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JO505

20, February 2019

My Own Experience with Racism

Growing up in Mexico, my ideology of racism was different from the rest. Every country has racism of their own, it is a global problem. The problem with racism, gender, and stereotyping has been around since colonial times, hence it is deeply ingrained in every society. Looking at the history of Mexico itself, we were invaded by the Spaniards in 1519. As soon as the white man arrived it was the notorious difference of us versus them, and skin color is the main identifying factor to see if you were either Spanish or Aztec. The Spaniards already came believing themselves as superiors, which as the years went by it translated to white being equal to superior in Mexican culture.

Mexico has a classist dynamics and the economy wage gap is extremely noticeable. We can blame this back to the Spaniards once again. What is considered a 'white Mexican' is different from a 'brown Mexican'. This is due white Mexicans having a bigger Spanish ancestry versus indigenous Aztecs. The amount of times I have been referred to or called as "guera", which means blonde, is something I grew up accustomed to and normalized it. Spanish ancestry equals to having money, since they conquistated Mexico, the Spaniards were the ones with the economic advantage, hence white Mexican equals wealth.

The gap is very noticeable. In my experience 'white Mexicans' and 'brown Mexicans' tend to not mix as much in terms of relationships, education, and job opportunities. However, this is due to the economic difference, not the skin color. The color of skin does not mean you

will be discriminated against by all means. Discrimination by skin color is not a concept that exist in Mexico. The reason why 'white mexicans' have better education or job opportunities is purely economical, as mentioned before, Mexico is extremely clasist. The color of skin does not determine anything, it is the money and social class that has a heavy role in a person's success. Discrimination in skin color in Mexico does not exist because we all share the common culture, which it is something that America lacks. Whether brown or white we are all mexicans and share the same traditions, morals, ideology, and culture. That is the experience I've had with racism in Mexico.

As mentioned before, racism is a global problem due to white man always being the ones in power, they have silenced the voice of others, and we do as they say. Why? Because it has been that way for centuries. White people have been in power since the beginning of times. Although as a society we have improved to be more racially inclusive, centuries have to go by before we are finally able to have an equal spread of power amongst races. In America there is lack of unification, there is a clearer differences between ethnicities and cultures. This is majorly due to America being composed of immigrants since the Mayflower. There is an underlying culture of who is the better race or an us versus them, a principle that I have picked up upon. My experience with racism in America differs from my experience with racism in Mexico.

There is a new underlying phenomena that I was not aware of until I got here which is the 'unearned white privilege' what this underlines is the idea of ethnic people having white skin, or white features that makes them appear as a white person rather than a person who is usually associated with an ethnic background. Being light skin and blond has earned me this 'white privilege' where I am not discriminated against judging just at my looks. People simply assume

I'm white. This generates a little bit of frustration for me at times. People don't notice that I'm foreign until they hear my accent. That is when they ask where I am from. As soon as I say Mexico, 9 times out of 10 I will get the comment back "Really? You don't look Mexican." This comment aggravates me because it comes with ignorance. People here in America are used to seeing the brown skin mexicans, not so much white mexicans. Even though I appreciate that this comment is not made with malice it makes me mad because I feel as if they were not validating my culture, my ethnicity, and my birth country. As if I were meant to look a certain way to satisfy a checklist. Another common question I get is "Where are you 'really' from?" or "Where are you parents/grandparents from?" which once again discredits my ethnicity. I recall being in a restaurant with my mother when I was about 10 years old. The waitress spoke spanish, so we ordered in spanish. The manager approached us and congratulated us, saying he was impressed by the level of our spanish. My mom and I looked confused and we just said that spanish was our first language. To which he replied "oh, I assumed you were white, I apologize." Once again this ties with the idea of unearned white privilege that comes with my ethnic skin and features.

I would say the very first time I experienced racism was when I was a junior in high school. I was a varsity debater and qualified to go to the state championship which was at Baylor University in Waco, Texas. This was at the peak of the political turmoil of last election. Things were tense and it was coming down to Trump vs Clinton. I walked into the room and saw my opponent. Before the debate started, we started talking. I might even dare to say he was flirting with me. Everything was going well, until he dare to ask "Are you legal?", when I first heard this my brain automatically thought he was asking for my age. So I simply replied "Well I am under 18" and he said "Oh no, like as in are you legally here?" My mouth dropped. I was shocked by

the audacity of the question, but by the whole concept of a person being ‘illegal’, I never thought about it that way. I just replied “not that it matters, but yes I am.” I thought to myself, but what if I wasn't? Would that make me less of a person? Less of a human being? Less important? The answer to all of those questions is a solid no.

The most hurtful experience that I have ever had with racism, and truly felt like I was less or undeserving, was with my highschool ex-boyfriend. For 3 years of high school I dated a white, texan, republican boy. Of course I fell in love with him and shared some beautiful moments. But his mother was never in favor of our relationship. The first time his mother met mine she asked her if we “enjoyed Taco Bell,” although this comment was very racist, for a second I thought maybe she is ignorant about the subject, and truly does not think asking that is racist. I quickly caught into the fact that her comments were out of malice. On the few conversations I had with her, she once asked me “Can I practice my spanish with you? I only speak it to the gardener and the housekeeper.” As condescending as the comment was all I could do was smile and say yes. My parents taught me to remain polite and level headed under any circumstances. Due to the constant rejection by his mother I felt that I was not enough. I wonder so many times what was ‘wrong’ with me. I would think: I am an honor roll student, I am well educated and cultured, I am nice, what am I doing wrong? Her anger towards against me got to the point where she would say to other mothers that my family had the wrong morals, values, and the wrong way to educate their children. My little brother got affected by it too, where mothers of his friends did not want him at birthday parties because according to my ex's mom, we were poorly raised and savages. A part of me always wanted to say something, put a stop to it. But as a 17 year old, I could not stand up to a women in her 50’s who was specifically the

mother of the boy I was in love with. My mother told me, don't take it personal, her ignorance is bringing out the worse, keep your head high, keep smiling, and do not let it get to you. So for three years I did that until the moment of our ultimate breakup.

My other experiences with racism happened with the college admission process. When we submit applications towards universities, and standardized testing they ask you for your ethnic background. The very first question is, "are you hispanic/latino?" As applications started rolling around, and I started getting acceptance from schools. My classmates who would have a higher GPA or ACT/SAT score than I did, would say that the only reason for my acceptance was my race, that the decision made on my acceptance was because of a minority quota the university had to fill. It is still a comment I get here at BU, or the "why are you not in CGS if your ACT was below the average?" When I get comments like this I feel like my intelligence, achievements, and hard work is discredited. Yes, maybe race had an influence in my admission decision, maybe I was judged to different standards, or maybe I am just as good as everyone else. Boston University is a world class institution that would not give a seat in their class to someone who did not deserve it.

Racism is a global issue that has been going on for centuries. We should be aware of our own inner racism, because we all have it, even me. But we won't get better and kinder to each other unless we accept that we have racist ideology ingrained in our brains and do something to change it. We change things by educating ourselves, by expanding our vision and opening our minds to the differences between us.