BLACK, MILLENNIAL, FEMALE AND… CONSERVATIVE

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I recently discovered something startling about myself. It turns out that I'm a racist, sexist, misogynist. This came as quite a shock to me. How did this happen? As a person of color, a single woman with a graduate degree who grew up poor in a home without a father, I had a clear political path to follow.
And I followed it.

I voted for Barack Obama...twice. After all, we share the same skin color. His father was from Africa. Mine was, too! What other reasons did I need? I was inspired to see a black man rise to the highest office in the land. I believed his ascent would herald a new beginning, a new era of racial healing and harmony. We would finally have that frank discussion about race that everyone always talks about. I was also inspired by his wife. I was thrilled to see such a strong, opinionated black woman take the national stage. But then something happened... actually, several somethings.

I realized there was a big contradiction in my own life. I considered myself a free-thinker, but I was thinking exactly what I was supposed to. I decided to start asking questions. I belonged to several campus feminist groups. I was even teaching feminism to inner-city girls. Part of that teaching involved making the case for abortion. These girls needed to know that they had the right to make decisions about their own bodies. Surely, I thought, that's empowerment. But one day I asked myself: Isn't it men who benefit most from consequence-free sex? Doesn't that give them even more power over women? And, of course, abortion certainly doesn't empower the women it prevents from ever being born.

When I began to ask my other feminist friends how they reconciled these issues, they just got angry. I was called anti-woman. Even by progressive men! "But I'm not anti-woman," I thought. "I am a woman!" I just don't want to be a weak one. I want to be strong – like Michelle.

At about the same time, while I was a student at the University of Texas at Dallas, the UT Austin Department of African Diaspora Studies released a statement in which they said, and I quote, "African Americans are disproportionately affected by the saturation of our society by firearms … We demand that firearms be banned in all spaces occupied by black people on our campus."

Wait a second, I thought. Why would you want to ban firearms only in black areas? Doesn't that mean that you either think black people are more dangerous than other people, or less worthy of protection? These questions did not endear me to my progressive friends. I was called a race traitor...even by white people. But I'm not anti-black. I am black. I just want to be safe – like Barack.

I realized I didn't have a good answer; I only had more questions – like, why were blacks doing so poorly in cities that had been run by Democrats for decades? Was it racism and sexism that was holding people back, or was it something else?

The more questions I asked, the less popular I became. But here's the funny thing: I started to feel better about myself. I decided that the very definition of empowerment required me to take responsibility for my own life. I wasn't going to be anyone's victim. Which meant I had to protect myself. So, I bought a gun. I started to advocate for gun rights. That cost me more friends. I joined the pro-life movement and walked in The March for Life. More friends...gone.

Then, I crossed the line. I voted Republican – the party that views me as an empowered individual, able to shape my own destiny; not as a member of a victim group.

And that's how I became a racist, sexist, misogynist.

I'm Antonia Okafor for Prager University.