

# SISSY

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[Assignment: Write an essay in which you define something that resists easy definition, or something you feel qualified to define more precisely, less generically than the dictionary does. What is high school, really? When for you did childhood end and something else begin? What does the word "home" mean to you these days?]

Twenty years ago close friends of my parents adopted a baby boy. However, as Allen grew up it was clear he was not going to be an exceptional athlete. His younger brother, Dave, however, had a lot of potential. Allen's family is very much into sports. In fact, one of Allen's cousins plays football for a major university and his sister was raised as a tomboy and is more into sports than many of my male friends.

In junior high, Allen's parents encouraged him to play basketball and he did. Mainly he collected the balls and sat on the bench. Our area had a tournament every year and Allen's team was in the same tournament as my team. Once, as I watched Allen's team play, I saw Allen sitting enthusiastically on the bench doing the cheers and the motions with the cheerleaders. As the adult spectators around me chuckled and pointed, I saw his parents trying to get his attention and to make him stop. I myself found it quite humorous and many of us made fun of Allen later.

For many years, Allen was socially immature and appeared to lack the common sense and drive needed to be successful in the working world. I remember as Allen was finishing high school, I would hear his family and friends talking quietly amongst themselves about how Allen would ever support a family. Although Allen never showed it, I am sure he felt a great deal of pressure to fit the mold into which his family was trying to squeeze him.

Allen endured pressures different from those which women often complain about. Men have pressures and obligations they feel they have to fulfill also, but men are taught to be proud of these roles. Thus, whether they like it or not, they certainly do not complain or form protest groups. My friend Allen is a perfect example of this type of situation. Throughout his life, people tried to pressure Allen into the characteristic male role: playing sports and getting a job that can support a family. When Allen failed to perform to the standards everyone felt were necessary, he was either ridiculed or worried about.

This area is one in which women need no longer worry. It is all right for a woman to be an athlete, for a woman to work, for a woman to be a homemaker, or even for a girl to be a tomboy. In fact, most fathers find it amusing and even enjoy it if their daughters are tomboys. Thus, we can see there are many different roles that women can choose. However, if a man decides not to play sports but rather to play with Barbies, dolls, and other feminine items, people are worried. It is not acceptable for a young boy to be a "sissy."

Young boys are pushed much harder into stereotypes than are girls. I often hear mothers say to their daughters, "You can be whatever you want; don't let anyone tell you what you have to be." This comment is never made to boys. In fact, I myself ran into this same dilemma. During my sophomore and junior years in high school, I was constantly pushed by my parents to choose an occupation. As I considered majors, my parents would say things like, "What can you do with a history major?" or "How could you get a good job with just a geography major?" They continually pushed me to choose a major with a direct occupation.

New societal standards suggest that men are no longer the sole breadwinners for a family. However, if men are no longer the sole providers, they are still the figurehead providers. If a family is not being properly provided for, people do not look at the woman with disgust but rather at the man. Because of changes in society, women have choices; men are still channeled along the same path.

Another example: the members of the Smith family are good friends of our family and one of their sons recently got married. Tom is unable to get a job and when he does get a decent job, he is usually fired within a week or two. His wife has the same problem. Tom and Lisa are very nice people but when I hear people talking about the family, I hear them say, "That Tom Smith, look at his wife and daughter. He needs to buckle down and start providing for them." I do not hear, "That Lisa Smith, look at her husband and daughter; she needs to start supporting them."

This example illustrates a pressure that is put on young boys from the time they are born. My mom is a fourth grade teacher and has gone to many seminars trying to improve her teaching approaches. She continually comments that these seminars claim teachers around America put more pressure on and dedicate more assistance to males who are not doing well than to females who are doing poorly. Why is this? Clearly, society still expects the man to be the provider for the family. The woman is still the supplemental provider, and in subtle ways we are preserving this trend for the future.

Jack and Inge Erickson are going against the flow in this regard. Jack is a theatre major from Indiana University, and Inge is a biochemist from Purdue University. Inge earns \$65,000 per year, while Jack earns under \$30,000. However, both are pleased with their situation. Jack is perfectly capable of handling the fact that he is not the primary breadwinner, but he does not go spreading this around. If more people knew about this situation, Jack would probably be looked down upon.

Clearly there are double standards that exist within our society. Women's liberation groups such as a NOW parade around declaring that women are the ones being hampered by society's stereotypes. In many cases, these women are correct and they probably do deserve to be released from these stereotypes. Yet men are hampered by the same society with different standards and will continue to encounter these heavy burdens with silent mouths and weary hearts.