

Student Work

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Thoughts from a College Student

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Thoughts from a College Student

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Juan Pablo Benitez Gonzalez

It is a little ironic to speak about racism or prejudice when you are holding a microphone and standing in front of a crowd.

If I am claiming inequality, shouldn't I be on the other side of the context pledging for my voice to be heard? Shouldn't I be the kid sitting passively, the kid that passes unnoticed in the crowd, the kid whose worth is not recognized by the community. But I am not, I am a minority but I am not discriminated. I am the one holding the microphone. I am the one whose words are heard and read. People greet me as I pass by. Professors know my name. Friends call me to hang out. I am another privileged one. It does not matter anymore that I am a foreigner, that I have an accent, that I do not look like everyone else.

It has been a long time since the days I need to prove my worth. Since the days I would awkwardly say hi and be ignored. The moments in which my comments were followed by a silence as if words were never uttered. It is no longer usual for me to hear comments or jokes that made me feel less, words that made me feel unworthy.

Status, hierarchy, supremacy, exceptionalism, exacerbated nationalism, popularity, coolness—these are different definitions for attitudes that are rooted in the same conception. The conception that somehow there is something that makes us better than other people. This conception is real. It exists. It hurts. Sometimes we are victims; other time oppressors. We judge people according to our concept of worthiness, and deny their intrinsic God given value.

“By hanging out with you what do I have to gain?” I usually ask that utilitarian question in my head as people walk by my side. Then, I remember what my mom used to tell me when I was a kid “You don't have to be best friends with everyone, but you have to be Jesus to everyone.”

It hurts to be invisible, it hurts to be in silent. But despite the fact that this is no longer my reality, I can still claim that it is hard to be a minority. It is hard to be away from home. It is not easy to be an international student at Dordt College. Not because people reject me, but because there are some aspects of my identity to which I have to renounce in order to fit. Because most of my friends avoid some comments or watch their words, not because they think that their conception of feeling better than me is wrong- that being American is somehow a valid upper status- but because they know that when they made those comments I felt offended and confronted them.

Step out, make your voice heard, do not allow people to make you feel less. But about everything be graceful and forgive. Maybe you can't be best friends with everyone, but for sure you can be Jesus to everyone.

About this post

This article was originally shared with Dordt College on Wednesday, April 1 during the campus' weekly chapel time. Come back to iAt on Friday to listen to the chapel's podcast as other students share their experiences of diversity in college.