



A Girl Amongst Men

A Sociological Analysis of My Identity Formation and the Creation of My Personal Feminine Ideal

Ann Barnes

University of Massachusetts Boston

Abstract: Adolescence is normally a period of self-discovery, experimentation and identity formation. It can also be a period of significant turmoil and alienation. My adolescence was spent trying to navigate relationships in an all male household; my parents divorced when I was young, leaving me as the only female in a home with my father and two brothers. As the only female, I often felt alienated; I was considered an “outsider” in many situations. This “outsider” label led to other negative labels; not feminine enough, not obedient enough, basically not good enough and my self-image suffered. It was not until the beginning of high school, and my inclusion into a supportive peer group, that I truly found a space where I felt accepted and able to appreciate certain aspects of my identity. The road to my current, positive concept of identity has been a long one, including college (when I could afford it) and a stint in the military. This paper is an attempt to step back and examine, with the assistance of various sociological concepts and theories, my adolescence and other significant events in my life, that have contributed to the formation of my adult identity and strong sense of self worth.

Adolescence is generally seen as a period of great personal development and growth; it can also be a period of great stress and anxiety. My adolescent experiences often tended to lean toward the latter, but I can take comfort in the fact that this is somewhat normal. Erik Erikson attributed much of the storm and stress associated with adolescence to the physical and emotional challenges that typically coincide with this stage in a person’s life. To a certain point, some stress during this period is natural. For Erikson, this is the point in one’s life when a true identity begins to emerge.

A good portion of one’s adolescence is

spent actively searching for answers to difficult questions like “Who am I?” and “Who do I want to become?” (Muuss, 1996, p. 51). The process of actively undertaking a quest to answer life’s important questions about one’s self, and the social interactions that take place during an individual’s search, are integral parts of Erikson’s **theory of identity development**. Once a mature adult identity is developed, one should be able to answer the previous questions independently without the influence of parents or peers, assured in their own sense of self and where they want to go in the future (Muuss, 1996).

The formation of a mature adult iden-

Ann Barnes (pen name), a Boston native, is currently pursuing a Bachelor’s degree in Sociology at UMass Boston. She wrote this paper while enrolled in Soc 201, “Youth and Society,” instructed by Anna Beckwith (Lecturer at UMass Boston) during the 2010-2011 academic year.

tity can be a complicated process; a process which, Erikson reasoned, is based on the **epigenetic principle of development**. Borrowing the principle from the study of embryology, Erikson used it to explain that human development is based on a foundation; from this foundation certain “parts” of a person’s identity emerge at their designated times. The successful melding of these parts results in a fully developed, “whole” being (Muuss, 1996). This principle served as the basis for Erikson’s “Eight Stages of Man” (Muuss, 1996). Erikson theorized that in order to reach adulthood with a stable sense of identity, one must navigate through eight unique stages. These stages cover a person’s development from birth to old age. How one develops through these life stages depends on everything the individual experiences beforehand; one does not develop in a vacuum. The ease or difficulty with which the stages are traversed has to do with developmental experiences stemming from the previous stage. Also, one must experience certain stages of development in the appropriate sequence in order to successfully advance to next stage.

It is not merely the stages themselves that are important to identity development, but how the stages are resolved. Within his eight stages, Erikson theorized that one’s identity was developed through enduring various “crises” (Muuss, 1996). Erikson did not only use “**crisis**” in the traditional sense of the word to relate to the emotional turmoil one may endure in life, he also adapted it to mean “opportunity” as well (Muuss, 1996). One is given an opportunity to influence and shape one’s own identity depending on how one chooses to handle certain life crises. When a positive outcome is achieved from the resolution of a crisis, one is able to better form a solid identity. I understand Erikson’s concept, but I cannot help believing that “crises,” in the more traditional sense, had a hand in forming my identity as well.

My parents divorced when I was seven. Since my father had a steady job, it was decided that my two younger brothers and I would stay with him. All of a sudden, I went from being the daughter in a traditional nuclear family to the only girl in a household of males. Being the oldest child and the only female, I ended up taking on the role of caregiver in many situations. Also, much of the housework was delegated to me because it was seen as “women’s work.” I still distinctly remember an incident that happened when I was around ten or eleven years old. My father called me home from playing at a friend’s house just to hang up laundry, something he never would have done with my brothers. It was around this time that I started feeling out of place and somehow less valuable than my brothers.

Many of the feelings I had because of how I was treated based on my gender reflects the feelings of many of the women in Leora Tanenbaum’s *Slut!* (2000). As a society, we are conditioned to believe that boys have an intrinsic value solely because they are male (Tanenbaum, 2000, p.101. Just as teachers in Tanenbaum’s work propagate misogyny in the classroom (2000, p. 191), my father propagated it within my family among my brothers and myself. Because I was treated differently, I came to believe that I actually was different and somehow deserving of the treatment. Somehow being **female** was my fault and I deserved to be an **outsider** in my own family because of it. I was a girl who existed on the outskirts of the male group composed of my father and my brothers. These feelings of alienation, that I had nowhere to fit in, only became worse as I entered into puberty.

Erikson defines **pubescence** as a period which is “characterized by the rapidity of body growth, genital maturity, and sexual awareness” (Muuss, 1996, p. 53). Since changes during pubescence are often quite different than those experienced during

childhood, an element of discontinuity from earlier stages of development may emerge during adolescence (Muuss, 1996, p. 53). The stable formation of one's identity hinges upon the acceptance of pubescent sexuality; as Erikson states, "[a]dolescents must establish ego-identity and learn to accept body changes as well as new libidinal feelings. Identity exploration depends at least in part on these psychophysiological factors" (Muuss, 1996, p. 53). This period served to distance my father and my brothers from me even further. Everything about my emerging womanhood seemed embarrassing, strange and shameful. Within my family, I felt as if I had no one to turn to for advice about the new physical and emotional changes I was facing. Though my mother was still in my life, she was there sporadically and therefore unable to provide me with much of the guidance I desperately needed at the time. Other female family members whom I saw often, like my paternal grandmother, were much older, so I found it difficult to communicate with them. There was no way that I could have had an honest, open conversation with my seventy year old grandmother about love, sex, and boys; I would have been mortified and she would have seen it as completely inappropriate.

There were certain topics that were simply taboo. Being born in the early 1900s, my grandmother had no personal experiences that could compare to what I was experiencing as a teenage girl in the 1990s. When she was young, she was expected to actively participate in helping her mother maintain their household while conducting herself appropriately; open discussion about casual dating and sexuality was certainly not appropriate. It was almost as if the concept of modern adolescence was foreign to her. William Wei addresses this in his *Hmong American Youth: American Dream, American Nightmare* (1998). Wei explains that problems arise amongst generations of Hmong parents and their Hmong Ameri-

can children during adolescence because the period of adolescence itself simply did not exist for the parents as it did for their children. Wei's Hmong parents transitioned straight from childhood to adulthood, working to support themselves as early as thirteen or fourteen (1998, p. 316). Though my grandmother was not working on a farm at thirteen, she did have other responsibilities that left no time for her to be concerned with any of the worries I had as a teenager. My grandmother's attitude toward casual dating is echoed by the Hmong parents in Wei's piece, succinctly summarized in two words, "forget it" (1998, p. 317). The **generation gap**, or differences in customs and values due to age that itself reflects different socio-historical conditions and contexts (Bensman & Rosenberg, 1979, p.81) that limited how my grandmother and I could communicate left me feeling lost. Our difference in age, and therefore differing life experiences, led to a lack of mutual understanding. I was unable to share many of my feelings with her because I felt she could not possibly relate. It was not until I started seventh grade that I finally found a place where I felt I belonged.

When I entered the seventh grade, I was twelve years old. When I entered a new school, I started making new friends and soon developed a relatively large peer group in which I found the acceptance and sense of belonging that I was not getting from my family. My **peer group**, defined by Bensman and Rosenberg as a "self-selected group of equals who coalesce around common interests, tastes, preferences and beliefs" (1979, p. 80) was my salvation. I finally felt that I found a group of people who truly understood who I was and appreciated me as I was; I finally felt as though I "fit" somewhere. Unfortunately, the more time I spent with my friends, the angrier my father became, but after a certain amount of time his reactions began to matter less and less to me. Through my

peer group, I began to gain a stronger sense of self. It was through **psychosocial reciprocity**, or the positive social interactions with peers where our individual identities were acknowledged and appreciated (Muuss, 1996, p. 48), that I really started conceptualizing and appreciating myself. Up until this point, who and what I was had been defined by my father. I was now able to dress the way I wanted, dye my hair different colors, discuss politics, music and literature and do it all without fear of harsh judgment or criticism from my peers. My father believed that I was wasting time spending hours with my friends, but I was only participating in my own **identity moratorium**. This was the period in my life where I was free from many adult responsibilities. I did not have a serious job, I did not have any bills to pay or a family to look after, I could freely experiment with my thoughts, feelings and appearance without too many serious repercussions and doing all of it would become the means by which I was able to develop my sense of self. Experimenting during adolescence with different thoughts, roles and ideas in order to develop an identity while enjoying a sort of “break” from societal responsibilities is an expectation when adolescence is accepted as a moratorium from life as an adult (Cote & Allahaar, 1995, p. 74).

Not only did I find refuge within my peer group, I found an escape within the public spaces of my city. Up until seventh grade, I had been completely dependent on my father, or other adults, for mobility. When I started seventh grade, I had to take public transportation to school. At first this scared me, but eventually I looked forward to the early morning and late afternoon train rides. A whole new world was opened to me and my friends because we were able to travel to new and exciting places without being constantly chaperoned by adults. As we learned to navigate the city, we started to view certain places as “ours.” Because we were without cars, much money, appro-

priate clothing, and adult supervision, most of the spaces where we were forced to congregate were public places. Reinforcing our “**place**” as lower status youth within the society’s hierarchical structure (Austin, 1998), we were not viewed as worthy enough to gather in more “adult” places; eventually we embraced and even relished our separateness. Austin also uses “place” to identify what he calls “a network of localities” where adolescents can physically meet and interact (1998, p. 240). One place in particular that I frequented was a fountain at Copley Square in downtown Boston. Often, my friends and I would sit and talk around the fountain. Just as the graffiti artists in Austin’s *Knowing Their Place* (1998) found a space to express themselves publicly in the subways of New York, we claimed this public space as our own. Here kids were free to do what they pleased away from constant adult surveillance. It was common to see kids drawing, smoking or eating there. The kids who could skateboard would do tricks around the fountain’s edges and steps; the kids who could play the guitar would sit down on the fountain’s edge and play.

Once my friends became a main influence in my life, the tensions between my father and I reached a boiling point. I became the “problem” in my family. Rather than being considered as an individual, I was seen as a teenager and teenagers are expected to be difficult. This fits with Kathryn Herr’s theory that youth are negatively categorized into one homogenous group. According to this misconception, **adolescence itself is the problem**, not the society in which the adolescent exists—the same society that actually creates and puts forth what it means to be an “adolescent” (2006, p. 47). This is a period in one’s life when individuals are marginalized and segregated from larger society purely based on age. It is as if society does not know how to react towards adolescents, so they classify them as “other”—people who

are neither children nor adults (Herr, 2006).

The concept of “troubled youth” is a common one in the United States and I was simply an addition to the number of troubled youth in the nation. In reality, my father honestly had no idea what it meant to be a teenage girl and rather than taking the time to find out how I was feeling as an individual, he reacted with anger and criticism because I was not living up to his expectations of what he thought a teenage girl and daughter should be. I liked dressing in baggy jeans and flannel shirts. Though this was completely acceptable in my peer group, my father reacted as if I was doing something wrong; I was not being feminine enough. To deter me from dressing this way, he tried many things, including giving all of my clothes away, but I still managed to find a way to dress in the clothes in which I felt comfortable, even if it meant changing at a friend’s house. Also, once I reached puberty my body began to change and I put on some weight. I was never significantly overweight, but as my body began developing there was definitely a noticeable difference between my pre-pubescent body and my body after puberty. Again, this was unacceptable to my father. In his eyes, girls should be skinny, and I was not skinny enough and this, once again, translated into my not being feminine enough. All of this resulted in my having very low self-esteem. Though I was developing a stronger sense of self in other areas, I was unable to resolve the inferiority issues I had as a female. I dressed similar to my friends, but I was very hesitant to show off any part of my body. I was shy around boys because I still considered myself as inferior to them. I hardly dated in high school because the whole idea of it was too overwhelming for me. Tanenbaum summarizes my feelings at this time perfectly, “getting a boyfriend is the most important thing in life. If she doesn’t have a boyfriend, she comes to believe she must be fat and ugly; she is worthless; she has no

identity” (2000, p. 101). Though I did not exactly feel that I had no identity, I felt that a large part of my identity was missing. I felt as if my identity was not fully complete because I had not participated in the mandatory “feminine” act of having a boyfriend and felt ashamed because I was failing at the preconceived role of “teenage girl.”

As if my father’s influence was not damaging enough, my adolescence corresponded with the popularity of “heroin chic.” This was a body ideal during the mid-nineties. Emaciated models like Kate Moss were used in advertisements for Calvin Klein and other famous fashion brands. Now these tall, impossibly thin models were everywhere and were supposed to embody what it meant to be a woman and to be desirable. This **gender intensification**, or “script” that dictated the appropriate behavior and appearance for a woman (Cote & Allahar, 1995, p.84) produced by the media was overwhelming. Jean Kilbourne addresses the media’s affect on women’s self image in the documentary *Killing Us Softly 3* (1999). Kilbourne speaks on the portrayal of “ideal” feminine beauty in advertising that most women are conditioned to compare themselves to and the fact that this “ideal” is what every woman should aspire to. If the ideal of femininity is not reached, women are then conditioned to feel guilty and ashamed because they have failed.

The most ridiculous aspect of the whole processes is that the ideal is completely unattainable; as Kilbourne states, real women are doomed to fail from the beginning when compared to the “ideal woman” who exists in the advertising world because her image is based on “absolute flawlessness.” The “ideal woman” has “...no lines or wrinkles. She certainly has no scars, or blemishes, indeed she has no pores” (Kilbourne, 1999). The concept of feminine beauty that is fed to women through the media cannot exist in the real

world. As a result of not being able to constructively deal with the pressures placed upon me, I developed an intensely negative self-image and I started to severely restrict what I ate. Through my not eating, I was engaging in **identity manipulation**, or attempting to influence my outward appearance in order to align myself with the appearance norms that are considered “acceptable” and “valuable” in our society. Since industrial societies tend to judge one’s “self” based on how they look and not what they do (Cote & Allaha, 1995), I was attempting to fall in line with what was expected of me. My restricted eating habits allowed me some kind of control over my body and, I hoped, would eventually lead to my being accepted by my father and others as an ideal female. Since I never actually considered myself to be anorexic, I never moved beyond the **primary deviance** stage of this behavior; at this stage my behavior had not yet affected my self-concept and it was not interfering with my performance of social roles (McLorg & Taub, 2006). Eventually I stopped dieting so intensely, but only because I started suffering physically from it with bouts of dizziness, irritability and an extreme lack of energy.

During adolescence, I remember feeling angry and frustrated most of the time, especially when interacting with my family. I was particularly mean to my brothers, which just put more of a strain on the relationship between me and my father. A feasible **explanation for this aggression** is that I was just reacting with violence to the marginalized role I had been given in my family, and in society. Lyn Brown and Meda Chesney-Lind reason in their *Growing Up Mean: Covert Aggression and the Policing of Girlhood* (2005) that girls take to acting out aggressively and violently as a coping mechanism, but they do so somewhat covertly. In a world where boys and men do not have to fight to be heard and are encouraged to be aggressive, girls have to

find ways to become more dominant but still remain “feminine” while doing so. Unfortunately, much of this aggression is taken out on other girls in the realm of competition. Girls negatively label each other with names like “bitch” or “ho” while channeling their aggression at those with whom they should be bonding. Many girls do not realize that by using these hurtful labels against other females, they are propagating the very misogynistic social stereotypes that probably serve as a source of their aggression (Brown & Chesney-Lind, 2005, p. 83).

In an attempt to gain some independence, I started working part-time jobs toward the middle of high school. My desire to work also caused problems with my father. By working, I was able to be somewhat self-reliant and began to save for things that I wanted, like a car or nice clothes. Plus, I thought working was what you were supposed to do; I thought I was being responsible. Unfortunately, my father did not see it that way. By working, according to him, I was spending too much time away from my family and neglecting my school work. I thought I was doing something right by getting a job as soon as I was old enough to work and I was confused as to why he did not feel the same way. Being industrious and independent, I thought, were traits to be encouraged, but I found that I violated a certain time-table that dictated when work was supposed to become an important element in my life; high school was not this time. By violating this concept of time, I had violated my role as a teenager. This speaks to the concept of “**expectant time.**” Nancy Lesko cites James and Prout’s application of this concept to adolescents (2001, p.123), specifically the idea that youth are both imprisoned in time and somehow separate from time. In this limbo, a teenager cannot move backward toward childhood and cannot move forward to adulthood before the “right time” because of the limitations imposed

upon them. If one does try to move toward adulthood before their “time,” they are negatively labeled and viewed as “difficult.” By focusing on work at too early of an age, I violated the concept of “expectant time,” even though I had been taught to value the traits that had motivated me to work in the first place.

After high school, I went to college. This was not something that I really wanted to do; it was just what was expected. My period of adolescence was extended by going to college. According to Herr, this has come to be the norm in our society; the time designated as “adolescence” has been extended through increased college attendance and youth working at menial jobs (2006,p.47). This stands in great contrast to the past when the transition to adulthood was rather straight forward and the concept of “adolescence” was either non-existent or a much shorter time period.

During my first year of college, I did well enough in classes and worked at a minimum wage job. By engaging in these activities, I was doing what was expected of me, but I did not feel like I was progressing toward any meaningful goal. I felt that school was not preparing me adequately for a career and the job I worked at a mall bookstore provided me with no viable skills for the future. Basically, I began to panic because I did not feel that I was preparing myself for adulthood. I developed a sense of **rolelessness**, defined by Herr as occurring when one is lacking a “sense of belonging” and “a sense of self worth as a person” (2006, p. 47). After the first semester of my second year, I decided to leave the college I was attending, move into an apartment with a friend and work until I could sort things out. During this period of my life I felt like I was stagnant. I worked full-time at a coffee shop and took a few night courses. By choosing the job I did, I was leaving myself open to any better opportunities that may have come along

while I figured out my next step. It was a job I had merely for the sake of a job; any other equally low paying job could have replaced it but the convenience of the job’s location is what kept me there.

My attitude towards working at the coffee shop mirrors some of the **teens’ attitudes towards work** in Susan Willis’s article *Teens at Work: Negotiating the Jobless Future* (1998)—as a means to claim some independence in a society that dictates much of how they are supposed to act, look, and consume. Willis theorizes that by having a somewhat disposable job, adolescents can quit the jobs as a way to assert themselves (1998,p 350-351). Even though I was not attending school full-time, I still thought of myself as a student, not a worker at a coffee shop. Like so many other jobs available to adolescents, there was no future in this job. My job was not meant to be the beginning of a career; it was just a means to make money so I could pay my bills and possibly have some left over to spend however I liked. I also enjoyed the sense of freedom that came with this job, the fact that I could leave the responsibility of the job behind me when I was not working. Willis notes that this separation of work and home is teens’ rejection of what she calls “yuppie ideology” (1998, p. 352) as well as a rejection of the increasing incidences in our capitalist society of working class homes being transformed into places of work (1998,p.352). Though I had very little responsibility at or attachment to my coffee shop job, I also was not fulfilled by it.

During this period in my life, I had reached a stage that could be classified by Erikson as identity confusion or role diffusion, which occurs when a meaningful self-concept is lacking—resulting in a loss of one’s role in society and the weakening of one’s identity (Muuss, 1996,p.51). This period could certainly be classified as a “crisis” according to Erikson’s definition. My decisions going forward would positively or negatively influence my sense of

self based on how I chose to resolve this particular crisis. At this point, I had no real sense of who I was or where I was going. I had no plans for the future and no financial stability to change how I was living. All of the money I made went directly toward paying rent and bills, so continuing school full-time was out of the question and the job I was working was nothing that could be used as a basis for a career. I felt lost and somewhat hopeless, as if I was not doing anything worthwhile with my life. It was then that I decided to join the military.

It seems strange, but being in the military actually enabled me to become more secure with my sense of self than any other social interactions in my life. Authority and independence, traits I was taught to view as distinctly “unfeminine” were valued here. During my time in boot camp, I was trained by female drill instructors. These were powerful, strong women and though they were working in a profession that was generally seen as “masculine,” they maintained their femininity. This was the type of woman I wanted to be: strong, assertive, and sure of myself both as a person and as a woman. When I graduated from boot camp, I was, in fact, sure of myself. I knew that I was mentally and physically capable of enduring things that were once unimaginable to me. I gained self-confidence and an appreciation for who I was and what I was able to overcome.

Unfortunately, once I arrived at my first duty station, the appreciation for the strong female I had seen in boot camp all but vanished. The common perception was that there were only two types of females in the military: bitches or sluts. You could not be both, and you had to be classified as one or the other. Of course the females in the military were not the ones who made these labels, but eventually some grew to embrace them. This mirrors many of the experiences Tanenbaum recounts in her work, where girls who are labeled “sluts”

end up embracing the label and actually gaining a sort of freedom from acting out in accordance to their new role (2000). Tanenbaum also addresses the concept of women as “outsiders” (2000,p.190-191). I doubt that there are many environments where women feel this as intensely as in the military, though personally I was not significantly affected by this “outsider” label. At this point in my life I had a firm grasp of who I was and had developed a stronger sense of self. I had to wonder, though, about the females who had enlisted directly after high school; I wondered how they would withstand being treated as outsiders and hoped that they would appreciate how valuable and powerful they actually were.

Serving in the military also provided me with the opportunity to travel. My first duty station was in California. Even though this was in the same country, it may as well have been a different planet to me—someone who had never really traveled anywhere outside of New England. While I was in California, I was able to expand upon my new identity; it was almost as if I went through a second stage of identity moratorium. I experimented with my identity within the context of the self-confidence I had gained. When I left California, I was stationed in Okinawa, Japan, for two years. It was here that I really had the opportunity to see countries and cultures different from anything in the U.S. Through different deployments, I was able to travel to mainland Japan, the Philippines and Thailand. I began to develop a “**planetary consciousness**,” which is basically a building up of knowledge about places in the world that are different from a traveler’s home (Desforges, 1998). A portion of my identity was formed around the fact that I had traveled places where many of my friends and family at home had not. This could be seen as **cultural capital** which serves as a sign of distinction, giving me access to certain social situations I would not have been included in if I had not trav-

eled (Deforges, 1998). After having been to certain countries, I now had a sort of bond with others who had traveled there, making our shared experiences somewhat special and exclusive. The physical act of traveling itself was beneficial for me. To know that I was able to pack a bag, get on a plane, and end up in a new country gave me such self-confidence. It seemed as if the whole world was available to me and was waiting and willing to offer me the possibility of personal growth, educationally as well as emotionally.

When I left the military, after five years of service, I had a period where I again felt somewhat lost and detached. Eventually, though, the shock of returning to life as a "civilian" wore off, and I got used to my new routine. I started working again, but eventually I decided to return to school as a full-time student and complete at least one degree. This return to an environment that is typically viewed as an "adolescent space" has enabled me to reflect on my own experiences as an adolescent. One thing that I find amazing is how readily society is willing to manipulate adolescents for a profit, be it through their exploitation at work and in schools or pushing certain fads onto them as consumers. Society makes it extremely difficult for adolescents to truly shape their individual identities on their own terms. In our consumer culture, marketing firms have developed strategies to capitalize on the adolescent search for self; indeed, marketing has infiltrated many facets of people's lives to the extreme point where individuals themselves are seen as "brands." Henry Giroux, addresses this in his work, *The Abandoned Generation: Democracy Beyond the Culture of Fear* (2001). In the work's seventh chapter, "Higher Education, Inc.: Training Students to Be Consumers," Giroux provides the reader with the example of two students, Chris Barrett and Luke Mc-Cabe, who formed a plan in order to pay for college tuition and living expenses. The students created a

website, ChrisandLuke.com, where companies could go to contact them as the two offered themselves up as "walking billboards" for any company who wanted them (2001, p. 154). The student promised to wear the brands, eat the food, drive the cars and listen to the music of whatever company was willing to sponsor them. Eventually they were successful and were able to get First USA, which was part of the larger Bank One Corporation, to sponsor them, becoming the first fully corporate-sponsored university students in the country (Giroux, 2001, p. 154).

Some may say that Chris and Luke were smart for using the preconceived notion of youth as consumers to their advantage; but really they were just falling prey to the influence of ever present marketing while reducing their identities to commodities and presenting themselves as objects to be bought and sold by the highest bidder (Giroux, 2001, p. 155). The concept of **youth as consumers** is not a new one; adolescents are perfect targets for marketing campaigns because of their desire to remain up-to-date with the latest trends as well as their ability to frivolously spend whatever funds they may have. If companies get teens and young adults to buy their products, the products will gain the prestigious designation of "cool." This "cool" title will then encourage other teens and young-adults to buy the products in a cycle that lasts until the fad dies out. Consumerism seems to be becoming more and more prevalent, even disturbingly so. As Giroux states, "the individual choices we make as consumers are becoming increasingly difficult to differentiate from the collective choices we make as citizens" (2001, p. 154), and places that were once designated as "public" are being infiltrated by private companies because they present possible "business opportunities" (2001, p. 155). Since this is the way our society is moving, it is not surprising that higher education is run more and more like a business, with

ever increasing tuition costs and fees, and less like student owned-spaces designed for the sharing of knowledge and learning.

After my journey through adolescence was complete, I was also able to move onto Erikson's next stage of development after Identity/Identity Confusion, which is the Intimacy/Isolation stage. According to Erikson, "once personal identity is achieved, the need for personal intimacy moves into the foreground of the psychological development of the young adult" (Muuss, 1996, p. 55). The need for intimacy in interpersonal relationships develops. Erikson goes on to state that it is, "only after a reasonable sense of identity has been established that real intimacy with the other sex is possible" (Muuss, 1996, p. 55). I believe this to be true. When I was a teenager, it was impossible for me to feel comfortable sharing myself with other people because I was not comfortable with my own identity. There was no way to let anyone else truly know who I was because I really did not know myself. After having gone through my own journey of self discovery, I can safely say I know who I am and I am proud of who I am. I have a wonderful relationship with the man who is shortly going to be my husband, and I am truly able to share every part of my identity with him. Even though it may have taken me a little longer to establish an identity for myself that I felt comfortable with, I believe that because of it, my identity is stronger. I have grown to accept and appreciate who I am as a person and as a woman. Even if my standards for what it means to be "feminine" do not completely align with the desirable "feminine" standards of society, this is fine by me. I know I am a woman; a strong, proud, and healthy woman, and I do not need any outside influences to convince me of this. I have been lucky to find a man who appreciates me just the way I am, and even if I may be a bit of a "tomboy" he knows that all of my traits are what make me who I am.

Though I would not want to experience any of the crises of my adolescence again, I cannot avoid the fact that they helped form who I am today, and for that I am grateful. I definitely agree with Erikson's theory of identity development that one's identity is formed sequentially into a whole from a collection of different experiences (Muuss, 1996, p. 43). It is not as if one is able to wake up one day, simply knowing who they are and what they will be in the future. The search for identity is somewhat of a battle and it is a battle that I feel I have won, for now. I do not think I would be the same person if I had experienced adolescence differently. Because my adolescence was less than ideal, I think I have become a stronger, more resilient adult with a solid, deeply-rooted sense of self-worth and a well-formed identity.

REFERENCES

- Austin, J. (1998). Knowing their place: Local knowledge, social prestige, and the writing formation in New York City. In J. Austin & M. N. Willard (Eds.), *Generations of youth: Youth cultures and history in twentieth-century America* (pp. 240-252). New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Bensman, J., & Rosenberg, B. (1979). The peer group. In P. I. Rose (Ed.), *Socialization and the life cycle* (pp.79-96). New York, NY: St. Martin Press.
- Brown, L. M. & Chesney-Lind, M. (2005). Growing up mean: Covert aggression and the policing of girlhood. In G. Lloyd (Ed.), *'Problem' girls: Understanding and supporting troubled and troublesome girls* (pp. 76-88). New York, NY: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Cote, J. E. & Allahar, A. L., (1995) *Generation on hold: Coming of age in the late Twentieth Century*. New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Desforges, L. (1998). Checking out the planet: Global representation/local identities and youth travel. In T. Skelton & G. Valentine (Eds.), *Cool places: Geographies of youth cultures* (pp. 175-192). New York, NY: Routledge.

- Giroux, H.A. (2001). *The abandoned generation: Democracy beyond the culture of fear*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Herr, K. (2006). Problematizing the 'problem' teen: Reconceptualizing adolescent development. In S. Steinberg, P. Parnar, & B. Richard (Eds.), *Contemporary youth culture: An international encyclopedia, Vol. 1* (pp. 47-56). Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Jhally, S. (1999). *Killing Us Softly 3*. Northampton, MA: Media Education Foundation.
- Lesko, N. (2001). *Act your age!: A cultural construction of adolescence*. New York, NY: Routledge Falmer.
- McLorg, P.A., & Taub, D.E., (2006). Anorexia nervosa and bulimia. In P. A. Adler & P. Adler (Eds.), *Constructions of deviance* (5th ed.). Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth.
- Muuss, R. (1996). *Theories of adolescence* (6th ed.). New York, NY: McGraw Hill.
- Tanenbaum, L. (2000). *Slut!: Growing up female with a bad reputation*. New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers Inc.
- Wei, W. (1998). Hmong American youth: American dream, american nightmare. In J. Austin & M. N. Willard (Eds.), *Generations of youth: Youth cultures and history in twentieth-century America* (pp.311-325). New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Willis, S. (1998). Teens at work: Negotiating the jobless future. In J. Austin & M. N. Willard (Eds.), *Generations of youth: Youth cultures and history in twentieth-century America* (pp. 347-357) New York, NY: New York University Press.