

The Language of Liberty Series



Do We Really Respect Diversity of Thought Or Not?

By Dottie Perkins, 16 year-old CSG student

A major issue of concern in today's world is the effect of conformity of opinion. In my particular social circle, there exists a rather diverse world of ideas: politics, religion, and countless other "socially inappropriate" things to talk about, usually offered by my peers. But regardless of the particular stances on these issues, I often observe how people temporarily change their opinions to prevent being judged for having a less popular idea. Growing up in this environment is a major concern for me because this means freedom of speech has been revoked by the "politically correct". We should all be able to speak about our beliefs in a respectful manner, without having to conform or hide our true opinions.

In school, I have become very interested in my psychology class. In this course, as the name would suggest, we study how humans behave and develop in certain environments. Recently, we studied the effect of conformity on social relations. In group situations, it is a common human inclination to conform to social influence by the use of social clues and gestures to determine our future responses within the group. This, combined with the politically correct nature of my age group, is a dangerous combination. Ironically, by keeping the conversation non-confrontational (and less intellectually stimulating), we never arrive at a proper conclusion of the topic at hand. Instead, the social vibe of the group is top priority, leaving the leader of the group completely in control of the group's opinion. This is a major concern of mine, especially due to the political views I know are held by most in my school.

The majority of my fellow students are naïve, with no tax burden, no job, and no perceivable responsibility besides keeping a 4.0 and being a good son or daughter. As a consequence, they have a tremendously judgmental outlook regarding political parties. The loudest ones tend to be those who have done little to no research, yet still judge the others who support the contrary belief.

Personally, I have not survived independently as an adult, so my political ideas have not fully matured yet. However, I do have a strong opinion regarding those who ironically steamroll other's ideas in order to gain control. If political correctness were not such a massive deception to squelch open debate today, this would not be such a concern. People ought to have the ability to challenge an idea without fear of being shut down with name-calling, or being referred to as ignorant or less informed. We should have enough respect for each other that we can face a crowd and voice our opinions gracefully and with dignity, not impeded by the pressure and anxiety of conforming to "group-think". Conformity to the majority has caused the society to plateau, leaving people constantly frustrated that their ideas and true needs are not voiced.

In my extra-curricular civics training, Foundations in Self Governance, we learned about Mrs. Eliza Powel. In her era, society gave her practically no influence on the world around her.

Women at that time were expected to be silent and polite, with no input of ideas for their future. However, Mrs. Powel did not let this intimidate her. Instead, she found a way to make her ideas known; she spoke to those with social influence. She had the ability to fearlessly engage in stimulating political conversation with anyone. She used her power to spark change. This is what my age group desperately needs: Someone who is willing to bravely spark a change and fearlessly engage in respectful, unemotional, factual conversation with others.

Conformity has plagued our world with countless individuals who have strong opinions and useful ideas, but are shot down the second the idea conflicts with a group's "accepted opinion". The next generation must emulate Mrs. Powel. We must use our God-given power to bravely voice our ideas. We must face the world with innovation, truthful insight, and facts to prevent the dreaded "plateau" of thought. We must be different. Change starts with one person!

I hope to help others find their fearless voice so they can freely articulate their opinions. Conformity has frozen my world to a politically correct halt. But with the gradual increase in respectful opinions, I hope to get meaningful conversation moving again.

Change in society often comes as the result of a period of silence by discrimination of speech. It is my goal, with the help of others around me, to break that silence. It is imperative that we make an effort to end the conformity of speech that exists today. We must remember to respect others by listening to all views. Otherwise, we too will be guilty of dominating and controlling the conversation. By listening to and encouraging all ideas, as well as offering new ideas toward the discussion, we will find ourselves making a positive change, beneficial to all by our example.

In conclusion, fear can be a massive driving factor in all the decisions we make, whether it is raising one's hand in class or tackling that next hill. Regardless of what the barrier is, we must have the courage to be the first to change and overcome.

Change is what led to the republic we live in today. America is a unique experiment, and in order to keep the experiment working, we must strive to disregard conformity and fear of judgment. I hope to be the one in my generation to initiate change for the better in my world and start the conversation.

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