



2-22-2017

No One Like Me

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Flores, Gisselle, "No One Like Me" (2017). *SURGE*. 305.
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No One Like Me

Abstract

“What are you interested in majoring in?”

“Umm, I’m not sure yet, but probably mathematics.”

“Oh.”

I am then faced with a look that says, “Are you sure that’s what you want to do?” or “Yeah, good luck with that.” Sometimes people actually vocalize these thoughts to me, and their judgement has always brought a dark cloud of doubt into my head. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Uncategorized

Disciplines

Civic and Community Engagement

Comments

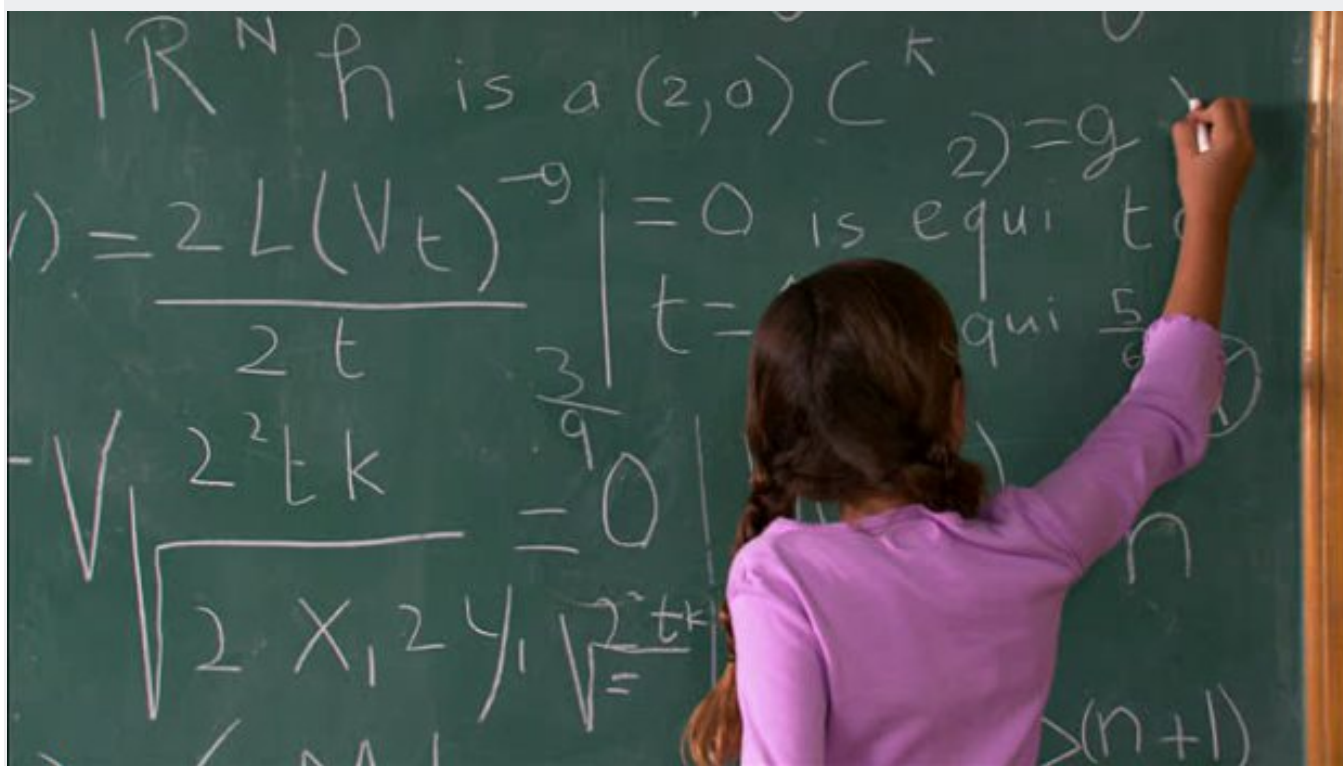
Surge is a student blog at Gettysburg College where systemic issues of justice matter. Posts are originally published at surgegettysburg.wordpress.com. Through stories and reflection, these blog entries relate personal experiences to larger issues of equity, demonstrating that -isms are structural problems, not actions defined by individual prejudice. We intend to popularize justice, helping each other to recognize our biases and unlearn the untruths.

SURGE

[VERB] : to move suddenly or powerfully forward or upward

NO ONE LIKE ME

February 22, 2017



“What are you interested in majoring in?”

“Umm, I’m not sure yet, but probably mathematics.”

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I am then faced with a look that says, “Are you sure that’s what you want to do?” or “Yeah, good luck with that.” Sometimes people actually vocalize these thoughts to me, and their judgement has always brought a dark cloud of doubt into my head.

During my educational career in East Harlem, I hardly ever met anyone who was interested in math the same way as me. People found math too frustrating, difficult, or boring; they could not see how it would help them in the

future. Here at Gettysburg College, I still feel ostracized but in a different way. I do see people who are interested in math, but the problem is I do not see people who look like me. I do not see Latinas. It took me a while to realize that when I looked for encouragement, I was searching for Latinas to reassure me that it is possible to keep pursuing math.

Usually, the encouragement I have received is from my parents. Being a first-generation college student has brought a lot of pressure on me, but not a lot of understanding. My parents have always pushed me to do my best in school from the moment I stepped on the yellow school bus as a child, and that encouragement has been essential in making me the person I am today. However, there are times when I wonder if that is enough. I often tell them about the work I have to do in college, and all they can tell me is “Ponle muchas ganas a la escuela. Recuerda que el estudio es la arma para ser alguien en la vida” (Put a lot of effort in school. Remember that your studies are your armor to become someone in life).

When I am sitting in math class, these words slip from my mind as I sit quietly and let others answer the questions I know. My self-doubt takes over to preserve my fear of judgement in a classroom where I do not see myself reflected. I know that the inconsistency of diversity I have observed is not limited to just this one math class. Too often, the levels of encouragement, resources, support and opportunities in the STEM fields differ between men and women, which intimidates and demotivates some women, especially women of color, like myself.

I mentioned the disparities I have been noticing in the mathematics department during my first time at eRace, and I did not think anyone paid too much attention to my comment. It was not until the end of eRace that I was approached and told, “Even though it’s difficult to make it through when you don’t see others that look like you in class, just remember that there are other young girls who feel the same way, but soon, *you’ll* be the one that they can look up to. So please keep pursuing math and don’t let anyone or anything hold you back from that.”

For a long time, I had been questioning whether math is the path I want to pursue in college. I now realize I am not questioning my love for math, but rather I am questioning my confidence and my capability as a Latina, as a daughter of immigrants, and as a first-generation college student. Hearing encouraging words from someone who had just met me that day but already believed in me gave me a rush of hope. I may not see many people who look like me as I continue to push through the obstacles that stand in my way as a Latina looking to major in mathematics at Gettysburg College, but I know that I do have people who I can now count on for support.

Gisselle Flores '20