambuli.

Miss Piggy: Wow. Riveting. Be still my beating heart.

Kermit: You'd like her theory on how gender behavior occurs. After researching these tribes, Mead found that there are no inherent, universal masculine and feminine traits. For instance, in the Arapesh tribe, both men and women were expected to be gentle, cooperative, and nurturing. In the Mundugumor tribe, both men and women were expected to be aggressive, competitive, and emotionally volatile. And in the Tchambuli tribe, men were more emotionally expressive, artistic, and concerned with appearance. The women were more dominant, practical, and leaders. Her findings contradict our Western ideals of what counts as masculine or feminine characteristics. She concluded that these traits are therefore learned through culture, socialization, and child-rearing practices.

Piggy, you have an aggressive, domineering personality that in the West is associated with masculinity, not femininity. And –

Miss Piggy: Hi-ya!! [She karate chops Kermit]. Hi-ya!! I'm not FEMININE?!?! Hi-ya! I'm the biggest beauty influencer in the world!! Hi-ya!

Kermit: Piggy! Stop Hi-ya-ing me and listen! I'm not saying you're not feminine. I know you're *all* woman. But the traits you exhibit aren't what we in the West typically associate with how women behave or are expected to behave. And that's good! It's what makes you, well, you. It means that these are *learned* rather than biological traits. You're the embodiment of Mead's point precisely because of your bold, atypical expression of femininity. You're redefining what it means to be feminine in the US.

Miss Piggy: Hmmm... What about masculinity?

Kermit: Yep. According to Mead, masculinity is socially constructed as well.

Miss Piggy: Would normative male alexithymia be an example?

Kermit: Um.... Uh... wha what is that?

Miss Piggy: Oh, so Mister Smarty-Green Pants doesn't know everything? [NMA \(normative male alexithymia\)](#) is the suppression of emotions by men. Since men are taught to suppress their emotions so much—or more specifically, men are taught to suppress certain emotions like

vulnerability and crying and amplify other emotions like anger and aggressiveness—psychologists created an entire subcategory for them.

Kermit: Uh... yeah. That works. In the Tchambuli tribe, men are taught to be more emotionally expressive than women, as opposed to the US, where men are taught that being emotionally expressive is too feminine, “sissy,” and subordinate. But for the Tchambuli, gender roles are reversed, thus demonstrating that gendered traits are not biologically determined. She showed that using different child-rearing practices and cultural norms and expectations, masculine and feminine characteristics are malleable and subjective.

Miss Piggy: This is reminiscent of [Simone de Beauvoir's](#) ideas in *The Second Sex*. She says a woman is not born a woman but becomes a woman through a process of feminization (Anderson and Pena-Guzman, 2025). To be feminine is to be subordinate. And this subordination is a key component of sexism. Also relevant here is [Judith Butler's theory of gender “performativity.”](#) For Butler, gender is a verb, not a noun. It's constructed through repetitive, unconscious acts of performativity relative to societal norms. So it is in the “doing” rather than the “being” that we understand gender.

Kermit: Um... Uh... yeah... well... uh...

Miss Piggy: Sounds like someone skipped their gender studies class.

Kermit: I had tadpole swimming lessons that day! Anyway... Mead felt that by separating biological sex from temperament, men and women could be freed of gendered divisions of labor. Society instead could be organized around individual aptitude rather than sex-based roles. To use a modern-day example, after the 2008 financial crisis, [Icelandic women](#) led the country and businesses toward economic recovery. They used feminine-coded characteristics or characteristics typically associated with Western femininity but considered antithetical to business, such as cooperation, openness, and fairness. Icelandic leadership is now studied as a model assessing whether certain gendered traits assigned to women are more advantageous for economics (Nelson, 2011).

Miss Piggy: Okay. But there's the rise of the [Tradwife](#) and the [manosphere](#) with the likes of [Andrew Tate](#), [Bronze Age Pervert](#), and Clavicular preaching toxic masculinity and rigid, gendered roles based on biology. [The “performative male”](#) is also a new trend in which men allegedly “perform” the role of a sensitive, feminist-loving man to attract women. What's problematic is that some men may be acting in good faith by sincerely challenging ideas of masculinity, while others may be acting in bad faith by pretending to be that guy. What would Mead say about these trends?

Kermit: I think she'd hate the Tradwives and Manosphere. I don't think she'd want to discourage sincere men from challenging socially constructed masculine traits, though. What's important for Mead, whether it's Icelandic women or incels, is not to ascribe gendered characteristics to men and women based on their biological sex. The traits female Icelandic business and government leaders exhibit should be viewed less through a gender lens and more through a “qualities best suited for the role” lens.

Miss Piggy: Maybe that's what we need. Instead of masculine or feminine characteristics, we should strive for universal human characteristics like cooperation, kindness, and a commitment to peace. Let's not filter everything through the male or female gaze. Except you, Kermie, I'll always filter *you* through the female gaze. Kissee kissee.

Kermit: Oh, uh... [murmurs] How do I get out of this one?

#### Works Cited:

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