

**Not Your Ordinary Slice of Pie**

 **By Megan Hernandez**

Megan Hernandez was born in Brick, New Jersey, and lived there for the first 13 years of her life. She had different views on life in New Jersey in comparison to *their* new perspective. Life has taken a toll on Megan’s life as a whole, going as far as to reconstructing themself as a person. Megan currently lives in Punta Gorda, Florida, and they approach life’s challenges in a different fashion. With new information and a new way of looking at things, Megan is the person they are today. In this essay, Megan will explain how they’ve changed as a person and that embracing the real you is an important part of your life. She will also further explain who “they” are and the non-usage of gender specific pronouns.

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eing ripped out of one place and placed in another takes a toll on some people, emotionally or physically. In my case, it was a bit of both. This feeling was different, and I did not know how to react to it. I had lived in New Jersey for the first thirteen years of my life, and that feeling of it all crashing down on me was something I have never experienced before. It was a genuine, unique, yet absurd feeling; and I loathed it. I used to enjoy experiences I never understood, and now it had been reduced to nothing.

 December 5, 1999. That was the day I was brought into this world. Some would call it a blessing, but I would call it a curse. According to my parents, I was not that difficult to deal with as a child and I am sometimes glad I wasn’t. My childhood was decent, aside from the two near-death experiences. My first exposure to the world was through school. Oh, how I loathed the sound of that word- school. I always have and that is probably the part of me that has not gone under significant change. Being called “Dora” and acting silly is what I’d describe my preschool, kindergarten, and partial elementary school experience. Now that I am older, I would call those years something along the lines of “hell.”

 This was around the same time I was learning about how society works, or how it should work, according to my parents. Be more ladylike; find yourself a husband; have children; and die, is how I would sum up their advice. Due to my lack of understanding opposing viewpoints, I took what they told me as facts. What else was there to believe?
 As I got older, I also became more observant and aware of my surroundings. I soon realized that there were multiple sides to an argument, not just one. People can have opinions and people have rights to do what they please. I began to do what most kids did when they reached thirteen– years old; I rebelled. Around the age of thirteen is when Stage Five of Erik Erikson’s psychosocial development starts to take effect. In stage five, the important question is “Who am I?”, and, I believe that during this time, I began to question who I really was. I began to establish a style for myself, and basically do what people of the opposite gender did for fun. Boys played video games; and girls played with dolls. Except, I didn’t play with dolls. People thought I did it for attention, but I wanted to make something of myself, something that people did not expect.

 Around seventh grade, I also found a type of “substance” during a difficult period of my life; the LGBT community. Finding out that girls did not have to always fall in love with boys amazed me. Because of the engraining of “societal norms” drilled into me by my parents, this revelation was a smack in the face. I was exposed to a whole new world, and I was ready to break away from the shackles my parents had on my wrists and ankles. They held me back for too long, and I knew I had enough. Boys were getting on my nerves already, and I soon came to the conclusion that I had an attraction to girls. That was the new me. Just when I was about to come clean, we soon had to move away from the drug-induced hell that was New Jersey. It was a rather difficult change to trust, but I accepted it for what it was. And, who would have thought that my life went in the direction it did.

 Instead of a cheery girl with no worries at all, I became a walking ball of anxiety and perplexing paranoia. I thought people were out to get me, and I was genuinely afraid of this new world; Florida, where old people will never know how to drive correctly even if their lives depended on it. My eighth grade experience was not a good one, especially because my parents found out about my sexuality. They gave me the, “I’m not mad, I’m just disappointed” conversation.
 Because of my exposure to the LGBT community, I found out that people can also identify as a gender that is not the one they were born with, and even some that did not make too much sense. Some people can identify as two genders at once, no gender at all, or some mix thereof. I thought the concept was baffling, and I, soon fell into that category of people. I do not identify as female; but, I identify as fluid gender, or genderfluid. As psychologist Erik Erikson might suggest, I experienced an identity crisis, or “a time of inner conflict during which adolescents worry intensely about who they are.” (Kasschau, 105) My parents questioned me as to why I wanted to go by “they/them” pronouns and the name of “Keegan,” but I constantly beat around the bush and tried to avoid conflict.

 During the course of my life, I can conclude that without a doubt I used the processes of desocialization and resocialization. “Resocialization requires an intervening process of desocialization, a process in which the efficacy of old values is erased. Desocialization occurs when interpersonal relations disintegrate.” (McHugh, 355) In simplified terms, resocialization is defined as “the process of adopting new norms, values, attitudes, and behaviors” (Shepard and Greene, 128) and desocialization is defined as “the process of giving up old norms, values, attitudes, and behaviors.” (Shepard and Greene, 128).

When I had to move to Florida, I knew that I had to reshape my character, because I longed for a new start. One could say I performed both desocialization and anticipatory socialization. Anticipatory socialization is the process of preparing in advance for new norms, values, behaviors, and is a voluntary change. I made the decision of changing myself in preparation for this new life in Florida, thus destroying who I was in New Jersey. I practiced desocializating, because desocializating involves the destruction of one’s old self. Also, according to Patricia A. Helland, “anticipatory socialization may serve as a social mechanism.” (Helland, 395)

I created a new identity for myself, but not many people embraced it well. Before, I could care less what people thought of me; now, as I am older, I realize that I care immensely. Today, I believe that most people care about how people perceive them rather than how they perceive themselves. We want to look good and use other people as mirrors, and without knowing it, we’re practicing the *looking – glass self –* concept*.*

Charles Cooley, the sociologist behind the theory of *looking-glass*, states that “self-concept is based on our idea of how others perceive us” (Shepard and Greene, 116), thus the use of other people as our mirrors. Mirrors differ from person to person, but I always found myself looking in those mirrors you would see in a funhouse. They distorted and contorted my views on myself, and I developed personally through the judgements that people made of me. The development of our self through the judgements of other people is the third stage of this unconscious process of looking-glass,”...the self is a result of the social process whereby we learn to see ourselves as other see us.” (Yeung and Martin, 843)

The concepts of gender and sexuality have impacted my life significantly. I sometimes ponder what would have happened if I never knew that people of the same gender could love each other just as a man and woman could, and that you can identify as genders that aren’t the one you were born with. There are still some “identities” that I do not understand too well, but it is amazing how much the human race has evolved. There is not just male and female and there is not just heterosexual. Instead of seeing the world in black and white, we see the world in vivid and amazing colors. These ideas have impacted me and made me see the real world, not what my parents’ world. Instead of a “she,” I am a “they,” and I am definitely proud of that. I do not want to be a damsel in distress or a princess, I want to be a knight, riding in the sunset with sparkling pink armor, a bloody sword in my hand, and on top of a majestic white unicorn.

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