

*You're not like other Mexicans, you're basically white!* I have been told this gut-wrenching phrase by peers and friends at school for as long as I can remember. I take pride in the fact that I am Hispanic and I embrace it wholeheartedly. What others do not see, is the years of shame and embarrassment hidden underneath. For the first six years of my life, I lived in Garden Grove, which has a very diverse population. In the midst of the 2008 recession, both of my parents were laid off. Fortunately, they landed a job managing an apartment complex in Huntington Beach. So, we packed our bags and left familiarity behind us, moving to what I presumed to be sunny, laidback, beachside living. In reality, I was faced with more hardships than I could have fathomed. As a young, queer, woman of color living in a city that was known for its white majority, upper-middle class, and conservative population, walking out into the open world was a challenge in itself. I was too white for my family, but too brown for my peers. The pressure to fit in was constantly looming over me. The fact that, as a seven year-old, I was terrified to be myself out of fear of being judged is utter shocking; this is not justice. Justice is the ability to be treated as an equal. Justice is the opportunity to live freely without prejudice. Justice is a basic human right that some will never be able to experience. Everyone dreams of equality, yet making it a reality is still a societal challenge. Orange County consists of over 3 million people. In 2018 alone, 67 hate crimes and 165 hate incidents were reported. As human beings, we must advocate for the oppressed and push for change. The key to achieving justice could not be more plain to see. We all have a voice, and it's our responsibility to use it. This school year, I became a writer for my school's newsite. Using writing as my outlet, I have been able to break down the walls of stigma and give a voice to people in my community. Journalism has allowed me to stand up and speak out for what I believe in with the art of language. We can no longer remain silent in the face of injustice. As I grow older, I question why I continuously allow people to discriminate against my identities. I am exactly like everyone else. Being Hispanic does not take away from my humanity. My story is only one of many. Together, we can use our own stories and experiences to give a voice to the voiceless. Only then will justice be achieved.