

Constructing Myself

By Miguel Giron

It was on the first day of my senior year of high school, a day that I consider the catalyst to discovering myself. A day that changed a boy that could only be recognized in those criminalistic mug shot photos that were shoved into past yearbooks. I had been judged in a way that many others in the past had. The construction of my identity had been taken by the already low stereotypical expectations of a young Chicano/a student. I was expected not to exceed high school, expected to be another bad statistic. The counselor at my high school believed that I would not attend a university, and would soon make me believe that I was someone else. My identity had been put in the hands of others; I did not know who I really was.

Waking up on the first day of senior year, I had great aspirations. Like any other senior in the country, I was looking forward to all the activities planned for that year. Most importantly, submitting college applications. I felt ready for a long bittersweet year of school. On my walk to school, I began to imagine my future self. Having visions of graduating from a four year university and becoming a successful engineer. Earning enough money to spend on anything that I desired, a fantasy that has shaped me all throughout my upbringing. Soon I arrived to school, being the first day of the new school year, I did not know what my first period was until I checked the huge poster that had my last name accompanied by my first period class. What I saw for my class confused me, I checked many times to see if I made a mistake, and after further inspection, it was not one that I had made. It read "Senior Math-Mrs.Quiros Room 314," I was in shock. I was not necessarily behind in math; I had taken Algebra 2 previously and achieved a B in both semesters. Uncertain of what caused this mistake, I began to walk to class. Once Mrs.Quiros settled the class, she passed out everyone's schedule. I was excited to see what classes I had received, until I noticed another discrepancy on my schedule. I was enrolled as a library aid. Although having a library aid is helpful for some students, it is useless for me to waste a class period that did not prepare me for college. After thinking a bit, I questioned my schedule. Why was I put in these classes? I know I was not enrolled in the IB program or have taken many AP courses, but my classes have been up to par consisting of all honors courses. There was no reason for my counselor to put me in any remedial or filler classes.

At first, I came to believe that these classes were the right ones for me. The math class that was given to me is of course remedial, but the very encouraging description given by Mrs.Quiros was clear. She stated that, "it's just a review from algebra 1,2 and Geometry," also reassuring us, "this will give you guys a stronger foundation on your math skills." I fell into her lies, spending three class periods in what I felt was tedious for me to be in. Until then, I realized that I did not need a "stronger foundation" on my math skills; I was simply put into this class to fulfill graduation requirements. Having realized this, I knew that I was looked as remedial student even though I was completely ready for pre-calculus. My identity had been crushed, all throughout high school I had worked hard to show myself as an intricate student that would be ready for a higher education. A student that would go onto college and receive an education that

will gain wealth and success. At that time I felt completely shut down and ridiculed. My counselor had picked my classes, and labeled me as unimportant enough to receive college preparatory classes.

I had scheduled an appointment with my counselor. We reviewed my class schedule and he told me that there was nothing wrong with it. Clearly, he expected me not to go to college. I protested and asked him why he put me in these classes and not those that will prepare my for college. He responded by saying, “your grades and coursework are not meeting the potential of college.” Immediately I became furious. I demanded him to enroll me in the classes that I wanted, in which he had agreed after several minutes of debate. Leaving his office, I felt a spark. One that made me change who I was. The spark created a fire in me, my motivation and goals suddenly escalated. With this raging spark in me, I had set myself to prove him wrong and all of those institutions that did not believe that I could ever surmount to anything.

It was not until I entered college that I realized that my identity was foretold by the construction of those that did not want me to be successful. My race had been subjugated, I was looked as just another Mexican that will never achieve anything.¹ A Chicano student that will be just another bad statistic to be entered into the books. Presumably, all my counselor did was look at my name and decided that I was remedial, solely based on his views. Targeted by a construction in a society that praises themselves for equality, I was disgusted. Equality was not given to me, the opportunities others had were never presented to anyone in my situation.

Not only was I targeted in high school, but also here at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Excited as any other recent high school graduate, I had sent in my student intent to register form and transcripts to the university. Surely, being a first generation student, I had proved wrong anyone that had doubted me. All the excitement and deadlines leading to the fall were overwhelming. Having gone to orientation and met up with local UCSC freshmen in my area was a very amazing experience, I could not wait to move in. Of course, good things are sometimes too good to be true for me, when one night everything had changed. I checked my portal for any new deadlines or request, I found out that my admissions had been revoked. The feeling that dawned over me created a void in my stomach. I felt like throwing up, and began to cry. Not knowing what happened I frantically checked all my emails and there it was, a letter from the university stating that my admission was revoked because I did not turn in a transcript. Having proof that I did turn it in, I decided to call the office of admissions the next morning and set up an appointment with the director. On the phone we discussed my situation, discussing several topics, letting him know my struggle as a Chicano student. With the evidence that I had, the director refused to readmit me. His whole reason behind his decision was that it would be unfair to anyone else that might of had their transcripts misplaced. I respectfully hung up the phone and broke down. Similar feelings rose from what had happen in high school. All that I had worked for the past four years had been for nothing. I was expected to attend a community college and be behind in my career by a whole semester. Once again, my identity had been misjudged by what I was about to find.

As crushed as I was, I began to dig into the situation. I had discovered that admissions had overly admitted students to the university and had no room to place them all. With further inspection, I began to talk to several people that were in my exact situation. Not surprising at all,

¹in Michael Omi & Howard Winant's essay, “Racial Formation in the United States” it is stated the race is subjugated, where in my case it was pointed out that I was a stereotypical Mexican-American that will not go to college. (Routledge) 60.

the majority had been students in almost the exact situation as me. Latino and Black American students coming from low performing high schools that had slightly below average qualifications of what they normally admitted. It feels like the office of admissions had revoked all of us just to make room for more “qualified students.” This is all speculation, but it cannot be a coincidence. The construction of who they thought I was again changed my life.

I had been down, it was too late to go to community college, so I was just home every day sinking in sorrow not knowing what to do or who I was. My identity was flawed, I felt stupid, non-deserving, and unfortunate. I was made to believe this of myself. I was lost and confused. Asking myself, how could this of happened to me? Why was I viewed so unimportant that I did not have a secure spot at an institution that I had worked so hard to attend? After a long appealing process that involved my local representative and a senator, I received a letter from the office of admission. Fearing another letter of rejection, I opened it slowly trying not to flood my thoughts with misfortune. Reading that letter slowly, I saw that I was readmitted to the university for the winter of 2013. The joy I felt when reading that letter overwhelmed me. Justice had finally been served and I was able to attend college.

My situation inspired me to become the person who I am today. I tried to pursue my career goals of becoming a wealthy engineer, but I did not like the idea of giving in to a system that will continue to subjugate people like me. Now I consider myself as a nonconformist, I will no longer fall into common stereotypes and will fight for social justice in order to change the education system. I was naive to think that wealth would rid me of my problems and fix my image. I believed that wealth would grant me a life that would not have any more struggle. As everyone in my family has come to understand, money is the key for success. In my case it is not, I have grown out of the old fashioned values of using wealth as a display of who I am.

Learning about social construction, gentrification, flawed education systems, privilege, and the never ending list of other social problems creates rage in me.² Only being taught this in college furthers deepens my hatred for the racist institutions that I have attended throughout my life. Constant questions about how and why these problems occur furthers my motivation, and knowing that most of this is a product of greed enrages me. It boils my blood, then gives me even more motivation to succeed.

That blind boy that was once shy and under spoken is no longer here. In my first summer back home to San Diego from UCSC, everybody noticed the change in me. Beginning with my change in major, everyone was upset. Since I was the first person in my family to attend a university, they expected me to study what they call “useful majors” so I can become successful. Expecting me to study engineering, biology or any of the other overrated degrees that students are pressured into obtaining because it’s going to give them wealth. I had changed my major from Computer Engineering to a double major in U.S. History and Sociology. I kept receiving criticism, “what are you going to do with that?” “You're not going to be rich like that,” “are you sure you want to do that for the REST of your life?” I had no support, only from my immediate family. I let them know my mission on social change, explaining to them that there is much more to life than money. Talking to my friends and family, I let them know the issues with society, they completely dismissed me. Giving me remarks such as, “who cares” or “theres nothing we can do about them.” Their imperviousness kick started the spark that was once used as

² In bell hooks’s book *Killing Rage: Ending Racism*, rage is described as the deep hatred of racism and oppression that engulfs your emotions with anger and motivation. (New York: Henry Holt, 1995) 11.

motivation in high school soon became anger. I turned this anger into rage, using it to fuel every aspect of my life. This rage creates a burning passion in me, one that will carry on towards my education and my purpose in life.

My career goals that were once of greed and blindness changed. I began to question everything that has socially influenced my life and realized that it corresponds to what I have read in my humanities courses. I am now a maverick on a quest to change society. My experiences have encouraged me to call for action on myself. I decided to do my part in this struggle by hopefully becoming a teacher, writer, and advocate for those who suffer through this system. This call is not only for myself, but anyone who does not choose to be idle on a moving train.³

Works Cited

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³The title of Howard Zinn's, *You Can't Be Neutral on a Moving Train: A Personal History of Our Times*, refers to a metaphor where he suggest that you can't stand by and wait for disaster(Boston: Beacon Press,1994).