

Every community has problems that shape how they live, how they see themselves, and how they imagine their future. In my own life, I've identified three issues that are connected to my identity and the communities I belong to. These issues are, being raised by my siblings and grandparents rather than in a traditional two parent household, growing up as the youngest of six children, and living in the decline of my hometown, Santa Rosa, New Mexico. The issue I want to focus on most is the highway construction and how it created the decline of my community.

My identity is connected to Santa Rosa, it's where my family is from and where I was raised. Before the highway was built, Santa Rosa benefited from travelers stopping along the historic Route 66. Local businesses depended on tourism, and there was a sense of pride in our town's history and culture. Once the highway focused traffic away from the town, many businesses closed, tourism slowed, and opportunity became limited. Over time, this decline also contributed to an increase in drug use and other problems within the community.

Watching a place you love slowly lose its excitement creates feelings of sometimes helplessness. For older generations, there is grief over what the town used to be. For younger people like me, it creates uncertainty about the future. It makes you wonder whether staying is even an option or if leaving is the only way to succeed. Back home this problem is often talked about with a mix of nostalgia and resignation. People in Santa Rosa frequently bring up how things were "before" and compare it to how things are now. These conversations happen within families, among neighbors, and at local gatherings. While I've had direct conversations with people in my community about this issue, there is also a sense that many have accepted it as something that can't be changed. We've even considered changing the town to a retirement town.

Besides just my main issue, my other two identified problems are also rooted in my identity. Being raised by my siblings and grandparents placed me in a nontraditional family structure, which shaped my sense of responsibility and independence from a young age. As the youngest of six, I also experienced being cared for by many people while sometimes feeling overlooked, which influenced how I navigate my role in groups. These experiences connect me to the communities of households that have support but challenges are also present. Understanding the root of these problems helps me better understand my own experiences and why these issues matter so deeply to me.