

My experience of being discriminated as a mexican american

[Sociology](#), [Violence](#)



Introduction

I'm able to speak Spanish because my parents are from Mexico, so I feel a connection to the Spanish language and culture in Mexico. I speak the language every single day to communicate with my parents, and I'm very proud of the identity they have given me.

The Protest and My First Encounter with Discrimination

Back in 2014 when I was in 8th grade, I remember stumbling upon breaking news online. 43 college students were arrested by government officials in Ayotzinapa, Mexico and disappeared soon after. They were studying to be teachers and did nothing wrong. The Mexican government conducted a swift investigation and concluded that the government officials who arrested the students turned them over to drug cartels. The cartels killed and burned the students at a garbage dump. The parents of the students, however, don't believe this story of the Mexican government and believe that their children are still alive.

Five years later, justice still hasn't been served for these students. I had to speak out about this injustice in my English class. I couldn't contain my emotions about this tragedy at all because my people were being targeted by the Mexican government, police, and organized crime groups. I asked my English teacher, Mr. Centeno, if I could share the news with the whole class. He said yes, so I stood up and delivered a speech full of outrage, frustration, and disgust. I did not condone the tragic event that occurred in Ayotzinapa, and I made that perspective known. After I delivered my speech, Mr.

Centeno concurred with my point of view about the Ayotzinapa students and made an announcement that there was going to be a protest in downtown Las Vegas seeking justice for those 43 innocent students. He asked if anyone was interested in going, and I immediately raised my hand like a rocket. A few other students raised their hands as well and after class, Mr. Centeno gave us more information about the protest.

When the day of the protest came, I had mixed emotions. Although I was excited, I was also filled with butterflies in my stomach because I didn't know what to expect. I was nervous. I never participated in a protest before, but when the protest leaders started chanting, " Vivos se los llevaron! Vivos los queremos!" and urging the crowd to do the same, my nervousness went away. I felt empowered to participate and make my voice heard. This feeling made me think that our protest was going well because cars honked at us in solidarity while we were walking around downtown Las Vegas and chanting our protest anthem. However, things quickly changed for the worse when a white, middle-aged man saw us protesting and approached us saying, " Go back to Mexico where you belong! You don't belong here. Stop speaking Spanish and speak English!"

The protest leaders instructed us to not pay attention to the man, but I couldn't stop myself from staring at him and pondering if what he said was true, or not. My language and culture was under attack. I didn't know how to respond. I completely froze and didn't say anything. At the time, I was naive and innocent. I never experienced any type of racial discrimination before, and this incident with the racist man caused me to question the Spanish

language and think it was wrong to speak in public. Because of this experience, for a while, I viewed English as the superior language compared to Spanish.

Pressure to Speak Perfect English

I consider Spanish to be a second language for me. I learned to speak English first, but I have grown accustomed to speaking Spanish. I use it primarily to communicate with other Spanish speakers such as my family, relatives, neighbors, etc. When I'm around other Spanish speakers, I feel comfortable because it's the language that my loved ones speak. Although I consider it a second language, it's still part of my identity. When I was on sports teams at school, speaking Spanish wasn't viewed positively because the teams we played against were predominantly white. Since we spoke Spanish to each other, opposing teams thought we were inadequate to play and not good enough to beat them. They judged our intellect through our use of Spanish and assumed that we weren't physically capable of beating anyone.

Similarly to Gloria Anzaldua's experience, I also learned the hard way that English is seen as the superior language in the United States. This is true because in "How To Tame a Wild Tongue", she describes a moment when an Anglo teacher caught her speaking Spanish at recess and punished her for it with "...three licks on the knuckles with a sharp ruler" (Anzaldua 75).

Anzaldua also mentioned the same Anglo teacher telling her, "If you want to be American, speak 'American.' If you don't like it, go back to Mexico where you belong" (Anzaldua 75). Unfortunately, in today's society, you're not

considered a real American if you don't assimilate to the language, culture, tradition, etc. Even broken English is frowned upon and not considered to be correct or proper. You're not considered an American even if you speak English with an accent because traditional American values expect and pressure people to speak perfect English. Any other language besides English in the United States is considered to be wrong, and Anzaldua internalized this feeling about her own language. I have internalized the feeling as well, to a certain extent, due to my experience with the Ayotzinapa protest.

The Burden of Assimilation

In 5th and 6th grade, my penmanship was terrible. It was really big and jumbled together. There were no spaces between words when I wrote, and my English teacher, Mr. Van Houten, noticed this flaw in my writing. One day, he pulled me aside and brought this issue to my attention. I thought my writing was good because no teacher had informed me about this problem before, so I was caught by surprise when I heard him say that I needed to improve my penmanship. To achieve this, he committed to providing me with worksheets that he made me complete every single day in class before I could participate in the actual lesson. I was separated from the rest of my classmates, and I couldn't join the class until I finished. Being separated from my peers made me more conscious of my writing skills. When I write now, I'm very critical of myself because my English teacher taught me how to write legibly. The process of improving my penmanship was tedious and frustrating at the time, but it made me a better writer.

However, I had to change the way I wrote in order to become one. As a minority student, I felt that my default writing style was too distant from the ideal American writing skills. Due to my Latino background, the pressure to assimilate to American standards made me feel like my culture's standards weren't up to par with the standards of American culture. Therefore, I believed that the English language was better. I can relate to Michelle Obama's *Becoming* when she says, "the burden of assimilation is put largely on the shoulders of minority students" (Obama 74). This supports the idea that the education system in the United States pressures students to be knowledgeable about the English language. They expect you to be at a certain reading level, writing level, vocabulary level, etc. If you're not, then they separate you into different English classes and teach you the skills that you're lacking in. Minority students are the ones who usually experience this separation because they don't have the same resources to a proper foundation in American education like students with multiple generations of Americans in their family.

Conclusion

Looking back on the day I found out about the injustice that the 43 students went through, I now understand their situation to be so much more important than what I once did. My experiences have given me a newfound pride in my language and with that, I plan to be socially active on campus. To accomplish this, I want to represent my culture well by being an outstanding LEAD Scholar and spreading awareness about injustices that occur in society through marches, protests, and other peaceful methods.

Taking into account my two experiences with the English language, I have learned to appreciate the value that language has to offer. It has made me more aware of my education and identity. Growing up, I didn't receive the best education in school because I went to public schools in low-income communities.

I had to mature to appreciate not only being able to speak Spanish, but also the process of becoming a better writer in the English language. I have come to realize that language is universal and used to communicate with others. It shouldn't matter that we have language differences because English is not the superior language. Although I speak English and Spanish, I feel a connection to both languages because I use them every single day to communicate with other people. Today, when I hear people speak in Spanish and talk about writing in English, I take pride in my educational background and ethnicity because it's what has made me the person that I am today.