

Research Interview #1

The first person I chose to interview was my mom. I already knew a decent amount of what my mom's personal story entailed, but I was very eager to learn more. More specifically, I wanted to know how her experience being a woman tied into her story. I've spoken to my mom numerous times about her childhood and upbringing, but I had never gone into how her childhood may have affected her as a woman, rather than just as a person in general.

My mom was born in Chicago, Illinois. She had a father, mother, and an older brother. Her father died when she was only nine years old due to lung cancer, most likely caused by constantly smoking cigarettes. Her mother suffered from Schizophrenia, which progressively got worse over time. Her mother also smoked cigarettes consistently, which led to my mom having health issues later in life due to second-hand smoke. Without a father and with a mother who could not drive, my mom had to do a lot of things by herself at a very young age. She had to go grocery shopping by herself, get to school by herself, often make food for everyone by herself, and more. She had a brother, and he was older than her, but she was still expected to do all these things for her family. I asked her if she thinks this expectation was set in place because she was a woman, to which she replied:

"Oh, yes, definitely. I remember my mom sitting me down one day after I picked up groceries. It was August, so it was super hot. I came home crying because I was just exhausted and sweaty, and I felt gross. And it was the summer— I was supposed to be having fun and I wasn't. I knew none of my friends had to do what I had to do. I remember just crying and crying and throwing everything on the ground the second I got inside. My mom came into the room. She looked crazy, but I mean she always did. She just looked at the groceries and then back up at me and then grabbed my hand and sat me down. It was kind of aggressive, but I didn't feel unsafe or anything like that. She told me that it was my responsibility as a woman to provide for them. She went on a whole rant about how I was lucky I had nothing wrong with me, and that I should feel grateful for being able to go get groceries on a hot summer day. Then she left the room. No thank you or anything. It's funny to think that she said it was my responsibility "as a woman" when I was literally only thirteen years old. Just crazy, but yeah, I definitely think my gender had something to do with me doing everything."

I then asked my mom if she held any animosity towards her brother because he didn't have to do what she had to do. She told me that she didn't at all, which was very admirable. I think that alone shows what kind of person my mom is. My mom left for college as soon as she possibly could. She paid for most of it on her own, with money she saved up from working multiple jobs throughout her teen years. She attended Northern Illinois University. She felt so free. She felt like she finally had a chance at a good life. She met my dad at college, got her degree, and became a chemical engineer for almost two decades. She eventually went on to teach math and chemistry at various schools. She also ended up having three kids, my two older sisters and me. Her life seemed sabotaged from the start, but she changed that. I want to end this with one last quote from her:

“I don’t express stuff like this very much, but I *am* a strong woman. Some days when I was only like 10 years old I felt like the whole world was closing in on me, and here I am now. Now I have three beautiful and strong women that I raised. I can see every day that all those crappy times as a kid were worth something. I’m really proud and happy.”

Research Interview #2

The second person I decided to interview is someone who I was not initially planning on interviewing, but as time progressed, I realized that she would be a perfect person to interview for this project. I've been working at a dental lab for about a year now. At my job, I have made a lot of meaningful connections and friendships with my co-workers. One of my co-workers who I have become closest with is Darrah. Darrah has been working at the lab for around 4 years now. For a couple years, she was one of the only female workers in our department. She was also around 19 when she started working. Due to her young age and being one of the few women in the department, she was not very well respected or taken seriously. Obviously, when you first start at a new job, you are not going to be viewed as a superior and highly valued worker, but even after working at the lab for over a year and displaying great competence, she still felt undermined by her peers.

I asked Darrah if she had felt discriminated against because of her gender from the beginning, or if it took her some time to realize that's why she was experiencing that treatment. She explained to me that at first she thought it was solely because she was new to the job that she was treated coldly by her peers. However, she knew that it was much more than that after she had been working there for over a year. She knew she was good at her job. What really confirmed to her that she was being discriminated against for being a woman was when her male co-worker who started working at the same time as her received a raise and she didn't, even when she had visibly put in more effort into her job. At that point in time, she was one of the two women in the department. The other woman had been working there for about 7 years, so she was more respected, but Darrah noted that she never spoke that much, and about 99% of the conversations were male-dominated. She told me she never felt fully comfortable talking.

Things finally started changing after Darrah had been working at the lab for about 2 years. Not only were changes made to staff in HR, but more women were starting to be hired in her department. Some of the men who had been working for years in the department eventually began to leave the company, so Darrah started being one of the main long-time workers, which meant people had to start treating her with more respect, whether they liked it or not.

Soon enough, Darrah had been working at the dental lab for 3 years. This is around the time when I started working there. By the time I had been hired, the majority of the people in my department were women. I felt very comfortable in that environment

from the start, and I'm very grateful for that, as that was obviously not the case for Darrah when she first started working there.

Just a couple weeks ago, we had received news that the head of our department was going to be leaving the company. We were all very curious about who would take his spot. Last week, it had been decided and finalized that Darrah would be the new boss. She went from being one of the only women in the department, who was treated with little respect, to becoming the head supervisor of a department made up of 70% women. She is definitely a role model and an amazing friend in my life, and I'm very grateful and appreciative that I got to interview her personally and hear her story.

Research Interview #3

The third person I decided to interview was my boyfriend's mom, Konnie. Konnie is someone who I consider to be a second mother and a great role model in my life. I've known her for about 3 years now and she's given me great advice all throughout knowing her. I wanted to interview her because I think she is a great mother and is also a very successful and intelligent woman. I think her story proves that in circumstances where it seems like odds are against you, you can succeed.

Konnie grew up in California. She told me that she had a pretty normal childhood. She had good friends, good family, and a plan for pursuing further education after graduating high school. She eventually made a big move to Illinois to attend college. While at college, first semester, she met her future husband, Jim. She told me that was probably the only successful aspect of her time spent at college. During that first semester, she spent most of her time partying. She didn't attend most of her classes and received very poor grades. She said she had never put less effort into anything in her whole life. I asked her if she expected this to happen, to which she replied saying that she would've never imagined slacking off the way she did in a million years. At college, she had a new sense of freedom which she had never experienced before, which is a situation that can often be unpredictable in its outcome.

Before the second semester started, she dropped out. She continued to live in Illinois with Jim, who was still attending college. She went from job to job while Jim worked on completing his education. She told me that she wanted a meaningful and fulfilling career, but often felt her job searches and applications were futile, since she didn't have a degree. Still, she was able to work pretty average jobs and get promotions and raises to live comfortably. After getting his degree, Jim proposed to Konnie and they moved to the small town of Ottawa, Illinois. Here, Konnie got a job at the bank, in one of the lowest positions. She thought it was going to be like any of her other jobs, acting as something to keep her occupied for a few years before moving on to the next. However, this was definitely not the case.

As years went on, Konnie stayed at the bank, steadily getting promotions and working her way up in the company. She also began to raise two children, but she still made time for work. She stayed with the company for so long because when she had kids, she knew having to start a whole new job would make things more difficult. She managed to balance her home life and her work life, although it was challenging.

Fast forward several years to the year 2021. The president of the bank was stepping down, and they had to choose a new president. The person chosen was Konnie. She became the head of the company. She went from a college dropout, with big dreams but little expectations of having a fulfilling career, to the president of the bank, making more than enough money to provide for her family and help pay for her children's college educations. She expressed that it wasn't an easy journey, but she wouldn't change anything about it.

I really admire her dedication and perseverance. She is one of the countless people that prove that you don't need a degree to be successful and well-off. She is not only successful career-wise, but she is also an amazing mother who raised two great children. I really think it's impressive to accomplish both of those things simultaneously. That's why I see Konnie as a role model.