

Column: Wishing to exist within their own language

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Identifying as non-binary in a world where gender is still seen as predominately male and female presents many challenges, especially within the Hispanic community. Berry Garza is one such individual who is very familiar with these challenges. They grew up in a mixed family of Mexican and Native American and have been out as non-binary for about five years.

The Spanish language can be very difficult to navigate within the Latinx community. “The language itself doesn’t really afford the space. It’s an incredibly gendered language,” states Garza. When first coming out as non-binary they were concerned with how their relatives would understand what it was they were trying to say, given the gender limitations of the language. Garza’s family is always trying to find words within the Spanish language that could be non- binary or genderless for everyone in order to address them properly. It is a struggle but they have managed to find some that work well for their family.

In their day-to-day life being non-binary does not come up too often, however in their interactions with the general public it is always present. Garza is frequently misgendered by people on the street, at restaurants, on the bills that they pay and so on. Strangers will misuse the pronouns she/her and he/him on them. Garza has taken an incredibly positive attitude to these situations and sees them as opportunities for learning together, giving patience and grace to those around them as well as themselves.

When a person comes out as non-binary it does not mean they automatically know everything that means, they just know it is who they are. “I’m constantly learning what it means to be non-binary for me and that means that everyone else around me should be learning what that means too. So there’s always going to be education. Don’t be afraid to go find your education,” says Garza.

They are an outspoken and courageous individual who has no problems informing others on which pronouns they use, seeing that strangers would have no way of knowing if they did not speak out. They view life from such a positive perspective. Garza believes that for most cases people are not being offensive, they just don’t know. They recall an instance early on at their job where there was a lack of education among their co-workers. So they teamed up with the company’s pride group and did a presentation where they tried to help others understand more about preferred pronouns, how and when to use them and why they are so important.

Garza points out that with the Spanish language being so gender dominated the whole language needs to change. It leaves people who identify as non-binary or transgender feeling like there’s no space for them in the Latinx community. When their own language does not even see them how can they comfortably and safely belong within it? “Recently the change has been starting but it’s very small,” says Garza. “People are starting to do the work but it’s always going to be an uphill battle but at least someone is pushing it up the hill.” They point out that they often hear the term “gang” being used with the Latinx community to try and be genderless, however even that word still needs to be gendered within the Spanish language which still makes things difficult. Garza always looks on the positive side and sees it as baby steps forward.

Taking your own mental well-being into consideration is a priority. Garza makes sure to surround themselves with people that they know will be accepting and understanding. Creating that safe space is a must. It can be frustrating and mentally exhausting having to educate other people every day who either do not like who you are or do not understand it.

“I would love to just be able to take up the same space as my cisgender friends who don’t have to acknowledge it and don’t have to talk about it. They just exist but I have to exist a little bit harder and a little bit further and take up a little bit more space to make that connection with people,” says Garza.

They find that just stepping back and self-isolating a little bit or having other non-binary friends who they can speak with helps tremendously with getting through the difficult days and feelings. “Also just reminding myself that it’s not about me when someone is struggling or upset about it, that’s a them problem and it’s not up to me to own their issues,” they add. They want others who may be going through similar problems to know that if someone doesn’t like who you are that’s their issue and not your weight to bear.

“There’s going to be times when you’re not going to get understanding. It’s going to be really crummy,” Garza says. “Find yourself some good people.” It is essential for people who are struggling to find that support and to go at their own pace. If someone who is in your life does not accept who you are then they don’t deserve your time. “Nobody needs to have that negativity in their life and it can be really hard,” they said. “Be yourself, be safe, be smart and everything will be fine,” Garza states.

Garza wants others who may not have found the courage to come out yet to know that there's no right way to come out as non-binary or trans.

"There's no timeline," Garza said. Give yourself space and find your community while you're at it. You don't even have to tell your community anything, just be a part of it. Find it and trust yourself and believe in yourself."

They wish they could have told their younger self that advice.

In smaller towns there may not be a large Latinx community, but Garza encourages people to seek out all that they can.

"Check out the local community clubs, check out the bulletin board at the library and see what's going on. You might not find a Latinx specific group, but you might find a LGBTQIA+ group and meet other Latinx people and they can become your group," Garza points out.

Online resources are also great options for people who need them. The Trevor Project is one such resource for LGBTQ youth under 25 years of age. Garza suggests checking out your schools GSA if they have one. "I was president of mine in high school and the support and experience changed my life in the best ways possible," they said. "The Bravery Center, which is another resource to help youths (14-24) have a safe space and support with navigating life after coming out," they said. The Human Rights Campaign and the Oregon Central Coast chapter of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) are some additional resources.

People like Garza in the Latinx and non-binary communities just want to exist and live their lives, just like all the other people around them are doing. Perhaps with more understanding, patience, and education one day they will be able to.

If you are an LGBTQ youth who needs help you may reach out to those at the Trevor Project 24/7 via texting 678-678, calling 1-866-488-7386 or their online chat feature found on their website, [TheTrevorProject.org](https://www.thetrevorproject.org).