

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.”