

Special Feature Introduction

The following selections are based on interviews conducted by undergraduate students as part of an upper division general education course. The subjects were all women, often the interviewer's mother, who reflected on their lives while sharing their perceptions of gender and womanhood. Through the experiences of five women from childhood to adulthood, we are able to see how being a woman impacted their lives. The theme that emerges most clearly is the elusiveness of gender equality but also the hope for the next generation. Oral history is becoming an increasingly important tool in the writing of inclusive histories. While individual recollections cannot paint a comprehensive picture of major events, they do help us to understand the zeitgeist of an era.

We first encounter Agueda, who did not get along with her own mother. She provides a less than warm environment for her children, while dealing with her husband's infidelities. Michelle, a woman of Middle-Eastern descent who married a Mexican, faces both domestic and cultural obstacles. Juanita, who was traumatized by mental and sexual abuse at a young age, tells of her resilience and attempts to avoid further victimization. Ruzanna recounts her gender perceptions growing up in communist Armenia and her decision to defy cultural traditions when raising her own children. Sara documents her life as an Iranian mother and housewife who, until arriving in the United States, was dominated by men her entire life.

While the assignment that precipitated these histories did not require the interviewee to be an immigrant, the multicultural themes of these narratives are striking. This is indicative of the diverse CSULA student body, which is 55% Latino, 22% Asian/Pacific Islander, 15% white, and 8% African American. *Perspectives* would like to thank Professor Ping Yao for providing the interviews for this special feature from her course Gender in History (HIST 357).