

To Be the Change

In our society today, we have made many jumps in ending discrimination, achieving marriage equality, ending poverty, achieving fair and just immigration reform, and more. No longer are we in the days where slavery is accepted. In our society, we strive to provide equality for everyone...or do we? Lately, my eyes have been opened to all the discrimination that is going on in our society today. I read newspaper articles and watch the news about police officers displaying racial discrimination towards African-Americans. One such case is the Ferguson case where a police officer killed a black teen. Gay discrimination is also another problem. I saw a weird bumper sticker on a car that had a giant **X** through a picture of two stick women with a “+” sign between them. I didn’t think anything of it at the time, but later, the meaning of that bumper sticker hit me like a steel bullet, and I was mad. Unfortunately, there are so many other disturbing incidences that I have not begun to explain, and even if I tried, it would take eons. What I do want to say is that we need to be the change. We need to feel equal. People should be proud of who they are. It isn’t fair for others to discriminate because of our differences.

To be the change, one doesn’t have to do something drastic. Small contributions are as important as big contributions. A change could be as minuscule as giving a person a hug, or smiling at a shy student at school. Hugs and smiles are scientifically proven to reduce stress, increase happiness, relax tense muscles, boost the immune system, and more. In December 2014 during a demonstration protesting the rights of a black male that was killed by a white police officer, a young black boy held up a sign simply stating “free hugs”. A white police officer saw the boy with the sign and gave the boy a hug. Someone snapped a picture of the hug, and the picture went viral in a matter of days, giving people hope for change.

Change can also happen if more people in the world are happier. Happier people are less likely to put others down and discriminate. Happier people are also more likely to feel compassion and empathy towards other people. To be the change, people have to think positively. They can do this by practicing soul-lifting activities such as yoga, exercising, and eating healthfully. I have practiced yoga since I was twelve, and even though I come into class feeling tired, and grumpy, ninety-nine percent of the time I leave the class feeling enlightened and happy. Eating healthfully and exercising has been proven to help improve your mood, making you a happier and healthier person. If people in the world are happier, there will be less discrimination, and angry people, and more potential friends and compassionate individuals.

Another change individuals can make is to be there for friends, people at school, people on your sports team, and more. If someone looks sad, go up to them and ask them what is wrong, even if they are not your closest friend or even your friend at all. This helps the individual know that they are not alone. Nine times out of ten, that person needs someone to talk to or confide in, and they will probably feel much better after talking about whatever was bothering rather than keeping it in. People who feel sad have a have a chance of having aggressive feelings or striking out, or might feel left out or discriminated about because they are different. In ninth grade, I felt discriminated against because I was shy, and socially awkward. Sometimes, I felt depressed at school because I rarely talked to anyone and sat alone at lunch. If someone had come to talk to me, I would've felt better about myself and my differences. Talking to others might be uncomfortable for both you and the person you are talking to, but you might really help someone feel happier by doing this, and even make a possible friend.

The final change is that people need to judge individuals, not by the color of their skin the way they dress, what kind of phone they have, what their family is like, what their ethnicity is, or

their differences in thought, but by the content of their character. Don't look at someone and think, "I don't want to be their friend because they wear pink, and they are Chinese." Instead, think along the lines of, "Are they a nice person? Are they respectful in the classroom and around school? Do they attempt to keep their grades up in school, or are they slackers? Are they with the right crowd?" In other words, think about the way they act and who they hang around with before judging someone.

We have come such a long way already with ending discrimination, achieving marriage equality, ending poverty, and just and equal immigration reform, yet, there is so much more to be done. People need to be proud of themselves for who they are. To achieve this change, people have to be the change. They can change themselves by becoming happier, being there for someone who needs it, and not to judge people on anything except the content of their character. By becoming happier, friendlier, and more open people, we can be the change. We, the people, can help end this racial discrimination, marriage inequality, poverty, and achieve freedom for everyone. Those are the ways to be the change, and help this society achieve the freedom that we so desperately need.