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2017 Human Rights Essay: Ableism

Ableism. What is it? Well, imagine you are walking and see a woman getting wheeled down the street in a wheelchair. She has one deformed leg, and her other leg ends at the knee. What is the first thing you assume? There's a good chance that whatever you just thought is ableism. I'm sure you've heard of racism or sexism, but ableism tends to be overlooked. Ableism is discrimination or prejudice against individuals with disabilities or discrimination in favor of able-bodied people. Basically not giving enough thought to, or respecting the needs and wants of the disabled. It's really important to hear about it, just as you hear about racism or sexism, even though it may not affect as many people. It is an issue in our society so we have to strive to correct it. Many people who are disabled face discrimination but it's not fair because they are people too. They have the same rights everyone else does.

If you don't have a disability I would imagine it's hard to see what others have to go through. It is for me too. So, let me give you peak into some people's lives who are in a constant battle with equal rights because of a disability or impairment. Hopefully it will give you some insight on ableism and how it is present in our lives. I read about a woman who has a wheelchair and struggles with how people respond to it, and how they respond to her. She went to an outdoor protest with some friends and ran into some issues pretty quickly. When she arrived she found there was no handicap parking, and all the parking was in grass. You can probably figure out the complications with this. She could not get through the grass on her own with her wheelchair. But thanks to the help of her friends she got past this obstacle, only to find there were no handicap bathrooms. This event ran for 12 hours straight so she had to leave to find

somewhere to go to the bathroom, that was wheelchair accessible. This is only a few of the problems she ran into that day, and she faces on regular basis. Human right #20 is we are guaranteed freedom to peaceful assembly and protest, and the problems this woman is confronted with violates that right. Another case similar to this is my mother. She has a disease called Retinitis Pigmentosa. This causes her to have trouble seeing in dark places, bright places, and means she has no peripheral vision. This is a typically a problem at any public space. Uneven steps are very hard to navigate especially in the dark because she can't see them. She can't get around when there are a lot of people, and can't go very many places without someone to help her to not run into things, and other people. When we go to a restaurant she often needs someone to read her the menu because it's too dark for her to read it. These would not be hard things to change but no one thinks about what other people need, if the person has different needs than you. This also violates her right to public assembly because she can't do things independently. Why should this right be given to some people, while others are being left out of it completely?

Because i was trying to dig deeper into the subject of ableism, I read an article about someone with an impairment and the struggles she faces. She explains how it upsets her when people don't think about what she wants or needs. She says this happens far too frequently. She often comes across people who talk to her like a child, or even asks someone she is with questions about her, when she is right there. People make assumptions about her just by looking at her, without asking her first. It also bothers her that people never consider the necessities of a person in a wheelchair. They just assume a ramp will suffice. But just because there is a ramp doesn't mean it's accessible. If it's too steep, or the railings are too high, a ramp does the same

things stairs do. Nothing. She talks about how much this all gets under her skin and hopefully you see where she is coming from. It's not fair that just because people don't have the same struggles as you, that those struggles can be overlooked. Everyone should have the same convenience in public spaces regardless of what physical or mental condition they are in.

As a person without an impairment, reading about these struggles really made me think. I will never fully understand what some people go through, but now that I see it from a different perspective, I want to help. Maybe you do too? The MOST important thing we can do is refrain from using things that have been specifically modified for those with a disability. We have to respect that those things are not there for their convenience but it's actually a necessity. It's also important to treat them as your equal, because they are. They are human too. When you focus on someone's disability you'll overlook their abilities. You'll overlook their beauty. You'll overlook their perfections. Once you learn to accept and love them for who they are on the inside, you'll find the outside doesn't really matter anymore. Also, we cannot assume everything about a person is our business. It absolutely is not. If they want you to know about them they will tell you. If you have to know something about them, they would rather you ask than assume. That's not to say that you can go up to a stranger and ask them inappropriate questions though. Use your best judgment about when it's ok to ask questions and don't jump to conclusions.

So overall, the biggest thing we have to remember is just because people with disabilities are different, it doesn't mean they are lower than everyone else. They have the same human rights and deserve the same respect as an able-bodied person. It's not hard to help them; just use common sense and be polite, like you would to anyone else. It's very important to be aware of what disabled people go through on a daily basis, so that we can help them to live with ease. Just

like a person without a disability. Ableism can come in many forms, and many are subconscious, so just pay attention to everyone and think about what you would want or need if you were in their place. Don't look at a person with a disability and feel pity, because there's a good chance they are living a very fulfilling life, impairment or not. Instead look at them as a human. A human who just wants to live; same as you. A person with a disability is no different than you.