Opinion



(Unsplash/Hannah Rodrigo)



by Mariam Williams

View Author Profile

Follow on Twitter at @missmariamw

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

November 28, 2017

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Over Thanksgiving, I had an epiphany about the current state of my familial relationships: I love being an adult at the same time so many other people in my family are also adults. My mother's siblings are all relatively close in age, so it follows that her generation would produce the next generation at around the same time and that we would grow up together. So I guess I knew most of us would reach adulthood at the same time, but I didn't know it would feel as good as it does.

I spent the holiday in the home of a cousin seven years my junior, playing games with her, her friends, other cousins seven and two years my senior, another cousin nine years my junior, and aunts and uncles. We played Family Feud and Heads Up. My grandmother was in the room when the prompt, "Name something people do after getting a divorce," came up In Family Feud. Those of us playing gave answers like celebrate, have sex or get drunk — without any worries as to what the adults would say. When my cousin joked that my mom, who has always been unmarried, was pimpin' by having a male friend while maintaining a friendship with my dad, my mom and I laughed with abandon. We all howled after a story about a church lady who implied a deacon with big feet had given two wives heart attacks in bed.

I don't mean to paint the picture that all we talked about over Thanksgiving was sex or innuendo; these are just the moments that stick out as being most adult, that would have been most forbidden when we were children. There was a time the adults thought it better to hide adult behaviors rather than to admit they did them, or that we children probably would do them ourselves one day.

Advertisement

Being able to mention, talk about and laugh about sex, divorce, drinking and the like indicates to me that my generation's relationship with its elders has shifted from parent-child/authority figure-subordinate to friendship. I don't know when the change happened or how. I know it didn't happen at 18 when I left home for college or 24 when I left home to pursue a fantasy of living in California. I felt very much torn between childhood and adulthood then, very much unaware of myself, of what were my goals for myself and what were those of my parents and grandparents. I

still want — and need — their support, guidance and love. And I think I want their approval but need it less, and this has changed the power dynamics of our relationships.

I don't consider myself equal to most of the women I spent Thanksgiving with; I don't have children and have never been married or had a long-term, live-in significant other. And it's not like the multiple generations of my family never disagree. I must say, however, that it feels freeing to be able to be more myself around my family. I think it must also feel better for my mother and grandmother's generations. I imagine how tough it is to parent, to set rules, *and* be an example, *and* be loving *and* be someone your children can talk to about anything. Though it's a role I want to assume in my lifetime, it's not a task I envy. But the payoff of adult friendship with one's child? That must be a sweet reward.

[Mariam Williams is a Kentucky writer living in Philadelphia. She holds a Master of Fine Arts degree in creative writing and certificate in public history from Rutgers University-Camden. She is a contributor to the anthology *Faithfully Feminist* and blogs at RedboneAfropuff.com. Follow her on Twitter: @missmariamw.]

Editor's note: We can send you an email alert every time Mariam Williams' column, At the Intersection, is posted to NCRonline.org. Go to this page and follow directions: Email alert sign-up.