

## MALE OR FEMALE: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

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[Assignment: Write an essay in which you reflect on how your upbringing differed from the upbringing of any siblings you might have of the opposite sex.]

In August of 1976, I was born into a family which already included a five year old son. Having an older brother taught me a lot of things. For example, I learned rather quickly that Matt was not only older but also stronger. He helped me to learn to ride my bicycle and to play 52 Card Pick-up. However, the most distinctive thing I learned from living with him was that boys and girls are not treated equally.

My brother seemed to have an easygoing childhood while my childhood seemed planned out. By planned out I mean each privilege had a set age assigned to it that did not necessarily correspond to the age my brother was when he was granted this privilege. For example, when my parents went on vacation and my brother was sixteen he stayed alone in our house. However, when the same situation occurred when I was sixteen I had to pack my bags and move to Grandma's for the week. Do not get me wrong--I love my grandma, but at age sixteen independence and equality was what I was looking for. I also felt I was being treated unfairly when it came to establishing my curfew. My curfew, that still stands today, was set at 10:00 P.M. on school nights and midnight on weekends. My brother, on the other hand, had no curfew.

To my parents, dating was another very touchy subject when I entered high school. I remember being asked out by a junior (age seventeen) when I was a freshman (age fourteen) and asking for permission to go. The answer was a flat no, with no opportunity for discussion. My brother would have never had to ask. Matt would be dating a girl for a couple months before my parents would ask to meet her. After I finally got a chance to accept a date at age sixteen, it was not "yes, you can go" but "we'll see, let us meet him first." I know very well that if my parents did not like a boy I wanted to date I would not have stepped out the door with him.

Another aspect that was difficult for me was choosing a college. My parents paid a lot of money for my brother to go to Rose-Hulman, a very expensive all-male engineering school. He attended for a semester before he flunked out. Therefore, when it came time for me to choose a college, my parents wanted me to go to either a community college or a state school. That did not go over well with me. I wanted the same opportunity my brother had when he chose his college. I felt I should not have to settle for my second choice school because my brother flunked out of college. Just because Matt did not succeed in college does not mean that I will not. So after much debate I got to attend college at my first choice, Valparaiso University.

Even though Matt got to more or less do whatever he wanted to, when he did get punished it was not a pretty sight. Matt's punishments were usually more severe than what they were for me. I am not quite sure if the reason behind this was because he was a male or because my parents had already dealt with a particular situation before they encountered it with me. For

example, I recall my brother always being grounded, even for the littlest things. To this day I have never been grounded.

My brother also had to work harder for what he wanted. For example, both my brother and I were not allowed to get a job until we turned sixteen, so that meant that when we got our driver's licenses we would most likely not have a car. My brother was required to earn money to purchase his car and my parents said they would match what he made, up to \$1000. As a result, he did not get his first car until he was almost seventeen. On the other hand, three months before I turned sixteen my parents bought me a car of about twice the value of my brother's car. At that time, I only had \$700 to spend on a car. Therefore, my parents established a payment plan and I only ended up paying \$700 for a \$3000 car.

My brother moved out when I was fourteen so he was not there when I received most of my privileges. I believe that was a very good thing because it would have caused more arguments between us. We did not get along as it was, so that would have just added to the strain between us. Even though my brother is married and has a family of his own, he still does not hesitate to remind me how easy I have it.

I believe in some ways I did have it a lot easier, but then again there were many things that I had to make great strides to overcome, things that my parents would not have hesitated to allow my brother to do. This diversity in the ways my brother and I were raised caused both of us to create two very different kinds of relationships with our parents. I was daddy's little girl; therefore, I knew how to sweet talk my dad into just about anything I wanted. However, if I tried that with my mom it turned into a screaming match. Matt was almost the opposite. He knew how to "play my Mom like a fiddle." It never worked when he tried that with our dad. This caused our family to take sides whenever we had problems, which I do not think was a good thing. However, after my brother moved out, I established a better relationship with my mother and now we are more like friends than mother and daughter.

I feel that whether a child is male or female they should be treated equally. However, I do realize how hard it is to erase stereotypes that have been around for so long. Circumstances still make it more difficult for women to be secure and for parents with daughters to feel safe about them and their physical well-being. I also realize that a lot of rules are made because of family traditions and values, but hopefully the day will come when parents treat both their boy and girl children equally. This will not only limit fights between siblings but also it will help society in the long run. Both male and female adults will be able to get along better in the work force if they feel they are not above or below each other socially or intellectually.