

- Welcome back to "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'll continue hearing from Taylor and Paulette, as they describe their experiences with code-switching as a means of survival, communication, and quote, unquote "Success in their workspaces".

- I'm super comfortable with people as long as they're willing to talk to me. That's really it. But as soon as I get that vibe, that you're uncomfortable with me being there in the first place, that's when that code-switching, just, flip the script. I go from "Hey, fam" to, "hello, hi, hi are, how are you doing today".

- What people call your phone voice.

- White girl voice is what they tell me.

- The white girl voice?

- Every time.

- I cannot do it though, my accent betrays me. I just try to sound more girly though.

- Okay.

- Because I feel like, if I valley girl myself, in the phone at least, it will be better. Does this make sense?

- No, I feel you.

- You know, I get like, "Hi", you know like.

- Oh my gosh, like.

- My bank account looked ouch, right? And I just cannot make it work. And like can you please, please, please like help me, because I'm like stuck.

- Over the phone, that translates to somebody who is not you.

- Right, my husband sometimes just looks at me. And I'm like sorry I'm just trying to get stuff done, okay? I could take two hours, or I could take ten minutes.

- And don't you think that's so interesting, two hours versus two minutes, depending on what you sound like?

- I mean, but do you have the strength to just go through the two hours?

- Sure do not.

- There are fights I'm not willing to have on like phone conversations.

- Pick and choose your battles.

- I'll choose my battles.

- Mm-hmm.

- I'll choose battles. I don't know how you- how do you choose your battles? Your code-switching battles, let's call them code-switching battles.

- Oh, I like this. Choosing those battles, which one is going to take a lot of effort?

- Okay.

- Because there are already so many stresses with being a graduate student in general, being a Black graduate student, in general. Being a Black-

- In chemistry.

- I was going there. Black graduate woman, in chemistry. There is so much that goes on with all of those titles that are attached to just me walking into a room and smiling, that I really do pick and choose those battles. Just like, situational. If it's something really small, where I can just like, two words and I'm out, cool. If it's something that is going to take three hours to try to chug through.

- I have better things to do.

- I have so many other things to do.

- Yeah, I get ya. And I think I make the same decisions, and that is when I lie asleep at night, and I say should I pick the bigger battles? I mean, I feel like I do it more when it's about somebody else than me.

- Same.

- Right, I'm like I can live with this, but I don't want this person to live with this stuff. But like, often enough, as you say, should I have had this battle? Like, would the world be marginally better if I had spent this two hours that I didn't have? But, to just try to get into this person through their brain or through their person, that what they did was wrong, or the way they made me feel was not okay, or...

- And then sometimes I have to, with picking and choosing those battles, when and when not to fight, think about the outcomes. If I had chosen to pick this bigger battle and fight it, where would that have left me?

- In an ideal world, you can go anywhere and you could say like "hey, yo, homie," and I could just Spanglish my way through the world, because that is usually how I speak. I use mixed English and Spanish words everywhere. And people would be okay with that, and I would not be judged about it, and our workers would not suffer from that.

- Right.

- I think that is what we are fighting for. Like, how do we get to this place, and at the same time, I'm like, "how do I get a position of power, so my future students in academia, like if someone wants to be a researcher, can say these things, if I don't code-switch all the freaking time"? Right, like, I'm taking one for the team. Is it broken? I'm thinking that I need to take one for the team, like how much? At what point my behavior becomes my behavior?

- And just like normal, like just normal all across the board.

- At one time it stops being code-switching, and it just becomes aculturamiento. It just becomes me being White, or like acting White, or instead of trying to present White, as passing White consciously, and that terrifies me. Like just the thought that this will become part of who I am, like deep, right? It causes me anxiety at night. You know what I'm saying? Like I see Mexican or Latinx scholars that you see

they sold out. You're like, "we lost you man". Like "you're gone, like you're gone". Like "we lost you", "you're more them than us". And I'm terrified of becoming that person, like that future generations would look at me and be like, "you sold out, you're not us". But then how do I get to the point of having power to support others without that?

- Exactly.

- Get your degrees, people. Just survive. I wish I had better advice, man. I wish I had, I just don't want, I want people to listen to this, who don't know what we're talking about, to understand what we're talking about. But like people that are listening to this and are like, "I get it, it's hard", I don't want to just leave it and like, "well, world sucks, keep code-switching, maybe one day". I don't know what the answer is.

- I honestly think that we should have more open conversations in regards to people having to code-switch.

- Okay.

- Because right now, those who code-switch know that we code-switch, and can listen in to when people code-switch.

- Right.

- But for people who have no idea what code-switching is, it's just, they're oblivious.

- Yeah they don't even know we're walking through the world.

- And they won't understand until it's really brought to their attention. I've found that to just be the overall theme of things.

- But is it our job? I get it, no I agree with you. The more we talk about it, the more conscious people is. And I feel like and I are extroverted, so maybe like, it is not like, I mean I'm not like, I'm enjoying this conversation, so it's good, But, I'm not going to deny, like if I were having this conversation with somebody else it may be emotionally taxing, right? So is it our job to talk about this and put it out there?

- Not necessarily our job, but if we don't, who will?

- Well, right. And at the end of the day, yes, if we don't who will? So for those who don't want to, or feel like they can, because circumstances, I know my advisor is not gonna fire me because of this, because he's real supportive, right? So I feel safe about it.

- Yeah, my advisor is super. Yeah he's that guy too, so.

- Right, so like we have safety nets associated with this. Is that why we're doing this? I guess so, yes. Let's say that.

- So as far as the pitfalls that come with code-switching, there are quite a few of them. And so I'll just go into two very briefly. It doesn't really do anything for this idea of diversity or the idea of understanding all people and being able to tolerate differences. And then there becomes this expectation for people who do not code-switch, or do not have to code-switch regularly, to perceive a person of color as, "oh, their always going to talk this way", so there's nothing outside of this one tone of speech, or articulation, like, this is it, this is what you're gonna

get. But that's not the truth, we shouldn't have to code-switch as much as we do, we should be comfortable coming in our authentic selves and just showing you who we are, as we are.

- That's deep. The only thing I'll comment that is like, code-switching is great for diversity, because diversity is just our presence in a room.

- Ooh.

- So with code-switching, our presence is tolerated, they can make space, as long as you sound like that and you make me comfortable, sure, take a space. Equity, which is us having a voice and be accepted for who we are and having power, because that is what equity at the end is, it's like having the same power would mean that I would not be afraid of code-switch, right? And like, as long as we keep touting diversity versus equity, right? Just the fact of having people in the room or like checking boxes or a percentage of people. And we prioritize the comfortableness- Wow, I did it! Yes! Conversation win! Of people in power over our success, or over making spaces for people that need it. Code-switching will be our only way out, right? Code-switching is gonna be our only way in the room. And then when we're in the room we can create some mayhem.

- That's true, like once your foot's in the door, Ha, I'm here now, let's go.

- What are you gonna do now? You're a candidate now, what are they gonna do now? They already gave me my PhD, they cannot take it away. I checked. You cannot take it away. I checked. I actually checked this. But equity is power, it's giving us power. And I hope by having these conversations, we give power to people and we retake some of it.

- Right.

- Great. It was great meeting you.

- It was a pleasure to meet you.

- A pleasure. It was great, awesome.

- [Rebecca] That was Taylor and Paulette. In our next episode, we'll be hearing from two University of Michigan undergraduate students, who will discuss their code-switching experiences, as members of the LGBTQ+ community. 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 Dapjor. Find us on Spotify, Apple Podcast, or SoundCloud. For updates on the most recent episodes, follow us on Twitter @inmyshoes.