

## Gender and Identity

**G**ROWING UP in a white, educated, middle-class U.S. household, different treatment or expectations based on gender were not a part of my day-to-day life. That changed when I studied abroad in Senegal. As a woman, on the gender hierarchy I was lower than a Senegalese man. As a foreign woman, however, I was higher than a Senegalese woman. I was allowed to eat with the men, but I also assisted the women with cleaning up.

I encountered these three young girls at the Great Mosque in the city of Touba. They were exiting the area where women and children pray separate from the men. I wondered if it bothered them that men had their own section of the mosque where they were not allowed to go. I know it bothered me. Did this make them feel inferior? Or did they not care?

While I struggled with understanding and respecting the different rights and expectations of men and women in Senegal, this experience also pushed me to consider my own sense of identity and importance in another way. Value resides in my ability to recognize and reflect on my own growth in and relationship to the world—not in comparison to others.

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