

GOODBYE GIRLBOSS

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I. an unmeetable standard for women in work and academic settings

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Graphic by Lia Garibay

Girlboss, a term coined in 2014 by Sophia Amoruso, has taken social media by storm in recent years. In her book *#Girlboss*, Amoruso, the founder of fast-fashion clothing brand, Nasty Gal, defined a girlboss as a woman “whose success is defined in opposition to the masculine business world in which she swims upstream.”

While on face value this definition seem complimentary to working women, the message has been lost in translation. Now, a girlboss is made up of the impossible standards of a beautiful, thin, white woman who is usually donning a pink pantsuit and sky-high stiletto heels. Women have subscribed to a message that preaches how putting up with sexism, looking beautiful and working much harder than your male peers can earn you a spot at the table.

Girlboss culture is infantilizing and isolating. Many women find the image of being a girlboss insulting. It sends a message that women who are in leadership positions are unnatural. They are not bosses, but merely girlbosses.

This phenomenon has encouraged women to become shapeshifters. Now, instead of just working a job while juggling subtle sexism, women are expected to navigate an internalized demand to become the “ideal” working woman. Women in school and working environments are forced to mold themselves into a perfect pair of heels and pristine pink pantsuit, just to get their foot in the door. The incessant need to live up to the unattainable girlboss standards have made working as a woman and gaining leadership positions much more difficult. It became more than just a 9-to-5; it transformed into a lifestyle.

The girlboss aesthetic, used almost inter-



changeably with a “hustler” attitude, has incentivized the need to overwork oneself in order to get ahead of, or even be seen as equal to, male co-workers. While this attitude seemed to provide an outline for women in the workplace to labor their way out of sexist conditions

and reach desired roles, the girlboss culture transformed into a system that rewarded poor working conditions and sexist conformity.

Girlbossing has become the act of biting your tongue in times of injustice—holding out for the hope that if you put up with enough, the ends will justify the means. Former chief operating officer of Meta, Sheryl Sandberg, advises this strategy in her 2013 book *Lean In*. By just leaning into sexism and expected corporate identities, women could work their way up the ladder. Instead of fighting against an oppressive institution, women could work with it. Toxic advice like this, coming from successful women, lured others into tolerating much more and earning much less.

Instead of tearing down and rebuilding the environments we live in, we should instead tear down and rebuild ourselves to fit in. This call to action caused women to leave themselves behind for the glitz and glamour of the girlboss.

Abandoning the toxic confidence culture abundant in the girlboss movement is key to making a seat at the table for all women. Social media trends pink-washing successful women were designed to be intriguing for young women, but are full of empty promises. We are shown beautiful and prosperous leaders who were able to become powerful without giving up their femininity, but they gave up much more.

When women take on the role of the girlboss, they give up any chance of gaining respect in work and academic settings. A demanding identity fails to challenge conformity and sexism, creating the facade of institutional change when just the opposite is true. The patriarchy existing in corporate America sells us personalities all the time. It's time we buy ours wisely.