- [Rebecca] This is "In My Shoes," a podcast about different perspectives on shared experiences across the University of Michigan Campus. My name is Rebecca Fantone, the host of this podcast. In this episode, we're listening to Taylor and Paulette share their experiences with code switching as members of the marginalized communities at UM.

- [Paulette] I'm Paulette Benson Ruse, I'm a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Michigan, and I'm a chemistry education researcher. You can find me on Twitter @stemseekinged. If you want to hear me not code switch on Twitter and talk about my awesome research and see me Spanglish my way around the world.

- [Rebecca] Go Spanglish!

- [Paulette] Spanglish for the win.

- [Taylor] Hi everyone. My name is Taylor Bramlett. I'm a third year PhD candidate in the chemistry department. And so I guess we're going to get this ball rolling.

- [Paulette] I think so I used my white people voice for this introduction. But like, I think it'll be fine. Speaking of code switching, uh yeah, I don't know how to introduce myself without my white people voice.

- [Taylor] You know I, god I'm the same way.

- [Paulette] For people that don't know what white people voice means, it means,

- [Taylor] Right. at least the boys at you, so like my accent looks less --

- [Taylor] Noticeable?

- [Paulette] Foreigny? Or like more European?

- [Taylor] Yeah.

- [Paulette] Like, so they think like, you know so those, that don't look how it looked like. I'm like I'm Mexican, born and bred, viva Mexico.

- [Taylor] Ooh la la.

- [Paulette] Yeah. But like, I'm really light-skinned. So when I speak, a lot of people at the beginning are like is she French, is she Spaniard, you know what I'm saying?

- [Taylor] Mhmm. They're like, your accent is like exotic, but like --

- [Taylor] Right.

- [Paulette] She's too light, and then they get to the question of like so where are you from?

- [Taylor] Mhmm.

- [Paulette] Really interested, right? And then they're like, I'm from Mexico. And they're like PAUSE.

- [Taylor] Are you sure?

- [Paulette] Well first is the pause. She's like, you don't look like a Mexican. And I'm like, oh? I'm not going to ask what do you think Mexicans look like. So

that is what for me is code switching. But what is for you code switching?

- [Taylor] So normally it's a comfort thing because going into spaces where I'm the only person of color, it can be really hard to, uh, for clarity purposes in order to talk to people. Because again, slang, I'm from the south and what I would say to someone who is from the south and a person of color, does not translate over to someone who's white.

- [Paulette] So like, for me, as I said, like this is part of like, at least part of myself but do you feel like it's a different Taylor? Like there's another Taylor you would be usually, like --

- [Taylor] So, it really is situation dependent because on one hand if I go into lab every day, there are some people who are white who I can talk to just casually, just as you and I are talking. Other people, not so much.

- [Paulette] Do you feel that it's also depending on like how the person looks at you at the beginning? Like even before you start talking, do you get like a vibe?

- [Taylor] Oh yeah.

- [Paulette] Is it a vibe? Is it a vibe thing?

- [Taylor] Oh, it's definitely a vibe.

- [Paulette] Okay.

- [Taylor] It's, it's definitely just knowing that I'm the only black person in the room that makes the conversation really interesting going in. Just immediate perception -- Huh? I mean, from others, my perception of how other people see me, I walk into a room and it's just like wow, okay. I'm not sure how I should approach her, or, you know, it's, it's always something and I'm not quite sure what it is, but --

- [Paulette] You feel the vibe.

- [Taylor] I feel it. Every time.

- [Paulette] What happens to me is different, right? Like I don't look of color, physically, phenotypically like how pe -- some people would say.

- [Taylor] Right.

- [Paulette] So like, what happens to me is that like, my back, usually back to me is really great. And then when they realize I'm not who they thought, who they thought I was,

- [Taylor] It switches?

- [Paulette] The vibe switches.

- [Taylor] Mhmm.

- [Paulette] But you get the vibe right off the bat. So something that I was talking with somebody the other day is that like, I actually find myself code switching also with black people. The greatest philosopher of the 20th century, Glorian Saldua fight me if you don't think that, said that like people like me that live in two, between two worlds, right? Have to actually code switch all the time because we don't belong anywhere. Right? Like we don't belong with people that have

been here for like centuries,

- [Taylor] Hmm.

- [Paulette] or like a long time, and like they're Americans, people of color that like live this experience every day. And as in time, we're no longer like of our countries because like we have taken too much of this other culture.

- [Taylor] Mhmm. So when I got to the United States and started meeting people of color, specifically black people in Pittsburgh, because like, that is a predominantly a marginalized population, I feel like myself acting to try and to fit in. And I was like, how do I like exaggerate my Mexicanness? So like, they know I'm like them, even though like

- [Taylor] You don't look it.

- [Paulette] I don't look like them.

- [Taylor] Yeah.

- [Paulette] But when I was with white people, I was like how do I like un-Mexicanize myself? So like, they also think I'm like them.

- [Taylor] Mhmm.

- [Paulette] And then I think net zero, I don't know. Like, it doesn't work at the end. I feel like at the end I'm like, I don't belong anywhere.

- [Taylor] Yeah. So I actually find that being able to talk to my black friends versus my friends who identify as Latin X, it really just like, it's all one for me because I started learning Spanish when I was like --

- [Paulette] That's cool, no, I'm really excited. Tell me about it.

- [Taylor] 14, 15, and so I've been trying to keep up with it, and so there are certain phrases that I love to use all the time.

- [Paulette] Okay tell me one.

- [Taylor] Me encanta mucho a la idioma espanhol.

- [Paulette] Oh, encantar, that is a good word. No, that is like a really, like a really nice word.

- [Taylor] And it's just like, it, it just, it's comfortable

- [Paulette] Right.

- [Taylor] because I'm more familiar with the language. I'm more familiar with hearing the language, and speaking the language, so I don't find much issues there. And then again with my black friends, just like, hey, what's up homie? Hey fam, how you doing? And it's just immediately, it all translates over.

- [Paulette] Got it. Huh. Okay. So do you think code switching is a product of racism?

- [Taylor] Certainly.

- [Paulette] Certainly?

- [Taylor] Certainly.

- [Paulette] 100%

- [Taylor] So I actually have a comment for this. This is one I had to write down because I thought it was like super interesting. I think it creates this idea that black people should adjust to make other people, generally white people, more comfortable. And that is like a real issue that white people aren't comfortable.

- [Paulette] Right. Like you're not?

- [Taylor] Right.

- [Paulette] You're like I'm anxious all the time.

- [Taylor] Right.

- [Paulette] It's, I think it's, I do think code switching the way we're using it currently, contemporarily, and we're like a lot of this discussion of like code switching is race, race-based like there's the code switching podcasts that NPR has, which is a lot about Latin X culture

- [Taylor] Mhmm.

- [Paulette] and like black culture. I think like you could say generally code switching is just this act of performative behavior to be comfortable when you're like marginalized.

- [Taylor] Mhmm.

- [Paulette] Like you can be like, as a woman you're behaving like more quote unquote manly between engineers

- [Taylor] Right.

- [Paulette] because you're the only one there.

- [Taylor] Mhmm.

- [Paulette] And you can argue as, even as a white woman, you're like code switching. But certainly I think that as, at least on the current situation of the United States,

- [Taylor] Mhmm.

- [Paulette] it's really hard to separate anything from race. Like everything is race-based like, even when we talk about gender, even when we talk about like

- [Taylor] Mhmm.

- [Paulette] sexuality like race is there. It's impossible to separate it. So like, I would agree that like, at least for purposes of like talking about it and how people move around the world,

- [Taylor] Mhmm.

- [Paulette] it would be impossible, like impossible to separate it from white supremacy. Right? Like there's no way. Even when I talk about, even if I were to

see a white woman code switching to behave like men in academia or link between engineers I would still say there's a white supremacy element underneath it.

- [Taylor] Right.

- [Paulette] And like, I dunno like, I know some people get like white supremacy.

- [Taylor] Oh my gosh, no! Oh my God really are we putting like hoods?

- [Taylor] Mhmm.

- [Paulette] And like, but like, I feel like we don't talk enough about, about white supremacy is only, it's just this underlying thing that like just pushes a little bit of behaviors, no matter who we are.

- [Taylor] Right.

- [Paulette] Like it pushes to who we talk about, how we talk about people.

- [Taylor] Mhmm.

- [Paulette] And as you say, it's like this idea that we keep like making, make it to feel these people comfortable about our presence in the world, when like we're just like suffering and uncomfortable as them in the situations.

- [Taylor] Right.

- [Paulette] So tell me more about that.

- [Taylor] So, ooh, la, la this was a deep one for me. It really sucks, just overall.

- [Paulette] It sucks!

- [Taylor] It sucks just feeling as though I always have to say things a certain way in order to be comfortable whether it's me being comfortable where I am or someone else being comfortable with me being there, it sucks. And it shouldn't have to be that way.

- [Rebecca] That was Taylor and Paulette. In our next episode, we'll continue their conversation to learn more about their code switching as a means of power and communication in their workspaces. Tune in next week. Thank you for listening to "In My Shoes" a podcast about different perspectives on shared experiences across the University of Michigan Campus. "In My Shoes" was produced with the support from the University of Michigan Center for Academic Innovation. This episode was edited by Ellie Daftor. Find us on Spotify, Apple Podcasts or SoundCloud. For updates on the most recent episodes, follow us on Twitter at in my shoes.