

Hardships

By Kayleigh Thomas



Kayleigh Thomas, an ambitious, lighthearted, and energetic teenager, has lived in Florida for the vast majority of her life. She has moved from house to house as a result of her mother's inability to financially support her and her siblings, and after the death of her mother, she went to live in Brazil with her grandmother for a short period of time. She then returned to live with her younger brother, stepmother, father, and step-grandparents. Since moving back to America, she has grown past her mother's death and started to view the world differently, recognizing sexist prejudices, even within her own family. In her essay, Kayleigh will explore the differences in generations and the overcoming of prejudices in her family as well as in society in order to achieve her dreams.



I have never been particularly lucky. By this, I mean that although my life isn't necessarily plagued by misfortune, I have still dealt with many woes in the short time that I've been alive. Most notably would be suffering from the death of my mother, somebody who meant the world to me and who I thought I couldn't survive without. Ironically, I had already spent a vast majority of my life without her as I would only see her for about two days every three to four months because of her struggle with poverty while raising my older brothers, my little brother, and me. Even though I did not see her often, this does not change the fact that I was devastated. Fortunately, my grandmother was there for me.

I spent two months with her in her *chácara*, (or "country home") in Brazil. During those two months, I noticed not only the cultural differences and similarities in Brazil versus that of

America, I also noticed the sociological differences and similarities in how people interacted, particularly in the family setting. Although there were many aspects of society that were the same due to cultural diffusion, or the process of spreading an idea or innovation from its hearth to other places, there were numerous other aspects that were extremely different (AP Collegeboard). For instance, “family time” was much more vital in Brazil than in America. I realized that I was much closer to Vovó than many others in this family, and she inspired me to become more outgoing and courageous. Many people did not want to see this change, however. Many people, instead, wanted me to be quiet, submissive, and “know my place,” as I once had. Previously, I had accepted the preconceived notion that I would never be anything except for a housewife; that although I may be intelligent, that means nothing in a world dominated by men. That although I may be intelligent, men would never give up their positions that they were granted because they are men. That they would always take advantage of women and refuse to acknowledge their accomplishments, a variation of conflict theory, or the theory that states that more powerful groups will always exploit groups with less power (Holborn 37). After my Vovó had inspired me to no longer be submissive and no longer allow any negative thoughts to hinder my progress academically and personally, I realized my passion- science, and more specifically, paleontology and physics. Upon expressing my desire to enter into a field of science, I was discouraged by many, including those in my family. I was not shut down because of my desire to go into a scientific field; rather, I was shut down in that people thought that I could not go into a scientific field because I’m a girl.

“Girls are bad at math,” I heard. “Girls should stick to taking care of their kids.”

To this day I still hate the idea of living a domestic life, and I *especially* hate the idea of being a housewife. It baffled me then, and it baffles me now, to think that people still exist who

believe women are not as capable as men to work in a mentally challenging and stimulating field. Society relies on the cooperation of both men and women in all aspects of life; this is the root of functionalism and why I feel so strongly that there should be no question as to whether or not women deserve just as much recognition in the scientific fields as men do. In order for a society to function properly, everybody needs to work together, hence the term “functionalism.”

Many others don't feel the same, however. It's not uncommon for women to look down upon other women and even themselves for pursuing non-domestic lifestyles. Women that don't have children and never express the desire for having them are often stigmatized for not keeping with tradition (Harold Scott 67). In Harold's paper, *Sexism in Science*, he states, “Because of this stigmatization... women will stray away from academic-based fields in order to keep from being discriminated against in society.” From a young age, girls are discouraged from excelling academically. Mara Partes states this in her paper, *Maybe There's a Reason*, concurring with Harold in that because of consistent discouragement, women are more likely to not join scientific fields.

Fortunately, I had my grandmother when I needed her most. She helped me not only move past my mother's death, but also helped me to realize my passion for astrophysics and paleontology. She taught me that despite everything, despite all of the hardships I may face and all of the stigmatization within society; I can be as inspirational and influential as I can be. And one day, I hope to encourage young women to desocialize from how they have been taught and become an influential astrophysicist, and/or paleontologist.

Works Cited

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