1. The earliest memory I have of myself considering college was before Kindergarten. My sister and I were with my mother talking about our future and what we would grow up to become. My mother answered by explaining to us that we would enter school, graduate and move on to university before finding a job and progressing further in life. From even before I developed a tight grasp of the concept of university, I already knew that university awaited me. As I grew up, this fuzzy notion became more and more concrete. On an individual level, both my parents were university graduates and would fondly recount memories of their time in college. This instilled a particular, favorable view of university life within me which I accepted with alacrity to be my destined path. On an aggregate level, the high SES community that I belonged to in my early years of education further cemented the prospect of higher education. Not a single parent from my school was without a university degree and many had even completed post graduate education. Finding work after graduation instead of attending university was not even an option that my school considered for its students.
2. In her early days of high school, my sister briefly considered studying to join med school and become a doctor, but due to a multitude of factors and perceived obstacles, she cooled down her expectations and is now in a nursing program. In terms of individual qualifications, there was nothing stopping her from pursuing medicine as a profession and studying for med school. She was academically adept, came from a high SES family that could afford to pay for her tuition, and had access to educational opportunities and resources that would have acted in her favor. She did not cool down her expectations because of the impossibility of admission. She cooled down her expectations because of the individual and aggregate influences around her dissuading her from pursuing that track. My parents were never as supportive of her educational aspirations as they were mine, the difference in their attitude a manifestation of their unconscious sexism and stereotypical gender perceptions. When my sister suggested medical school as a possibility, although approving of her choice, they were reserved in their support and encouragement. Their response was a stark contrast from the enthusiasm and anticipation with which they received the news of her cooling down expectations and opting for a nursing program. Similarly, my sister had many peers in high school who were also on track to enter nursing programs and become nurses. Their influence on her final decision is undeniable. From a macro perspective, the high school she attended did not have any alumni that attended medical school. The teachers were inclined to recommend nursing for those who wished to enter the medical field. Such macro obstacles had likely also contributed to her abandoning her initial intentions of entering medical school.
3. My friend Maya dropped out of school and is now in the music industry as a rapper. Her story is a prime example of ‘cooling out’ of the educational track to find fame elsewhere. Maya’s family was financially challenged, and the culture of her family was distinctly working class. These familial conditions created barriers between her and her peers and teachers at school. She was very gifted intellectually and performed highly in academics until the early years of middle school. Her intellect could not compensate, however, for the incompatibility of the other facets of her personality and behavior with the decidedly middle-class culture of the school. Prominent among her most frowned upon characteristics were her use of profanity, other rough linguistic tendencies, revealing clothing, and iconoclastic behavior, which earned her the animus of her teachers and her peers. Her position as a pariah was solidified over time and no matter how hard she worked on her academics, few people encouraged her or even acknowledged her hard work and success. It was evident that she was desperately in need of validation. At first, she sought it in school but was instead met with scorn. At home, her mother was busy working to make ends meet and lacked the capacity to give her attention.   
   The lack of attention and support she received at home and at school drove her to find these through a different channel. By the end of middle school Maya became heavily invested in the night scene in Tokyo, hopping from clubs and bars every night and making friends there. The community she established for herself in the social scene seemed to provide her with the external validation that was hitherto absent from her life. She gained a significant social media following which quickly became her sole focus in life. As she became more deeply involved in the social scene, she drifted away from school and stooped paying attention to academics. She would skip school, barely pass classes and actively rebel against and fight the faculty. She dropped out of high school in her senior year and has since devoted all of her time to advancing her musical career.  
    What lead to her ‘cooling out’ of academia was the failure of academia, in her situation, to provide her fame, recognition and acceptance. Individual factors, such as peer and teacher expectations, as well as aggregate factors, such as school culture, created a trench that effectively blocked her from going down an educational path as a means to achieve social relevance. Hence, she, perhaps rationally, altered her course and committed to achieving social relevance via music.
4. My mother’s parenting was informed by many prevalent misperceptions of sex and gender, the utmost one being the mistaken belief that women are emotional whereas men are rational. This belief was echoed in my mother’s treatment of me and my sister. My mother would often commend me for my strong reasoning skills but would fail to recognize the same skills in my sister. Instead, my sister received praise for her handling of young children, her hospitability towards guests and her rosy disposition. My mother encouraged both of us to read, but her endorsement of reading was stronger with me and the books she pitched were often nonfiction and related to the social sciences. My sister dropped the habit of reading early on and took up drawing instead with very little resistance from my mother. However, whenever I tried to ease off of reading to pursue other activities, my mother would pressure me back to my old ways. This difference in parenting was consequential in the way we both turned out, with me choosing economics as my field of study and my sister choosing nursing.   
    Sex-role socialization was also prominent in the type of toys and clothes my parents supplied us with. My sister was given stereotypically “feminine” toys such as dolls and kitchen themed toys while I was given action figures and toy weapons. Likewise, I was dressed in male clothing with simple designs while my sister was given dresses, frilled shirts and the like. Sometimes this selection of toys and clothes was enforced against our will. Growing up, I was fascinated by dresses and high heels and would request such clothes for myself. My father strongly disapproved of my penchant for cross dressing and refused to dress me in what he called female clothes, teaching me to be ashamed of my desire for such clothing. I would also frequently ask for Barbie dolls to play with, but each time I did my father would explain to me what it meant to be a boy and teach me to toughen up. In this way, I was conditioned to accept widely held notions of gender and force myself to conform to my designated role.
5. In elementary school, aggregate levels of sex-role socialization worked to subconsciously shape our views of gender. All of the teachers in elementary school were female with the exception of the gym teacher. This uneven distribution among the faculty emphasized women’s role as caretakers. I heard many of my female classmates say they wanted to grow up to become elementary school teachers but did not once hear the same from my male classmates. Furthermore, the teachers expected girls to better mirror their own actions by behaving nicely with a calm temperament and looking out for others. Boys, however, were expected to be “boys” and mess around, stirring up trouble. There was a general understanding that girls were to give boys space and let them do their thing, but the same kind of behavior was not condoned when seen in girls. Thus, the sex-role socialization in middle school entrenched gender norms in students and strongly influenced their behavior.   
    In high school, a similar mechanism of sex-role socialization through faculty demographic could be observed. This time, implicit gender roles appeared in the gender of teachers teaching STEM subjects and teachers teaching humanities. STEM classes were predominantly taught by males and humanities were taught by females. This sent a signal to students reinforcing the widespread fallacy that men are better at STEM subjects and women are better at humanities. Students at my high school were far more likely to choose STEM subjects if they were male than if they were female, and very few female students went on to study the STEM field in university. In fact, this subtle manipulation of students engendered a phenomenon where female students would coordinate with each other and choose humanities subject en masse. This created peer pressure for students to conform to the dichotomous allocation of subjects by gender. I, too, chose to take Biology, Chemistry and Calculus in high school for no other reason than the fact that many of my friends were taking it and it was expected of me. Gender had an enormous impact on the subjects students chose in high school, and therefore exerted influence over a student’s entire educational trajectory beyond that point.
6. If my sister had been born a male, she likely would have found herself at a position of higher status and success in academia. My sister and I were very similar in terms of abilities. My parents liked to pretend that I was intellectually superior to my sister and therefore better suited for academics, but the difference between us was negligible. Perhaps the only difference was in my parents’ expectations of our performances, and that is what in the end gave me a comparative advantage over my sister in the realm of academics. However, had my sister been born a male, my parents would have expected her to exceed and would have encouraged her more to pursue studies seriously, predictably improving her overall academic performance. Furthermore, as I explained in question number 2, my sister originally intended to be a doctor but cooled down her educational expectations due to lack of support from her parents and her peers. When I was in high school, my parents suggested that I enter med school to become a doctor and even researched med schools for me. When I showed interest, they were energized and eagerly provided me with resources and pushed me to study for medical school entrance exams. If my sister was a male, this was the response that would have replaced the stultifying indifference that had dispirited her in actuality.   
   The parental expectations would not have stopped with her entering university. Right now, my parents do not expect much from her in school and place very little pressure on her shoulders for her to succeed. This disconnect from her educational experience explains their reaction to my sister’s recent confession of her plans to move to America upon graduating university to live with her partner. A few months ago, my sister started living away from home with her girlfriend who works and provides for the both of them. This recent development has naturally distracted her from her studies and resulted in declining grades in school. However, my parents expressed little concern for her performance in school and seemed not to care about her decision to move to the US. To them, the subservient role that my sister plays in her relationship is natural, and because they do not expect academic excellence or success from her, they think nothing of her compromising her own work and success for her girlfriend’s career.   
    The same cannot be said about my parents’ attitudes towards me. Whenever I reveal to them that I am in a relationship, they make clear that my priority should be school and that I should not compromise my own education or career to accommodate my partner. They expect me to pursue a graduate degree and expect me to maintain high grades for that purpose. These expectations would have been transferred to my sister if she were male. This would have resulted in further devotion to and concentration on studies in medical school, altering her career course and changing her life entirely. As of now she is set to sacrifice her high status in Japan and become a nurse in the US where her educational credentials mean nothing, but if she was a man, she may have been a medical student with great educational credentials working hard to become a doctor and bound for success.