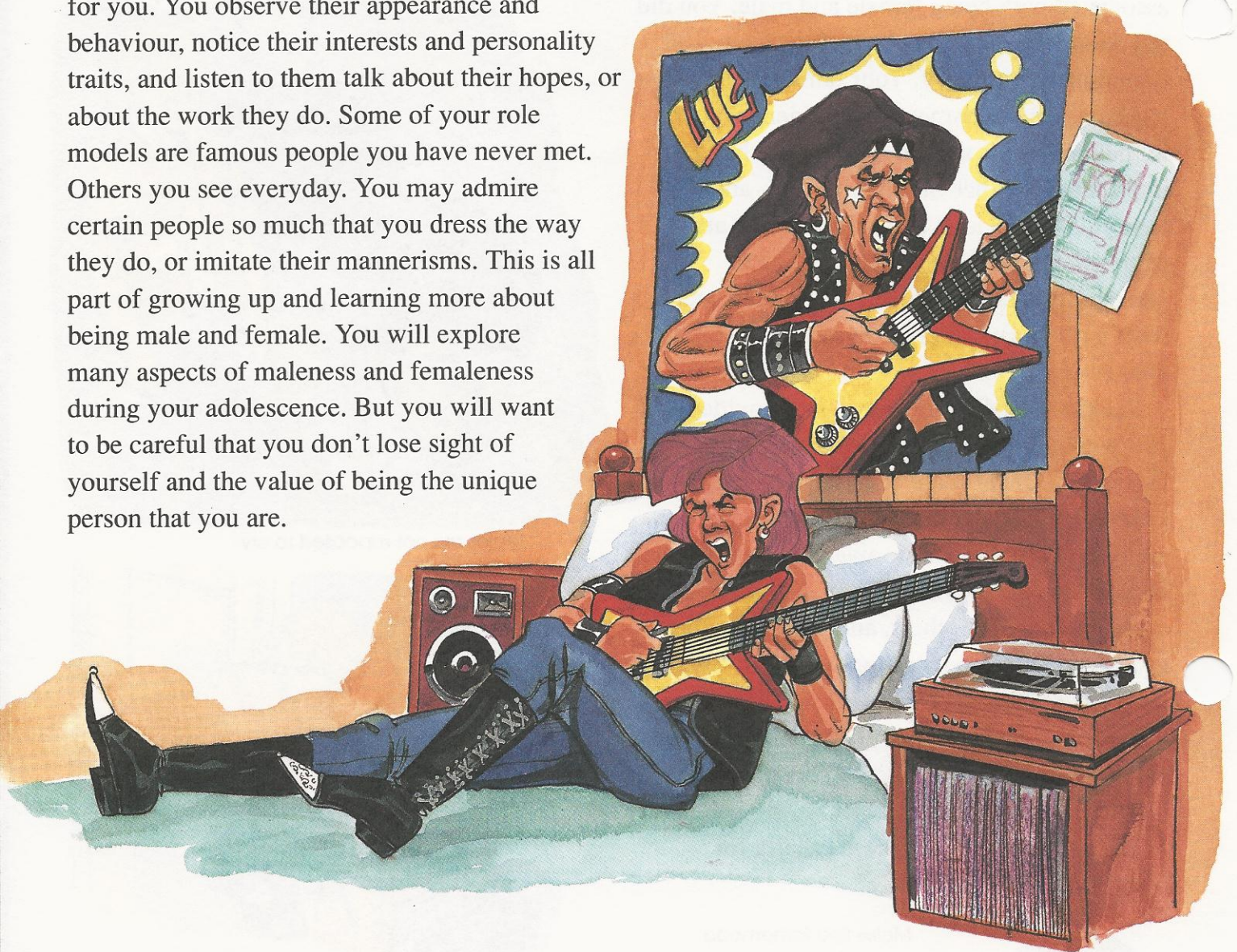


Your criteria for femininity and masculinity are also influenced by people who serve as role models for you. You observe their appearance and behaviour, notice their interests and personality traits, and listen to them talk about their hopes, or about the work they do. Some of your role models are famous people you have never met. Others you see everyday. You may admire certain people so much that you dress the way they do, or imitate their mannerisms. This is all part of growing up and learning more about being male and female. You will explore many aspects of maleness and femaleness during your adolescence. But you will want to be careful that you don't lose sight of yourself and the value of being the unique person that you are.



## Understanding Sexual Roles

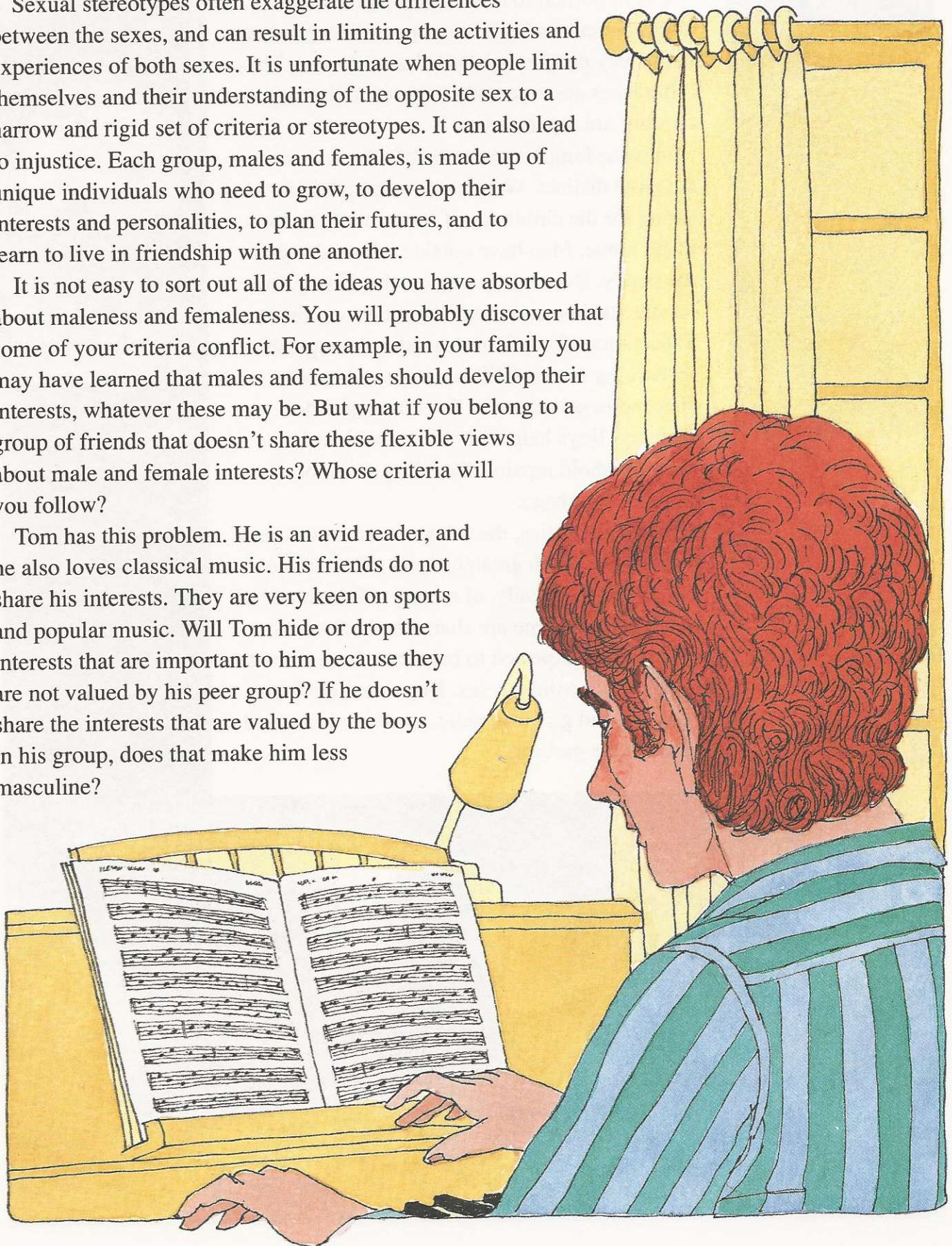
As you learn more about your sexual identity and explore different views about sexual roles, it is important to be aware of sexual stereotypes. A stereotype is a belief about a particular group of people that is overly simple, often incorrect, and is applied to every member of the group. Stereotypes about any group of individuals — men, women, the elderly, teen-agers, or people of different races — ignore the uniqueness of people. People are far too complex and mysterious to be summed up by a stereotype.



Sexual stereotypes often exaggerate the differences between the sexes, and can result in limiting the activities and experiences of both sexes. It is unfortunate when people limit themselves and their understanding of the opposite sex to a narrow and rigid set of criteria or stereotypes. It can also lead to injustice. Each group, males and females, is made up of unique individuals who need to grow, to develop their interests and personalities, to plan their futures, and to learn to live in friendship with one another.

It is not easy to sort out all of the ideas you have absorbed about maleness and femaleness. You will probably discover that some of your criteria conflict. For example, in your family you may have learned that males and females should develop their interests, whatever these may be. But what if you belong to a group of friends that doesn't share these flexible views about male and female interests? Whose criteria will you follow?

Tom has this problem. He is an avid reader, and he also loves classical music. His friends do not share his interests. They are very keen on sports and popular music. Will Tom hide or drop the interests that are important to him because they are not valued by his peer group? If he doesn't share the interests that are valued by the boys in his group, does that make him less masculine?

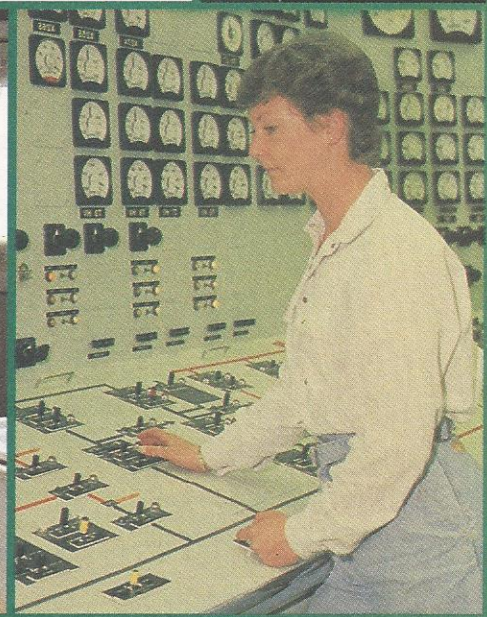
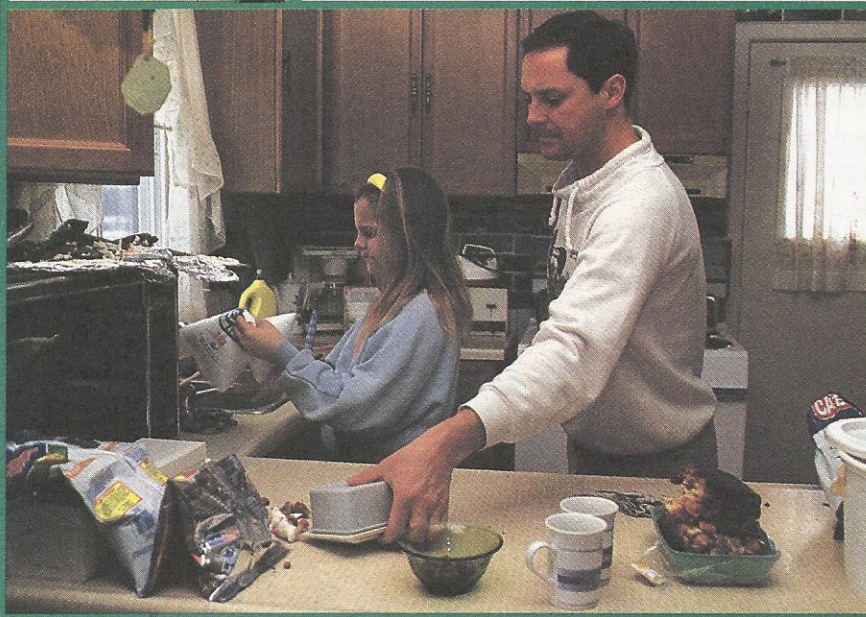
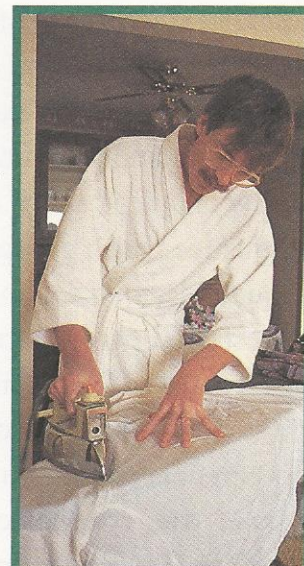




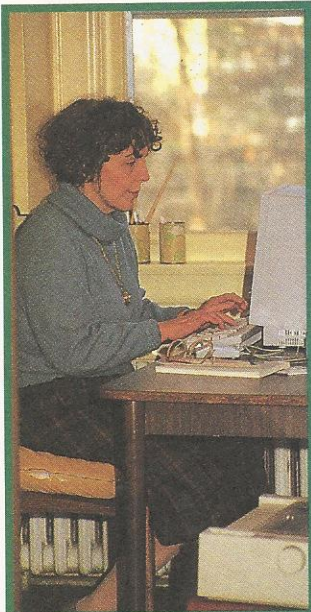
It is important to remember that there are important cultural differences within our society in the way people understand sexual roles. These differences are especially obvious in the way families are organized.

In some families, the roles of men and women are quite distinct. Women are responsible for caring for the children and for most of the work in the home. Men have outside jobs and support the family. Even when women also have jobs outside the home, these distinctions remain. Expectations for children are also distinguished according to sex. Girls are expected to help their mothers with tasks like cooking and cleaning. Boys help their fathers with tasks like household repairs, shoveling snow, or taking out garbage.

In other families, the roles of men and women overlap to a much greater degree. The tasks of supporting the family, of raising children, and of caring for the home are shared by both sexes. Children are expected to help, but chores are not assigned according to sex. Boys can help with cooking, and girls can paint, mow the lawn, and take out the garbage.







Your family may be something like one of these two types of families, or it may be somewhere in between. Or you may be living with one parent who has all of the responsibilities for your family.

No matter how sexual roles are defined, it is essential that both male and female roles are valued and that the work of each sex within the family, and outside the family is respected. Men and women are intended to complement each other. This means they are intended to develop their personal gifts, and to share them with each other. They are meant to be help-mates.

