

DADDY'S GIRL

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[Assignment: In this paper, you will take a stand on society's treatment of men and women, specifically on which gender is more restricted by societal norms. The stand you take will be your thesis. In developing your paper, plan to compare and contrast the attitudes of society toward men and women in the areas of work, child rearing, and home.]

Society dictates roles to people from the moment they are born. Girl babies are wrapped in pink blankets and boy babies are wrapped in blue blankets. Parents are programmed by society to teach their children these roles. They are told to hang baseball bats in their boy's room and surround their girls with flowers and dolls. My mother died when I was six years old. Since that time, it has always been just my father and me. With no woman at home, I saw only the male perspective on housework, child rearing, and employment. Because my father had to fill both the role of dad and mom, I realized it is possible and even good for men and women to break society's set roles.

Society says that it is the woman's place to be the homemaker. In my friends' homes, their mothers were the ones who baked cookies, cleaned their rooms and made their Halloween costumes. Their dads were always working, hunting, or doing so-called "manly" jobs. In my home, it was not like this. My dad and I had no one to do the "woman's" work. My dad did the cooking and cleaning and as I got older, he taught me how to do it. Before he could teach me to do woman's work, he had to break society's set rules and learn how to do woman's work himself. But Dad also fixed the cars, mowed the lawn, and handled the family finances. And even though that is "men's work" to society, my dad taught me to do these things too. As I got older, I started to do more cleaning and cooking. Even though I was filling the typical female role, unlike other girls my age, I knew how to fix a carburetor and trim a hedge. Thus, there are many things I understand because I was raised solely by a man.

In our culture it is usually left up to the mother to raise the children. She is the one expected to stay home with the babies, to pick out their clothes, to teach them manners and give them advice. Society believes fully in the "like mother, like daughter" and "like father, like son" theory. Society dictates that mothers will teach their daughters how to act like proper young ladies, and father will teach their sons to act like impressive young men. However, in my family, my father had to teach me how to act like a lady. In Betty Rollins' essay "Motherhood: Who Needs It?", she says "A girl's mother is usually her first teacher" (*The Norton Reader* 327). My father, not a woman, taught me about puberty and boys. My six-foot-tall father taught me how to wear make-up and walk in high heels. My dad also taught me how to play baseball and how to throw a curveball better than any boy in the neighborhood. In my house, my dad filled the male role of provider, disciplinarian, handyman, and father. Also he had to fill the female role of teacher, nurse, homemaker, confidant

and mother. He has always pushed me to be the best at whatever I do, be it a male role or female role.

Society says a man must work to support his family. If he does not work, the general public will assume there is something wrong with him. He is to take care of all the family's finances and make life comfortable. A woman is praised if she wants to work, but in a two-parent home, it is totally acceptable if she does not. A woman has the freedom to choose to work, but her main priority is to raise her family. In my house dad had to fill both of these positions. My dad was the money-maker and the mother. He knew both of these roles, and knew I could be a better person by also knowing both roles.

There were many times I wished that I had a mother to turn to, but my father did a wonderful job of raising me. He showed me the man's role and taught me the most he could about being female. Anything he could not teach me, society showed me. There are definite roles for men and women set by society. Society is not about to change, and the roles are not about to disappear. But I know from experience that it is possible for men and women to move freely between society's roles. And I know that if everyone were as courageous as my father, these stereotypes would slowly fade away, leaving us with an open-minded society.

[Editor's Note: It should come as no surprise that a number of our students are interested in the role gender plays in the way we are raised, and the way gender roles are shifting (see also Rachel Pearson's essay, "Commercials Are Teaching Our Children the Wrong Things," and also Nicole Katonah's "Ms.") Teachers have found this subject area a natural for teaching patterns of organization based on comparison and contrast.]