

For me or for us

Emilia Gonzalez

Abstract: What happens when you just don't want to "dream big" anymore, when you're tired of the pressure of "proving people wrong"? In this piece, Emilia Gonzalez shares how her first-gen experience led to a critical decline in her mental health and her decision to finally confide in her parents for support. Through this experience, Gonzalez realizes her potential as a powerful source of inspiration for future generations of first-gen women.

How do I accept the fact that I've let so much go to waste over my own stupidity and blindness to what I've been given. How do I tell my immigrant family that all their years of hardships and sacrifices, their pools filled with gallons of tears, sweat, and blood now lie in the hands of a child—a child that remains a disappointment of what could've been. I still don't know how, but I did. I told them that night. I was vulnerable and gave into the pressure of years and years of being told what I needed to be to make their combined lives together finally feel like it was worth a damn. I was born to be in a position where the world seemingly gave me everything I needed to be successful, so why do I feel and see that it's against me? Why did I that night need to tell her that regardless of the life-threatening changes she made to make sure I had a good life, it meant nothing. And that that same daughter, who a family did all that tortuous travel and work for, would've rather never had a chance to start at all. She didn't want to "dream big" anymore, she didn't want to "prove people wrong" anymore, she didn't want to live anymore. The world can be so cruel to those who just want to be themselves, because in this reality we seemingly have to live up to a title—in my case, a degree—just to mean something in this society. Why couldn't I just be good enough as I was?

It was hardest to realize that it wasn't my family's expectations for me, but rather it was a plethora of expectations we need to meet to be seen as equal in this America. On top of that we must do it all on our own because unfortunately, this society doesn't believe in us, just as much as they don't believe in our immigrant parents. Now to complete my meaning in life I need to finish this degree no matter how hard it is going to be. This degree is going to, in the end, define my status, who I am, and what I can be. I think I've come to terms with that now, but I've also come to terms with the fact that I can just live. Words may hurt and opportunities that I'll never be able to achieve may hurt more, but living a life that I don't want to will hurt the most...has hurt the most. So I wanna' use that piece of paper and go on to teach. I wanna' teach our youth that they are more than the image we are set out to make for ourselves; instead, we are whoever is behind that image, the person who sits at home and does the work, the one who goes out every now and then and allows themselves to feel, to enjoy, and to thrive as they are.

And now to my sweet, sweet souled first-generation girls, to you mamas, you are the reason I need to do better for all of us, more importantly for myself. I am, so we can be a first-generation to look up to. For you, I am and always will be a hand for you to hold onto when you get lost. But you mamas, you need to be the voice that others are going to hear when they are as far gone as I was that night. Being a first-generation isn't always the same story, and it isn't always as easy regardless of what we do or don't start off with. It's what we make of it. It is whoever we are as we are. To all the little angels out there present, past, and future, begin to wear that first-gen title with pride, because for so many years so many haven't and can't.