

# Lucia Gonzalez

All my life, I trusted you as the metric by which to measure my accomplishments. I would think it ineffective to reassure myself that I am not reflective of the labels you attach to me, but I am. And consequently, I have spent too many sleepless, restless nights wrestling with my self-doubt only to find your image of me in my own eyes. I have become susceptible to an esteem that is not rooted in my own self.

Unfortunately, the extent of our agency is constrained to the parameters of our own being and conscience. I could not prevent you from tearing down my self-esteem. This education system gives institutions the freedom to label me as “rejection” or “deferral” simply because past generations of my family did not have the luxury to be born in this country or the means to attend their institution.

And yet, “legacy” is not a term foreign to me. Legacy is taking pride in the amalgamation of Spanish and Indigenous blood that flows through me. It is empowering those from my community to receive a higher education. It is being prideful in my Mexican heritage in a society that labels my people as murderers, rapists, and criminals. Legacy is the intricate compilation of our everyday interactions with others. It is the way we grow, live, coexist, and love.

Labeling in all of its forms, whether macro or micro, stems from polarized, divisive perspectives. We must learn to amicably share our experiences against the tides of ignorance so that others may see our life through our eyes. Some through no fault of their own are alienated from our life experiences, and we should teach them as they should teach us. No one man is independently

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sovereign from his neighbors, and education is the key to an indivisible community free of adverse labeling.

While I refuse to be defined by a string of adjectives, and though I cannot prevent others from attaching a label to the queer idiosyncrasies of my being, I can take pride in the words I choose to define myself with. Hija, student, first-generation, Chicana. I make the conscious decision to empower myself to be unapologetically me.