

Defined by A Shade

“You're White like Christina and I.” Miss Rapaport had said.

My cheeks flushed with embarrassment as the class erupted into laughter over our teachers lack of knowledge.

“Great,” I thought to myself. “Here we go again.”

It wasn't a rare occurrence for someone to mistake my race, but today it was different. A teacher, a person in a position of power, put me in a category that I wasn't even supposed to be in. I was infuriated that society kept putting me into a box that I couldn't escape, but it felt like there was nothing I could do about it.

“Um,” I paused, “Miss Rapaport.”

“Yes, Christina” she replied.

“I'm not White , I'm Puerto Rican.”

“Oh, I'm sorry,” she stuttered. “I just assumed.”

“It's fine. Everyone does.” I said under my breath.

It was a sunny April morning, and Miss Rapaport had begun to tell us about what it was like to live in an era of slavery. She had already gave us an example of what it was like to me an African American back then, and now she was beginning to explain what it was like to be White. However, I hadn't expected her to use me as an example. As the day continued, I had constantly been reminded of what had happened. My classmates would bring it up to me as a joke thinking I would find it humorous, but the reality was that being called or mistaken for a White person made me feel bad. It made me feel like I was a disappointment to my culture because in everyone else's eyes I didn't fit their model of a Puerto Rican. Their fixated image of a Hispanic

girl with long, curly, dark brown hair, tan skin, and chocolate brown eyes was the complete opposite of their image of me. A White girl with pale skin, straight, light brown hair, and amber brown eyes that made her look as basic as any other privileged White girl they've ever seen. These thoughts running through my mind caused me to think of every time that my race has been questioned. Specifically, when I was accused of being disappointed in my race.

"You're White, so you don't understand how we feel," my classmate said during a conversation about the prejudices against minorities.

"I'm not White!" I replied angrily. "I'm just as much of a Hispanic as you are."

"Christina, look at you," she started, "You're a privileged White girl. You'll never understand how we feel."

"I'll always understand how minorities feel!" I whimpered in distress.

"You know what? I bet you try to look White on purpose! You're disappointed in being Hispanic, aren't you?" she said menacingly.

I felt a rush of emotions as she had questioned my love for my ethnicity. Aggravation. Anger. Humiliation. Being mistaken for another race was a never ending cycle that always came back to haunt me, but this had never happened to me before. No one has ever questioned my love for my ethnicity. Until now. This accusation truly hurt me because I love being Puerto Rican. It's something that I embrace and appreciate about myself everyday. The culture behind my race makes up who I am, and I think the same could be said for anyone else.

"Soy Puertorriquena" I say. I am Puerto Rican. Those are the words that are like music to my ears.

I never thought that a systematic conformity, like race would have such a huge affect on me growing up. Race, such a simple term in its definition, but so complex when represented in the real world. It's something that makes me feel like people are constantly watching me, judging me, or trying to figure out what category I fit into.

Society has been programed to put people into categories. Simply because it aids us in deciphering things. However, this program can cause us to have an implicit bias and they can also cause us to be insensitive and misunderstanding towards others.

I felt misunderstood, but then again so does everyone else. To each person their own characteristic. The characteristic that makes people confused about what category they fit into. Things like race, gender, sexuality, and religion are all examples of things that people are judged on almost everyday. Everyone has days where they're misunderstood, but they also have their days where they misunderstand people. The difference is how we let it affect us.