



## *The Quinceñera Rising*

### **Self-Discoveries on the Heels of City and Rural Town**

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**Abstract:** When a Hispanic young lady turns fifteen, there is usually a huge celebration in her honor to welcome her into adulthood. This ceremony is called the Quinceñera. After the dedication portion of the ceremony, the father of the quinceñera makes his own speech. At this time, the father switches the little girl's white flat shoes into her white high heels. When I became a teenager, I was living in Revere, Massachusetts. With much of my family in Boston, I was mainly raised in the heart of the state. However, in the middle of my adolescence, at the age of fifteen, I was moved out of Massachusetts, to Franklin, New Hampshire, where my whole life changed. Everything I once knew and understood didn't matter anymore because the country lifestyle in New Hampshire was completely different from the city. Once I had the opportunity to leave New Hampshire, I took it. I am a city girl to the core, and the rural atmosphere was never adequate. However, after reflecting on how different my life in Massachusetts and New Hampshire was, I see that there were many benefits to living in New Hampshire. In this article, using various sociological concepts, theories, and literature in the sociology of youth, I explore how I grew, and continue to grow, on the heels of my experiences of living in both the city and the rural town.

Adolescence is one of the most important phases one goes through during their lifetime. The period of **adolescence** is when the individual establishes a new **ego identity**—"a feeling for who one is and one's place in the larger social order" (Crain, 281). Location, culture, nationality, and upbringing can all shape how everyone experiences their youth.

When I became a teenager, I was living in Revere, Massachusetts. With much of my family in Boston, I was mainly raised in the heart of the state. However, in the middle of my adolescence, at the age of fifteen, I was

moved out of Massachusetts, to Franklin, New Hampshire, where my whole life changed. Everything I once knew and understood didn't matter anymore because the country lifestyle in New Hampshire was completely different from the city. Once I had the opportunity to leave New Hampshire, I took it. I am a city girl to the core, and the rural atmosphere was never adequate. However, after reflecting on how different my life in Massachusetts and New Hampshire was, I see that there were many benefits to living in New Hampshire.

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son and the Eight Stages of Life," Erik Erikson considered youth as a moratorium. **Moratorium** is defined as "a period during which young people take time out to try to find themselves" (Crain, 272). The whole point of moratorium is to set the adolescent on "a life course that is rich and rewarding" (Cote and Allahar, 74). Cote and Allahar said it best, in *Generation on Hold*, that "if the environment nurtures the individual's capacity and encourage self-discovery instead of stifling these things, it can enrich one's life" (77). Although my parents did not intend to stifle my self-discovery, they definitely deterred me from discovering myself because I focused too much of my time adjusting to my new environment. My moratorium became very complex because of this.

When I lived in the city, I would take the train or the bus to anywhere I liked with my best friend Craig.<sup>1</sup> We ventured off to different parts of the city with no adult supervision. My main goal during my early adolescence was to go to places that I have never been to. I wanted to discover new hangout spots, new stores to shop in, or even new places to eat. This may not seem like I was trying to discover myself, but I was. The whole purpose was to discover what I enjoyed, what location I felt comfortable in, and where I could see myself living in the future. However, when I moved to New Hampshire, my interest in different locations had to diminish because there was no public transportation. I had no way of getting around unless one of my parents drove me. Therefore, I focused on a different aspect of myself. My self-discovery efforts became focused on concerns with my outward appearance and discovering my true identity. By "true identity," I mean what makes me the way I am, rather than what makes me comfortable. Cote and Allahar would say that this would be my

"identity moratorium" (74). Crain stated that "even though identity-formation is a lifelong process, the problem of identity reaches its crisis at adolescence" (282). By **crisis**, I think Crain meant that it can be both an opportunity and an emergency where the future is dependant on how the crisis is resolved. Moving to New Hampshire forced me to figure out my true identity.

Erikson mentioned that during the adolescence phase, youth tend to focus on their identity. In my new school, much of the students didn't accept me because I didn't grow up with them. Many of the students in this school had known each other since they were in elementary school. I was the new girl from the city who dressed differently, spoke differently, and had seen things in a different light. When some of the students learned that I was Puerto Rican, they really saw me as an outsider even though I thought that I would be able to blend in because of my fair complexion. These students were part of such a small town and didn't have much direct experience with minorities.

I was always proud about being Puerto Rican. Even though my skin complexion is fairly light, it never stopped me from claiming my nationality. If anyone mistook me as a different ethnicity, I always made sure that they understood what I really was. At Revere High School, I never had a problem with being Puerto Rican because that school was very integrated. We had such diversity in my class that everyone understood and embraced everyone else's heritage. However, I believe that the students at Franklin High School were not very accustomed to Hispanic people or minorities in general. Therefore, they felt as though it was fine to treat me like an outsider. I heard everything from discriminatory slurs to petty name-calling. It was clear to me and everyone else that I wasn't accepted.

In her book *Jocks and Burnouts*, Penelope Eckert discussed two major categories

<sup>1</sup> All personal names in this article have been changed to respect privacy.

in a particular high school, Belten High. The two categories were the Jocks and the Burnouts; she also mentioned that there existed a small minority of In-Betweeners. In this context, the classificatory terms are words that reflect the structure of the school. According to Eckert, the development of “the differentiation between Jocks and Burnouts arose ‘overnight’ upon entrance into junior high” (76). Junior high was a starting point for much of development of the students’ senses of self. The **Burnouts** were known as troublemakers and the **Jocks** were more popular because they were participants in the school’s activities and teachers rewarded them for their behavior. Eckert also described how “clothing and other forms of adornment, ways of speaking, territory” distinguished them (49). At Franklin High, I think most of my classmates considered me to be a burnout because I dressed differently, spoke differently, and acted differently from all of the popular students. In Revere, I would be considered a jock because to them I dressed, spoke, and acted mostly like everyone else; I was a favorite to many of the teachers at the school, and I also focused on doing well academically. Unfortunately, my first couple of months at my new school did not quite reflect the status I had at the previous high school.

At first I thought that I should focus on trying to fit in, but I soon realized that there is no point in working to fit in. I started to discover myself away from what everyone was saying about me. Erikson mentioned that “it is the thought that one might not look good to others or meet others’ expectations” (Crain, 281) that concerned the youth the most during this moratorium phase. During my first few months of school there, I was concerned with that, but there is only so much work one can do. Therefore I made sure that I fit the exact profile they thought of me. I continued to dress the way I dressed; continued to speak the way I spoke; continued to publicize my national-

ity; and most of my classmates refused to try to become my friend because I made sure they knew that I wasn’t like them. Although I was just expressing who I am, in a sense I was rebelling against the norm at that school. Then again, even though I couldn’t fit in with the students, I still tried to find my own **clique**—small group that is derived from the school setting (Bensman and Rosenberg, 80).

It is hard to survive high school without a few friends that one can trust. I wanted to find my own peer group in this school. **Peer group** is defined as “such a group [that] is an association of self-selected equals who coalesce around common interests, tastes, preferences, and beliefs” (Bensman and Rosenberg, 80). I grew up with many of the people in my peer group at Revere High. Nevertheless, we always welcomed newcomers of different backgrounds. Many of the people within my group had the same interests as I, so making friends was never a problem. However, it was so much harder to make friends in New Hampshire. Everyone had his or her peer groups already fully developed.

A little after I started school at Franklin High, another girl from Massachusetts moved up. Her name was Tiffany and she was half Puerto Rican and half Italian. Naturally with everything we had in common, we became best friends. It happened within a matter of days, but it changed our lives forever. We found a new member that also recently moved to the area. She was African American and she was from the South. Her name was Abby. We all became good friends because we shared the same interests such as hip-hop music, dancehall music, step dancing, and going to nightclubs. We even dressed very similar and had the same speech patterns (used the same slang) aside from our individual accents. Because none of us originated from New Hampshire, it created a stronger bond between us and a weaker bond with any of our other

classmates. Although we all had different upbringings and cultures, I felt more compatible with them than the other predominantly white students at the school. They also felt that same way.

In the film *Ghost World*, the two best friends, Enid and Rebecca, were very similar to my very small group at Franklin High. Enid and Rebecca were very different in personality. The other two girls and I were very different in personality also. However, similar to Enid's and Rebecca's relationship, we were able to understand each other's differences. In *Ghost World*, Rebecca was focused more on leaving home and working on getting an apartment. She wanted something better for herself. Enid, on the other hand, was comfortable where she was. She took life as a joke and rarely did anything to better herself. She was less of a conformist and instead used sarcasm to knock down society. Tiffany and I were very goal-oriented. Our main goal was to do well in school and hopefully find a way out of New Hampshire. Abby was a different story. She was more like Enid. Life was one big joke to her. When she started acting differently and spent time with those who primarily disliked us, she started to develop interests that Tiffany and I couldn't relate to.

During our senior year together, Abby spent so much time with our male classmates and other girls' boyfriends. Then there were numerous rumors about her promiscuity. However, as many times as we told her to be careful what she does and who she spends time with, she thought we were trying to tell her what to do. We just cared and wanted the best for her, but she couldn't see that. Everyone else saw her as a slut, though. She was very sexually active, but she didn't sleep with every guy she spent time with. However, the other girls and even some of the other guys at our school did not believe that. They believed that she was sleeping with every guy. What I found interesting was that according to

Cecile Wright, in "Black Femininities Go To School," most black girls are thrown into a category which is perceived as "loud, naughty, confident, and overtly sexual and how this means that they are, inevitably, negatively stereotyped" (105). It may be possible that my classmates viewed her this way because she is African American and they probably placed her within this category. However, what was really upsetting was that the white guy that she spent the most time with was very sexually active himself for several years. However, she developed the bad reputation and he was known as a popular guy. It is possible that being a white male gave him the leeway to do whatever he pleased, with no negative judgment coming from his peers. She was ultimately a victim of a double standard.

Abby didn't see anything wrong with being very sexually active at her age. In *SLUT!*, Leora Tanenbaum stated that the double-standard is "the idea that women are disgraced by sex outside of marriage, that sex transforms them into 'sluts'" (76). I never considered Abby a slut because I knew the person behind the reputation, but she never attempted to change the way people viewed her. I think that much of it had to do with the fact that it was our last year in high school, and she didn't care what people thought of her. She took herself out of our peer group because she had newly developed interests and some male friends who shared them. In the end, I managed to find at least one friend to trust. After I adapted to my new environment and found someone to relate to, I still didn't feel like I could truly find my identity until I left Franklin. That was still my main preoccupation.

After I became comfortable with myself in Franklin High School, I felt more comfortable to do well academically similar to how I was in my previous school. The impressions of the other students didn't bother me anymore. I was more focused on making a good impression on the teachers

and staff, so I joined many clubs and also joined the volleyball team. I engaged myself in many extracurricular activities. Basically, I did anything that would look good on my college application. In my experience, there was definitely an “emphasis on future thinking during this time, where adolescents begin to envision life possibilities...” (Herr 50). I thought that everyone considered me to be a burnout because I didn’t quite fit in, but I worked my way to jock status. Tiffany and I even started a club of our own which was called the Hip Hop Dance Club.

The Hip Hop Dance Club was our way of finding some common ground with our peers. We were worried that we wouldn’t get a good number of females to join, but we did. To our surprise, many of the females (all white) thought that this would be a good experience for them. Tiffany and I were just expressing our passion for dance; we never thought that our peers would actually give it a chance. After five months of practice, the girls in the club managed to master a dance routine. Tiffany and I slipped in a little bit of salsa, to introduce our culture, into the routine also. All the girls agreed that the salsa was the best part of the routine. Similar to the double-dutch discussed in “Dancin’ in the Street to a Black Girl’s Beat,” our main interest when teaching the other girls was “keeping the rhythm, [and] not interrupting the meter and the flow of the musical experience” (Gaunt, 273). The club performed during the last couple of months of my senior year and we received unbelievably great feedback. This was such a great experience for Tiffany and me because we finally made a connection with our peers. What was even better was that the school board agreed to continue the Hip Hop Dance Club every year.

What I really didn’t like was that when I was participating in the clubs and sports, it seemed as though everything was monitored. Even the Hip Hop Dance Club had to

have adult supervision in order for us to practice after school. How can a student strive to be a leader and start something on their own, if it wouldn’t pass the school boards unless there is an adult present? This might be what Nancy Lesko called “youth as probation.” “**Youth as a probation**” is the trial period of youth where everything they do is monitored through adult supervision. In her “Time Matters in Adolescence,” Lesko stated that “**youth** were defined as always ‘becoming,’ a situation that provoked endless watching, monitoring, and evaluating...slow, careful development-in-time was identified as the safest path” (111). The moratorium phase is where youth is supposed to free themselves from adult responsibilities, but school monitors youth because they have the power to do so. They also tend to encourage youth to become more productive citizens by their definition.

This monitoring and adult advising contradicted the idea of moratorium. All I wanted to do was to express my hobby of dance to the rest of the school, but I had to delay my idea until an adult agreed to sign on. Cote and Allahar believe it to be “unreasonable to expect individuals to learn the requirements of maturity and responsibility without allowing them to perform roles in which maturity and responsibilities are exercised” (108). One of the ways I learned maturity and responsibilities was by getting a part-time job. During the time I was focusing on being a productive student, I was also earning an income.

I started working during my junior year in high school. Some of the reasons why I picked up a job were to help out my parents by taking some of my financial burdens off of them. I wanted to earn money in order to purchase the latest sneakers, the latest clothes, and anything that would set me apart from my classmates. I held a temporary part-time job at a local supermarket. I worked in one of those low paying, no benefit, and very little upward mobility

jobs. This job I held was very boring and simple. The scanner did much of the work, which proves Cote and Allahar's idea in *Generation on Hold* that "a major consequence of modern technology is the deskilling of segments of the labor force" (36). There was no need for me to calculate the prices of each object because the scanner calculated the total, therefore deskilling the job into something monotonous. The mentality that I had in high school is much like what Susan Willis mentioned in "Teens at Work: Negotiating the Jobless Future" about how teens only strive for immediate compensation (353). The only benefit I saw in working there was to earn the income to become a "good consumer." Teachers, parents, and most other adults teach youth how to become productive citizens which entails being consumers, employed, and not dependent on the government. I guess they taught me well. However, as I transitioned from high school to college, my view on everything including work changed.

Because I didn't let the negativity from the other students bring me down, I accomplished everything I wanted to in high school. I accepted the fact that school was a benefit for me. I envisioned being a child advocate lawyer in Boston, Massachusetts, and succeeding academically in high school would take me one step further to my dream. Therefore, I had to make the best out of the situation I was dealt with. Penelope Eckert said it best in *Jocks and Burnouts* that the "high school career...is essential to entrance into a good college" (103). With everything I achieved and the high grades I earned, I was accepted to the University of Massachusetts Boston. My main goal of high school was to get out of Franklin and back to the city. As I mentioned previously, once I got the chance, I took it.

My latest self-discovery was back in Boston; where I felt I belonged. Although I was happy to move out of my monotonous life, my parents did not seem as excited. In

actuality, my family was very close as a result of the move. Jessica Sawyer, in her article "Confessions of a Maine-iac: The Family, Academia, and Modernity," mentioned that the media usually depicts family as an embarrassment and the friends are the one that truly understand adolescents (193). In my case, my family was the ones that truly understood me the most. However, I couldn't let them be the reason why I stayed. Even though family emotions bind children and parents together (Bensman and Rosenberg, 80), I had dreams to fulfill on my own. Ultimately, the move helped me appreciate my family more, but as Sawyer stated "young adults are encouraged to and expected to reach their full potential, even if this goes against the interests of the family" (194). I was no longer some adolescent that needed to be monitored all the time. It was the time for me to excel on my own.

I went to college to find myself on a whole different level. In high school, I discovered how to distinguish between friends and foes. I discovered that if anyone tried to stop me from doing anything, they would never be able to stop me. I discovered myself to be full of determination, dreams, and strength. I took these faculties with me to college. On the other hand, there is still so much to discover. As Crain mentioned, "identity-formation is a lifelong process," so it was clearly going to take me quite some time until I discover my true identity. Going to college meant that I would be able to allow my individuality to prevail. Sawyer defined **individualism** to be "encouragement to be yourself, to develop your own talent, to try your best, and to build up your own career" (196). Those were much of the goals I had as I went into college, but I still had the doubt in my mind of whether this was a good move for me.

One of the biggest concerns about college was how I was going to pay for it. In high school, I worked just to buy materialistic things, but since I have a lot more re-

sponsibilities, I have established different work ethics. To fulfill my dream, I would have to do years of undergraduate and law school. Cote and Allahar stated it well in *Generation on Hold* that “those coming of age now face the prospect of remaining in school for a prolonged period primarily in order to attain high levels of educational credentials” (35). Because I am going to be in school for a long period of time, I had to find a way to pay for it.

Throughout high school, all I wanted to do was get out of New Hampshire and college was my ticket out. Ironically, leaving New Hampshire caused more problems for me. Although I returned back to the city, I missed my family, Tiffany, and the lack of responsibilities. As for college being my ticket out, I probably should have gone to a New Hampshire college. Being an out-of-state student meant that I have double the tuition of in-state residents. Once again, tuition was my biggest burden.

With the minimal availability of permanent jobs and the lack of time to keep a permanent job, I was forced to pay for tuition with credit and the little money I earned. I paid for school through loans, which are useful, but I pay back more for borrowing than the original amount I needed. The types of jobs I am able to hold do not provide benefits; healthcare would have been a problem if my mother's insurance didn't still cover me as a student. Ryan Moore mentioned in his article, “Downward Mobility, Affect, and Postmodern Narrativity,” that most white-collar jobs are being downsized and that professional occupations in fields like law (which is where I want to be) are being proletarianized with the introduction of technology (259). As I search for an occupation that matches my “educational credentials,” the opportunities may not be available. My future quality of life is in jeopardy.

My journey even up into the present was based on self-discovery. Although I have accomplished much in my life, I

would not consider myself an adult. Then again, I wouldn't necessarily consider myself an adolescent either. I am at an in-between stage in my life right now. In the article “Adolescent Rites of Passage,” Lynn Hoffman discussed how all adolescents eventually “navigate their passage from late childhood to adulthood” (58). **Rites of passage** are basically the path that adolescents take that transitions them into adults. Some adolescents would consider themselves adults when they learn how to drive or get a part-time job (58). However, Hoffman mentioned that “our culture lacks a systematic way of transitioning adolescents into adulthood, and we do not identify a set of achievements that would mark that status” (58). In my case, I don't consider myself an adult until I graduate from law school and get my first full-time job with salary and benefits. My family on the other hand considered me an adult at the age of fifteen.

When a Hispanic young lady turns fifteen, there is usually a huge celebration in her honor to welcome her into adulthood. This ceremony is called the Quinceñera. The whole ceremony is very long and meaningful. One of the first things the quinceñera (the young girl who is turning fifteen) does is walks into the hall or church with a very delicate, but plain white dress. Along with the dress, the young lady must be wearing white flat shoes. The white in the dress and shoes symbolizes the pureness of the young lady because it is suggested that the young lady is still a virgin. The flat shoes symbolize a young girl. There is a small flower presentation where the grandmother or the eldest woman of the family gives a bouquet of flowers to the young lady as a gift. Soon after, everyone has a chance to say something to the quinceñera including the mother, friends, or other family members. After the dedication portion of the ceremony, the father of the quinceñera makes his own speech. At this time, the father switches the little girl's

white flat shoes into her white high heels. The switching of the shoes is the quinceñera's passage into adulthood. The father then presents the once little girl to everyone as a young lady: an adult. The father has the first dance with the quinceñera as a lady. However, every Hispanic family had their own way of doing the celebration. This is what my family considered my rite of passage into adulthood. To everyone else in my family and in my culture, I am already an adult. However, in my eyes, I am not done growing.

I have not become an adult yet. The moratorium phase of adolescence is supposed to be a time when you spend time without adult responsibilities and discover who you are. I did a lot of self-discovery, but I don't think it ends when one becomes an adult, which for some means at the age of eighteen. I am twenty and I have already gone through my rite of passage into adulthood according to my culture. But I am still figuring out who I really am. I agree with William Crain that identity-formation is a life-long process. I've lived two completely different lifestyles during my youth, and I have grown from both to become the person I am now. There are, or should certainly be, many different theories about youth and adolescence because this period of time is different for everyone. Therefore, it is seen differently by everyone. I see my adolescence as the undergraduate level of my self-discovery and the years to come is the law school of my self-discovery. There is still so much to understand about myself; I know that I am not ready to be an adult yet.

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