

Monica

My grandpa would always tell us, 'Hey, take off my shoes. You're gonna do this for your future husband.' And I'm like, 'Am I really? Or, is he gonna take off my shoes?'



My name's Monica and I am 18 years old. I was born in Ontario, but I spent the first five years of my life in Mexico. People have a lot of stereotypes. "Oh, you grew up in Mexico? Okay, you're illegal." And because I'm a woman and I have an opinion, that means I am "bossy."

When I came from Mexico and started kindergarten, I was learning my ABC's and my 1, 2, 3's like a typical child. But when I went to first grade they thought that my English wasn't good enough, so they put me in the English learning classes. I quickly realized that a lot of people wouldn't want to hang out with me because of that. It was hard for me to make friends. I was a "foreigner" from Mexico. A lot of kids wouldn't even attempt to speak to me.

It's funny because often the people that would make fun of me were those who had the same sort of background. They'd be Mexican, too. And they'd say things like, "Oh, I learned English faster. Oh, my parents didn't come from Mexico, my grandparents did. Oh, I've been here longer than you." And it was like, "All those things make me better than you." It made me feel weak, at first. And it made me feel excluded.

I finally found a group of friends when I became more focused on my education. We met through the school AVID program - Advancement via Individual Determination - that helps kids to prepare for college. It was like, "I'm into school, you're into school," and that's the common thing that we had. We each had our stories, but we didn't judge each other for them.

My parents didn't have an education, so they really didn't emphasize the importance of school. It was my older sister who joined AVID first. She kept enforcing the idea that if you get an education, your life becomes easier - it's not that there aren't any struggles when you have an education, but the struggles are different, so you can achieve bigger goals. My sister was my role model.

My mom really influenced me, too, because she's the one who provided for us by working. For many years my dad didn't have a job. I learned to see things as, "Okay, this is how things work. Females can provide for the household, whether they're single or not."

That's different from many traditional Mexican households. I lived in my grandparents' house for



“He was the only friend I had after coming to the States. He was a sense of security to me, and without him I would not have gotten through the bullying or discrimination I faced in elementary school”



Build-A-Bear stuffed wolf, made by Monica in the second grade

many years, and my grandma would constantly tell me and my sisters, “Pick up after your uncles.” I had five uncles in that house, and they were all messy. They were used to my grandma picking up after them!

I was seven years old and being told, “You must cook for the male. You must feed the male. You must clean up after the male.” I would get mad, like, “I didn’t make this mess! How can you expect me to wash these dishes when they don’t even, literally, pick their underwear up off of the floor?” They told me this was my role, as a woman.

Being that I am female, many men do think they can automatically tell me what to do. And if I say something back they think that, “Oh, she’s just bossy.” And I’m thinking, “If you were in my shoes would you be bossy? No. You’d be, in quotations, ‘the boss.’” Right? Well, I’m just trying to be the boss as well.

I have been in a relationship for six years. That’s tough, I’m not gonna lie. When you’re twelve you’re just thinking “Oh my God, you’re cute! You like me back!?” Okay!” And that’s all you need. But growing up, our views started going in different ways. My boyfriend grew up in a more traditional household, and at times he can be a

little overpowering, like, “I’m the man. I take dominance. I provide for you.” And I’m just like, “I’m a female, but that doesn’t mean I can’t do things for myself. We’re going to have equal balance in this relationship.” And we still struggle with that, because he is like, “I must do this and provide for you.” And I’m like, “But I can do it, too.”

That I didn’t know English, that doesn’t make me who I am today. That I am a woman doesn’t define my potential. My motivation to succeed, and what I want to achieve, are what make me who I am. Instagram, hashtag, you’re your own fuel. Monday motivation.