I have personally been pressured to behave and dress in more traditionally feminine ways by my mother and sisters. This often goes against my nerdy, tomboyish nature, especially since I do not enjoy wearing things like earrings, high-heels, (most) bright colors, or frilly clothes - the types of things that are equated to femininity. I also do not often act as elegant or passive as my mother would prefer, but rather I am generally blunt, cynical, awkward, and geeky. These characteristics do not really fall under the clear-cut generalizations for females; they are somewhere in between male and female characteristics. Many people still stick to traditional ideas that men and women should behave in ways that fall into specific categories determined solely on their gender. However, male or female gender-specific identities are irrelevant in modern, civilized society. Gender roles are social constructs developed over time and are not based on natural human behavior. This is because gender roles evolved as a way to organize the necessary tasks done in early human society. Some may say that due to the fact that traditional gender roles have been practiced for so long, they should not be changed, and are now a key element in human development.Nevertheless, in many of the modern societies today, there is no need for traditional gender roles, because both men and women are able to do many of the same necessary tasks, thereby making gender-specific behaviors irrelevant. These stereotypes can be harmful because they motivate people to condemn and oppress those who do not fit the traditional gender roles. As a result of this oppression, many people struggle to reach their full potential. Therefore, it is critical that we encourage everyone to follow and express their own truth, regardless of gender norms, so that everyone is able contribute fully to our society.

Many of the gender stereotypes we know today were not always present in the past; they are relatively new trends in human society. This is because social expectations of each gender change over time, and often develop differently in cultures around the world. Sara Bobolts, a writer for *The Huffington Post*, stated how several common gender stereotypes changed over time. Bobolts describes how gender stereotypes, such as the color blue being for boys and the color pink being for girls, are new concepts. She explains that between the years 1918 and 1940, pink was viewed as a masculine color, while blue was seen dainty and soft, making it best suited for females. Bobolts also states that during the Middle Ages in Europe, high-heels were exclusively for men, rather than women. They were seen as a “sign of masculinity”, depending on their height. This shows that the attributes people connect with “traditional” gender categories were very different only a few centuries ago, and cannot be used as a reliable basis for establishing roles today.
Furthermore, based on an article published by Pennsylvania State University, many gender roles around the world were dictated by the environment and the needs of a society. The document also states how gender roles vary based on the historical and cultural background of a society, as well as ethnicity (“The Social Construction of Gender”). For example, in many old Native American and African tribes, cultures were matriarchal, meaning that women were often leaders, healers, and important figures in their communities. This is different from most Asian and European societies, where men were the only ones with any social or political power. Therefore, depending on the time period or region, gender roles vary drastically. Since these typecasts based on sex are different depending on where and when they are used, they clearly hold no real significance to human society as a whole in this modern age; they were made up and therefore can change. As a result, they should not be used as a guideline as to how people of a certain sex should behave, because they are not reliable nor constant.

Although many people seem to fit within the specific categories of masculinity or femininity, these generalizations are simple social constructs. Alice Eagly and Wendy Wood, authors on the psychology website APA-PsycNet.com, state that “general differences between the behaviors of the genders are the result of the social roles they were placed in”; namely those developed in the first human social structures. Nathaniel Givens, an author for Times and Seasons, also states that gender roles were not invented, but were developed over time, and that they cannot work as generalized distinctions. Givens also explains how many traditional gender roles were based on the idea that parental duties should not overlap, rather, they be taken care of separately (Givens). For instance, during the Paleolithic Era and early Neolithic Era, during which most societies were nomadic tribal units, men hunted animals for sources of meat, skins, and bones, while women scavenged for roots, nuts, and berries, as well as looked after the children. These tasks held equal importance to early human societies, so both genders were viewed as equal. Over time, the technological and agricultural developments of the Neolithic Revolution spread, causing more nomadic tribes to settle down into stationary lifestyles. Thus, women began to stay home or within the settlement to take care of children, make clothes, and other domestic tasks, while men worked the fields to grow food, domesticate animals, and continue to hunt, although to a lesser scale. While children and women did tend to the fields with the men, they were often not as physically capable as the men, and thus began to be valued as less. This shows that roles were not necessarily based on gender, but rather they were based on societal needs, and, since needs remained relatively the same, they became seen as the traditional roles that men and women needed to fulfill. This demonstrates how gender roles were created based on the needs of a society. However today, the majority of the jobs that are viewed as important, such as being a lawyer, doctor, politician, business executive, etc., are attainable by both sexes. This means that past gender roles should not apply anymore, because both sexes are now equally capable of contributing to society.

Also, it is a common misconception that the words “gender” and “sex” are words used to describe the same thing, when there is actually a big difference between the two. Judith Lorber, a professor of sociology and human studies, describes how the “gender” of a person is a “social phenomenon,” and that being a man or woman is different from being a female or male. Lorber explains that the sex of a person is different from their sexuality because sexual orientation,
identification, and practices are socially constructed and have their own specific forms of practice. Kate Gilles, the author of “What is Gender? And Why is Gender Important,” also states that sex is an anatomical term, used to describe the physical characteristics of a person, while gender is a generalization of how men and women should look and behave in society. These facts show the clear differences between sex and gender. Sex is anatomical, while gender is social and psychological. Therefore, gender should not be confined to the sex of an individual, because gender is not actually a biological occurrence.

Based on a survey done on Debate.org, some people believe that gender-specific expectations are necessary because each gender has jobs they fulfill in society; they “are necessary for society to function naturally”. Others believe that gender roles can never be abolished because of the biological differences between men and women, and that traditional gender behaviors are simply “in our nature”. (“Are gender roles...”) Daniel Miesser explains the logic behind basic conservative views on gender roles, stating that most conservatives believe that “girls act girly because it’s innate, and that gender programming [by society] has nothing to do with it.” This view by conservatives often allows them to enforce their belief that women should do domestic work, as well as other “feminine” things because it is natural to them (Miesser). Many people base their opinions on gender roles on their religion, such as Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Hinduism. While the Bible, used in whole or in part by Christians and Jews, does not provide clear guidelines on gender identity, it does provide some insight on gender roles in society. The common examples are Adam and Eve. Adam was created first, and was viewed as the leader who guided the world, while Eve was his helper (“How Does the Bible describe Gender Roles?”). The Bible also specifies the authority of men over their wife (or wives) and daughters. For instance, when Eve eats the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil in the book of Genesis, her first sin was stated to not be eating the fruit, but was leaving the area of Adam’s authority. This belief motivated men who followed Abrahamic religions to believe they had a dominant role over women, while women were meant to be subordinate to their husbands (Beisner). However, just as high heels were once exclusively worn by men in the Middle Ages, and pink was a masculine color, these views are outdated, being largely rooted in the eras from which they are based.

Despite the reasons that people who still believe in the relevance of gender roles present, there is a lot of evidence that contradicts them. In regards to religion, there are dozens of religions around the world, as well as people who do not believe in any religion at all. Also, religion itself is a personal belief system and way of life. Due to these facts, religion cannot be used as a basis for gender roles because it is also a social construct that is specific to an individual; it is different for every person. For those that believe that gender roles are innate and occur naturally, it has been observed that gender roles develop as a person grows up. The Online Learning Center explains how children “acquire the values, motives, and behaviors viewed as appropriate for males and females within a culture is called gender typing. Children develop gender-based beliefs, largely on the basis of gender stereotypes; the latter are reflected in gender roles. Children adopt a gender identity early in life and develop gender-role preferences as well” (“Gender Roles and Gender Differences”). This document also explains how the gender identity of a child is a form of expression, differs based on their preferences, and should not be
forcefully influenced because it can negatively affect a child later in their psychological, emotional, and social development. This shows that gender roles are influenced by society, but should be based on the preferences of the individual. This way, people would not be pressured to conform to societal standards, allowing them to express themselves more freely, and preventing them from feeling as though something is wrong with them.

Gender roles are influenced by social beliefs and generalizations that have been in use for centuries. Similar to the title of tomboy, there are other gender classifications that many people go by, such as agender, gender fluid, omnigender, and bigender (Killermann). Genders and gender roles are not clear-cut categories that can be applied to everyone in society. This can lead people to believe that those who do not fit neatly into the set gender roles might be flawed somehow, which can result in problems like discrimination or mistreatment. Instead, gender should be thought of as behaviors and personal identifications that exist along a spectrum. One way to solve this problem in society is for the media to show more relatable, positive portrayals of people who do not follow traditional gender roles, such as a transgender or transsexual teenager who is going to school like any other teenager, or a football player who dresses or behaves in a feminine way. Another solution would be more comprehensive lessons in schools that show the differences between sex and gender, as well as the different feelings kids and teenagers may experience as they begin to go through puberty. This would help teenagers better understand themselves and their bodies as they begin to develop and change.

Works Cited