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Why a Mexican Trans-Masc Can Appreciate “I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter” [Personal Essay]

Guest Contributor

Last summer, I decided to pick up a book my dad recommended to me. I was working out of town and crashing with different relatives. When I was not spending four to eight hours in a warehouse, I was wasting my time scrolling through YouTube and listening to music. My grandparents' house did nothing to help the situation as they did not have WiFi, and I was completely and hopelessly bored.

Suffice to say, I was in need of a different form of entertainment. This came in the form of “I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter,” by Erika L. Sánchez. Reading the plot synopsis, I did not believe I was going to feel a connection to the main character, Julia. My parents are not immigrants, we never lived on or below the poverty line and I never suffered the loss of a sibling. But as I delved deeper in the book, I realized we are not so different. Whether or not Sánchez considered people like me would find representation in her book, I am grateful she discussed the issues of sexism and gender expression in Mexican culture. While I did not experience her family's hardships, I related to Julia's frustrations about her family's and culture's expectations for being a woman.

Recently, my friend and I went to watch a theater rendition of the book at the Seattle Rep Theatre. And as someone who is critical of book adaptations, I really enjoyed watching Isaac Gómez's play. Nearly every page of the book was adapted into live theater seamlessly and the actors and actresses portrayed their literary counterparts respectfully and exceptionally. Julia's cynical and dry humor translated well in Karen Rodriguez's dialogue and numerous soliloquies.

But the reason I adored this production was seeing the book scenes I found myself in while reading come to life. Julia is shown wearing the same clothes throughout the play: a David Bowie t-shirt, a flannel, jeans and Converse shoes, but her relatives and family constantly harass and bully her for dressing “like a slob.” Her passionate, and often blunt, tone does not help the matter as they deem it “crude” and tell her to keep quiet. But whenever she does stay silent, she is “antisocial” and “does not care about family.” Despite protesting about her parents throwing her a quinceanera, they ignore her because “what girl wouldn't want one?” During the ceremony, Julia wears an extravagant peach dress and high heels and dances to music her parents like, not what she likes. She is uncomfortable, but she has to go along with it to satisfy her family.



Natalie Schorr

When I came to these parts in the book and play, I felt myself represented in a way many books fail to do. Though Julia is not transgender, we share the same experience of not living up to expectations. My mom always fought me whenever we got dressed up for social gatherings because I did not like getting my hair done, wearing a dress or wearing uncomfortable shoes. Whenever I sit with my legs spread, my mom is quick to say, "Cross your legs; you're sitting like a boy." One time I slapped my dad for harassing me in front of family, and all of a sudden I was the one in the wrong. For my senior prom, I settled for wearing a dress because my parents did not listen to my wishes to wear a suit and tie.

Trust me, I tried my best to be my parent's "baby girl" for 18 years, but I cannot keep living this lie. The longer I have to live this double-life, the harder it becomes to lie about why I am not the child you used to know. It hurts me whenever I hear them bragging about how they are blessed to have such a wonderful "daughter" because I feel like I am betraying them. Dad, I appreciate that you did not drink so you would remember my prom night, but I cannot lie to you and say I enjoyed myself. Mom, I know how much you wanted a little girl, but I will not sacrifice my happiness to be someone who I am not. I am sorry I cannot be your perfect Mexican daughter, but maybe I can be your perfect Mexican son. One day, I hope we can sit down and read "I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter" as a story of coming to terms with your identity rather than a story of loss and repression.

So, if you are a Hispanic, trans-masc person and are looking for a book to read or play to watch, take a look at "I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter." The title is misleading, but I believe you are going to feel represented throughout the story.