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## Mis Berrinches: My "Otherness"

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# Mis Berrinches: My “Otherness”

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## Jacqueline Barrera-Pacheco

Back when I was youngster, I did not know much about what disadvantages or privileges I did and didn't have. I did not even know what that meant. Never heard of it. I sort of knew what it looked like, but did not know what to call it other than *mi mala suerte de ser pobre*. Last semester I just learned that “*mi mala suerte de ser pobre*” excuse had terms, a background, a cause, and which are the institutions behind it.

My mom calls my supposedly molestias y tristezas como berrinches; she did not fall for any of them. “¿¡¡Amá, porque ustedes no tienen dos carros o porqué nunca salimos?!!” I would say madly, especially during the summer when living in a two-bedroom apartment was not the place where I would want to be. Knowing that my friends were in Disneyland or Raging Waters made me wish I were rich. My parents worked and still continue to work at a 7 AM to 5 PM job and work even on Saturdays. So yeah, taking my brother and me somewhere was not in the picture. We could only go to the neighborhood park. I am not saying I did not appreciate it, but I was at that age where everything my friends did I wanted to do as well.

During high school, I constantly heard that I lived in an “at-risk, low-income neighborhood,” South Central, Los Angeles. I, along with others in the neighborhood and surrounding neighborhoods, were and are at-risk of: joining a gang, doing drugs, dying, dropping-out of school, getting pregnant as a teen and much more. The main factor that would ensure those outcomes was not having money at home. Many claim that money cannot buy you happiness, but it sure does make a family who lives off of their parent's paycheck week-by-week want to do something to support them. Money needs to be used wisely, sure here and there you can splurge on yourself, but knowing what you need to pay off first matters the most. Many people I knew in middle school knew the privileges they did and did not have at the

age of 14, precisely the age in which many of them dropped-out to work and help their families.

I did not judge them, I knew that they had troubles at home and only had one parent in their life to make the rent on time. If anything, I looked up to them and wondered how they had the courage to take the initiative to create their own path at a young age. I really thought about working and not going to school, but I did not have that “necessity” although I knew how much my family needed it. I knew that the unequal pay my mom and dad received was not fair, I heard them talk about how bad their bosses treated them and the sarcasm used and maldades their co-workers did amongst the rest of the workers. I heard their daily conversations (and still to this day) through the crack of the door, how they wish they could stop working there and leave, but it is easier said than done and looking for another job would take weeks. And when they did leave that job, it was not weeks but months that it would take them to find another job - and it always ended up being the same work environment as the previous one.

I did not end up dropping out the moment I started to realize that I knew what it was to “look poor” and be poor thanks to the media, neighborhood police officers, teachers and neighbors. I knew that I needed to stay in school fo’sure. As I transitioned to middle school, I complained about why my parents were not looking for a house, not an apartment, but a house. They said that they did not have the money, but les reclamaba diciendoles que hay familias que tienen cinco hij@s y tenían casa y dos carros. Man I would get mad because how difficult could it be to find a house when the total family members in the house are four?! We did not have two cars or payments for having bought a brand new couch or refrigerator - I did not understand why it was difficult to get a house. “Ama agarra Section 8, una casa de dos pisos estaría bien, acabo no nos iríamos lejos de la área,” I would tell my mom. She would respond by telling me, “No. No voy a depender del gobierno sabiendo que yo puedo pagar mi propia renta. No quiero que tu tampoco dependas en eso.” I would still be mad though, but she had her reasons.

My aunts and uncles have a home of their own, all paid! A nice home with their own front and back yard, basement, three rooms, big kitchen, I mean what more can you ask for? Oh yeah, and they had two cars. But most importantly, they have their own home that they only have to pay utility bills for. I never told my mom that though, I knew she would get mad at me or even worse, feel that I was ashamed of how I was living. I got even madder because she is the oldest, and she did not have a home of her own, but her younger siblings all do. I was not ashamed, if anything, just jealous, and to be more honest I'm still jealous.

Even people in the neighborhood have good cars, unlike my dad, whose last two cars were stolen. I saw the second one get stolen, but I did not scream at the cholos who stole it because what good would that do? What sucks even more was that those cholos were the same ones who lived two blocks away and I would see them pass by like nothing. But I have seen them do far worse things at night to innocent people, so lo deje en las manos de Dios and just hoped that the next car my dad got wasn't stolen. Plus, snitching was not the route to take since everyone ends up finding out anyways.

To be honest I do not know where this essay is heading, it seems more as if I'm ranting about what I did not have when growing up.

Then attending a University happened. A class I took, in *Race, Class, Gender and Sexuality Studies* taught me the disadvantages, advantages, injustice, and privileges that I have encountered without even knowing that I have. Terms such as *discrimination* and *internalized oppression* caught my eye the most because I really think that everyone in the *hood* projects those two at all times. If I were to look back at when those moments happened I couldn't point them out even though I faced them hundreds of times. The wanting of better things and being unhappy with the way how I was living is internalized oppression because I wanted what the privileged people have, a fancy home, more than one working car, and a fair and equal paying job. I let it go though (honestly to some extent) but now that I know that receiving a higher education is a privilege I know that I will have those things one day and I'm glad. It is not my fault, nor my family's, nor my community's for how we live.

My otherness is not unique; many know of it, many have gone through worse. But seeing how it has made me feel worthless, feel ashamed of my culture and background, of my skin, my color, my identity, my persona at a young age of just 11 years-old makes me feel glad of the privilege that I did obtain of being able to learn at a higher education institution. I'm PROUD TO BE MEXICAN. Proud and blessed to be the daughter, cousin, granddaughter and niece OF MY FAMILY. My otherness, I'm also proud of.

## Reflection

When responding to the writing prompts over the course of this semester, I did not know that I had a lot to say about a question whose response only mattered to the person telling the story. Who cares about what a young Chican@/Latin@ student has to say? Who cares about our struggles? Who cares about our story? That is what initially crossed my mind because I come from a community where people's stories like mine are just used for the benefit of the elite who just need an area to donate their money to. We were, and still are, being used. We tell our stories to the media because we want the truth to come out, but it is always misinterpreted and written differently for the benefit of others who we do not even know.

In other situations, when I was asked similar questions, just like the ones in the writing prompts I used to lie and did not speak about it. I did both of those things because I was upset that my story did not matter. I lied because it made me stronger in knowing that others were not going to say the usual, "*I feel sorry for you. It really amazes me how people like you have survived so much,*" because those phrases coming from outsiders were always just said para sacarnos más información para sus organizaciones que ni nos ayudan y nos hacen sentir peor de lo que ya estamos. I did not speak about it because I did not know what good it would do. So why start now? Why should I truthfully write about it in class and re-read my story just knowing that it would make me more homesick than I already am?

I continued to truthfully respond to the prompts because my professor and my classmates gave out a vibe that made that classroom our safe space. A space where I heard my classmates write and tell their most intimate stories to the rest of the class. An

environment where we were able to relate to one another and even relate to our professor. How often does that happen in an institution where we are often looked down upon and belittled? It does not happen often. So being able to cry, laugh, become stronger, admire, and learn from those around us in that classroom made me write my stories truthfully and genuinely. We were not reporters, we were not just any other outsiders trying to profit from each other's stories, and we were not the type of people who would ever exploit one another.

It was not easy reflecting back on "Write about a time when..." nor was it easy on having realized hours later that you missed out on the chance to share your story out-loud. But knowing that there was going to be at least one other person who would relate to my story continued to make the writing process easier, even if nobody would read it other than me. I liked the fact that my professor did not give us guidelines, other than continuing to write without stopping because it helped me jot down stuff that I was previously discouraged from saying. I was encouraged to actually write about my "otherness" and about my feelings, something that I would not dare write about and that would only be kept in my mind. Writing my stories made me become proud of whom I am, was and will become.