

## Understanding My New Normal

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## Understanding My New Normal

Brianna Juarez

I am a Chicana in higher education.

I am in some ways privileged and some ways not.

There are many intersections of myself that scream oppression, that exude trauma, that are fueled in fear, but this wasn't existent in my paradigm in what I previously thought of to be my *formative years*.

I am a queer, first-generation, Mexican American woman living in Northern California. I am not from here, I am from Southern California; a place where having all these identities never made me feel othered. Growing up in SoCal meant a lot of things, such as actually seeing the sun every day, looking to my left or right, and seeing people who looked like me. People who spoke in my mother's native tongue that I grasped tiny portions of, people who I felt safe with even if I didn't know them. I always lived in the hood, sometimes my hood was "nicer" than other hoods but still the hood nonetheless. The ghetto bird flew above my home countless nights, and yet I still felt safe.

I didn't start to feel unsafe in my own home until I moved to Northern California. I could no longer look to my left or to my right and see those who looked like me, or looked like other BIPOC. I had to search in a sea of whiteness that felt endless. I began to lose myself in this whiteness. I began to feel the oppression and trauma that was there all along besides me but wasn't prevalent because I had been privileged, shielded, and fooled that it had skipped me.

Silly me.

I am a Chicana in higher education in a predominantly white area that I do *not* feel safe in. I am a Chicana residing in an area that had Trump parades on Sunday afternoons. That was normal, but it was not **my** normal, or was it? What is my new normal?

My normal used to be living in a home filled with my mother's love and my father's pride. Now my normal is living in a home with my partner's love, pride, and my kitties' silly selves. My normal used to be waking up to a home cooked meal that my mother would sometimes resentfully make but I didn't taste the resentment, mostly because it was not meant for me, I just tasted the love. Now my normal is cooking my own food and trying my best to fill it with love and not the stress, pain or trauma that I sometimes think is oozing out of me. My normal used to be hanging out with my cousin and friends every weekend, doing nothing and everything, but having the time of my life. Now my normal is working, studying, living, spending time with my partner when it fits into our schedules, and mostly feeling alone. You see, I don't have many friends in Humboldt, maybe that's because of lack of effort on my end but for the most part I would say it's because I never felt like I belonged. Community was never something I had to search or yearn for. Previous to living in NorCal, I was a part of my community, there was no searching for it, there was no wondering if I fit in, I just felt **in**. But now, where do I fit in?

I am a Chicana in higher education living in Northern California.

Up until my senior year working on my Bachelor's degree, I never felt like my institution loved me as much as I loved it - an unrequited love, a toxic love. A love that was so consuming, at times I thought it was destroying me.

I am a Chicana in higher education who is wrapping up my B.A. in Philosophy. This subject never felt like I belonged in it, I knew this, I knew that it was not a field meant for women *especially not women of color*. I knew this, and being who I am, and who I was raised to be, I did not care and pursued the degree. What I didn't know was that it was going to break who I was.

Countless courses and countless lessons excluded my existence and when it accounted for it, it was romanticized or demonized which forced me to feel on the outskirts of the information. How can I truly study and be connected with the information? I felt ostracized and honestly, really sad because of this. I could no longer hide under my shielded existence; I felt an uprising within myself. I told myself I was

working on my degree in philosophy so I could become a professor and be the representation I never had. But that never felt easy or natural, it felt like I would be living in a cycle of repeated trauma. It was because of this that I became cynical.