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**Testimonials: "Discrimination – An Everyday Experience"**

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It is awkward to be here, trying to be open with you in a way I can't be with my family. It is equally awkward to speak about experience of discrimination with so many experiences present in the room. I would like to invite you to get to know and reflect upon them.

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When I was invited to talk about my perspective, I was immediately transported to the time when I was around 16 years old and I was going to secondary school in a small town on the outskirts of Lisbon. I had a school friend, who was in the year above me, who shared the same physical education teacher. One day he told me that this teacher would refer to me as "the butterfly" to him and his classmates.

One could be confused thinking that I was being compared to a beautiful and gracious animal but in Portugal, "butterfly" is a derogatory term for men who don't behave like "real men", who are over sensitive and probably gay.

I was called "butterfly", "faggot", "sissy" at school many, many times before that. Most of those times it was just because I was different from other boys, long before I even claimed an identity as a gay man. But that time struck me differently because, while the other times the bullies were other kids in the school, that time the bully was my teacher.

I was so outraged and I felt that the situation was so wrong that I decided to gather up all my courage and confront the teacher the next day. I came to her and, very nervously, I said: "What is this shit, you're calling me «butterfly»?"

The focus of the discussion that followed was about how disrespectful I was in addressing her using the word "shit". Instead of leaving the teacher's room knowing why she was calling me names in front of the other kids and an apology, I left with my ears filled with a reprehension for my bad choice of words.

You may ask me (and I asked myself many times) why would I jeopardize my credibility by using swear words. At the time I wanted to restore my dignity as well as my masculinity and I believed that swearing would make more of a “man” out of me.

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I chose to tell you this story because until that day I believed that if the worst would come to the worst, the school as an authority would still be there to protect me. From that day on, the school was on the side of the bullies and I felt truly alone.

Looking back in time I guess I hoped I wouldn't be alone with my fears of not being good enough for my peers, my teacher and my family. That something or someone able to change things would be clearly on my side.

The appeal I would like to leave here today is for you to think about the role that schools have in our lives. After the parents or the family, the school and in particular the teacher is the next figure of authority. In the case of public education, teachers and school staff are the faces of governmental institutions. The school is the space where we spend most of our time, especially during childhood and youth.

My access to education did not depend only on having material and human resources available. It also depended on feeling safe and protected, in a space where I could grow and learn.

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The way my life developed is one out of many possibilities. In some ironic way, it is my life's story that is bringing me here today.

I believe this and other stories have built my motivation to work as an educator against discrimination. They brought me to my work in peer education so that other teenagers, like I was, feel empowered and able to confronting their own discrimination (and hopefully have a wiser choice of words).

Thank you.