

Sofia Ruiz, Statement on Diversity

As a woman living in a country that unfortunately still treats us differently than men, and where women have to fight for equal opportunities and safety, I have felt first hand what it is to be defined by my external appearance, rather than by my interests, personality, and competency. I understand the difficulty of getting the community at large up to speed, and acknowledge that it takes everyday, informed actions from every individual to create change. In an effort to understand the root causes of systemic sexism, I have sought opportunities to learn and connect with others who are fighting for equality, leading me to intersectionality and to a wider understanding of systemic oppression across the globe, and based on a number of different factors.

I understand diversity as a recognition that people come from a variety of different social, economic, racial, gender, sexual-preference, nationality, cultural, identity, ability, and religious backgrounds, and that they are all worthy of holding space and having a voice in the community. Inclusion means to hold that space and make sure every person is allowed in it and is respected and celebrated. Equality means that every person should have the same access to rights, liberties, security, and basic needs, as well as the same opportunity for personal and professional advancement; equity is recognizing that our different starting points necessitate different accommodations for each individual to have access to that advancement.

In my teaching, a simple, but important first step is to acknowledge each person's identity by asking for their pronouns and learning how to properly pronounce their names. Then, I would acknowledge different learning styles by, for example, offering visual aids along with the lesson, or having reading materials for those who prefer them; making sure that any videos shared have captions; and offering experiential learning (always remaining vigilant to adapt to other needs as needed). I would offer the students a variety of ways of getting in touch with me and give them the space and time should they need to discuss any issues. Choosing inexpensive materials for class would also be important, not assuming that everyone's economic possibilities are the same. Additionally, I would search for a wide variety of voices, going beyond the traditional western, Anglo-Saxon canon. I believe the way to relate to students with different backgrounds is to, once again, give them equal space, and listen with empathy and without judgement — checking myself if I recognize any bias and asking myself why that bias exists. I believe that is the only way to move forward.

My research to this date has been centered around giving Mexican women a voice, one that challenges preconceived notions of what is “appropriate” female behavior. Specifically, my short film *Inocente Confusión* posits that women have a right to own their sexuality and pleasure, without being chastised by the community. In my *Untitled Sleep Paralysis* short, I looked for opportunities to have more women in my crew, hiring a female producer, make-up artist, sound designer, caterer, and gaffers. Finally, my podcast *Sobre Actuando*, in which I discuss topics relating to actors and acting in Mexico City, I released a season dedicated to representation in the media, in which I interviewed specialists on the importance of representation and equality, the value of *sororidad* (sisterhood), and the difficulties female directors face in the Mexican film industry. My goal is that with each project, I will give more women on-screen a voice, as well as access to often male-dominated roles behind the scenes. In future projects, I wish to keep addressing this issue through an intersectional lens, making more space for a wider variety of perspectives.