

Chapel Talk by Gabrielle Alias '16

This summer I went to a concert in San Francisco called Outside Lands. I opened myself up to all the musicians playing at the different stages, but one specifically stood out to me. Kendrick Lamar has been one of my favorite artists for the last couple years and now I was seeing him live. Standing with Bridget D., watching him perform his song “I”, I felt the power of his words. Kendrick stood only a couple feet away from me, repeating the same phrase “I love myself”. Standing in the middle of thousands of people staring straight at Kendrick yelling his song brought me to the realization of the strength of love. Every day we should be able to scream “I love myself” just like Kendrick.

Self Respect is the “confidence in one’s own worth or abilities”. We all have a part in this world just like the ingredients of a cookie. We each have our own purpose and ingredient to bring to the table, and there are some of us who are the chocolate chips and some who are the something that flavors our lives. We need the courage and confidence in ourselves to come together with our different characteristics to bake our communal cookie.

For me, finding self respect was a journey. I had to learn from the failure of what self worth was just how important it really is.

Middle school was a rough time for me. Back in 7th grade, I attended an after school ball-dancing program that many Bay Area students attended. The class is a sort of a rite-of-passage. Every Wednesday I would leave my girls choir practice early so I could get to these “Midweeklies.” I would cautiously change my outfit in the car and eat a bite of food that my mom brought. I couldn’t straighten my hair or put makeup on like my friends so I just went as I was. My bony feet were squished into little wedges not even an inch tall. A huge red bow hung at my waist and my hair was up in a bun like a nest. My mouth was heavy with bright colored braces and my eyes were covered with thick glasses. Let’s just say I wasn’t a cute 7th grader.

As I exited the car, my mom would always wave good bye, wishing me luck. With a heavy sigh I entered this building of terror. Coming from an all girls’ middle school, boys were foreign to me. I hugged my friends who were huddled by the little cups of Swedish Fish and M&M’s. When the bell rang we all entered this huge dance hall. Boys were ushered to one side and the girls to the other. Although I took all the dance steps seriously and would practice in the mirror almost every night at home, whenever I went to Midweeklies I froze up.

I would stand eagerly in the front of all the girls wanting to be picked but I was never chosen as a dance partner. There were more girls than boys so each week 5 girls were always excluded from dancing and I always seemed to be one of those girls. I desperately wanted to dance, but no one would dance with the girl with big hair, glasses, and braces; I felt hopeless and undesirable. I grew frustrated and angry. I just wanted to be picked .

Crying to my mom one day after class, I was upset and confused. I was belittled by the fact that no one chose me to dance. My mom sat me down and said, “Hell with the boys, dance on your own.” The next day I realized that I had to do just that.

It took the biggest leap of faith for me to dance by myself in front of all the girls and boys, and at first I think they all thought it was a joke. With all eyes staring at me, I was worried I had made the worse decision of my life. But after the most embarrassing 5 seconds there was a cascade of appreciation. My friends joined me and then some other students and soon enough everyone was making fools of themselves. At the end of the night, my instructor came up to me overjoyed by my courage. All the fellow girls and boys knew my name, and waved goodbye to me when my mom came to pick me up. At the next class, I was not the last girl to be picked to dance, but one of the first. Taking that leap, and feeling those 5 seconds of pure embarrassment was not easy, but it was one of the more empowering things I have ever felt.

When I came to Kent as a new sophomore I had the same experience. I was not prepared for how I was going to adapt in an environment completely different from my single-sex Catholic boarding school. I guess my clichéd California life has always shaped the way I see the world.

No matter how much I packed that summer, I never felt fully prepared for Kent. I would constantly stalk the school's Facebook page and website to get ready for this new experience. Was I going to have to become more East Coast, whatever that meant? Was I going to change my hair? Was I going to change my interests? Was I still going to like Spongebob? All these questions were answered the first days at Kent with a resounding "No."

However..... I'll admit, moving from coast to coast was a lot harder than I anticipated. Sophomore year was so hard because I was conflicted. Should I change myself or should I strive to be the same as everyone else. With a whole different walk of life, I had to adjust. My words changed from using "hella" to "wicked," and my wardrobe eventually included Barbour's, Lilly Pulitzer and Jack Rogers. It was inevitable for me to adapt to the surroundings and environment, but changing the person I am inside was never going to happen.

Appearance is not equal to reality.

When I went back home, thought, people thought I changed. They would see my Barbour jacket and Sperry shoes and immediately ask me "Why are you so preppy?". I did not know how to take this- if only they saw how preppy Kent is on re-visit day! Although my wardrobe had changed, I knew that I was the same girl they knew four years ago. Appearances can change, but the true character is always present.

Being biracial has given me another set of self-esteem twists and turns. I have a white mother and a black father, and have always felt torn between which race and identity to be, as I often feel I have to choose a side rather than be both. My diverse identity is not just seen within myself but in my family as a whole. My half-brother and sister are Hispanic and Black, while my aunt is Chinese-American. Although my family is diverse and this grants me a great perspective on life, it was not always easy.

One of the most challenging aspects of this diverse family was understanding why my grandfather would not speak to me. Why?

Well, because he did not approve of my mother marrying a black man. He did not go to their wedding nor did he ever plan to associate himself with me. But after I turned twelve, he began to warm up to me- small acknowledges that turned into conversations- and a month before his passing he asked for forgiveness of his doubts about me. I will always remember last years Thanksgiving when he patted me on the back and said, “We’re so proud of you, I’m so proud of you”.

Each person here brings something to the table. Others may not see your potential at first, but what you must know is that you have to be the first to recognize your own potential. It’s a fact of life, there will always be things you can’t change. I will always be “team light skin”. However, I can choose to change how I see myself, and so can all of you. You can’t change your identity. It is something you live with day in and day out. It just depends on how you see yourself that determines if its a good thing or a bad thing.

Loving yourself is so important in our day-and-age when we are constantly being compared with each other. In this competitive world of social media, and now college applications, we are forced to compare our image and our intelligence with one another. Constant pictures on Instagram, Facebook, and Tumblr diminish our self-worth because they make us see a kind of perfection that is unachievable. In fact, it’s exactly like applying to college. I’m talking to the seniors right there—

It is so easy to pick out our flaws rather than our strengths. Although college is practically the da Vinci code when deciphering the application process, I catch myself constantly comparing grades, extra curriculars, and personalities with my fellow classmates applying to similar schools. But, I’m beginning to realize that we aren’t just a sheet of paper. Each one of us brings something to the table that doesn’t have a line or box to check on the common app. And so,

Self respect is so important because it allows us to be more confident and express our true ability and worth.

I might not ever be as tall as Margaret S., or as outgoing as Blair S., or as funny as Mary N., or as smart as Eddie Y., but I am Gaby and each day I strive to be a better me. So if there is anything you take away from today it is not to look at your flaws but focus on the strengths that each and every one of you has, and do what Kendrick Lamar does....jump up and sing out “I love myself!”

Thanks,

Gabrielle Alias ‘16