

Racism in Japan

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Where are you from? You speak Japanese very well. These might sound like the friendly beginnings of a conversation or a compliment you say when you see a foreign person or somebody who you think might be from a foreign country. However, have you thought that it might hurt some people by giving them these comments? These are called microaggressions. A microaggression is a comment or question that is unintentionally discriminatory against people in a minority group, such as foreign people or biracial people. Why do we make these comments to foreign people? Why is it offensive to them? All these comments come from our consciousness that “We are the Japanese. You are not.” That is why, particularly for those who were raised in Japan or who have been there for many years, asking where they come from would mean they are not regarded as a part of the community.

I think education plays the most important role in ending discrimination because what you learned as a child would greatly affect your beliefs, thoughts, or actions as an adult. Pre-school, where they learn the way to treat others and build a good personal relationship as an individual who belongs to society. That is why educators, including both parents and teachers, are greatly responsible for teaching them how important respecting others is. To make children understand about respecting other people, they need to learn to accept differences.

However, recently, I heard some shocking news on the TV, which was that a female high school student sued her school because it forced her to dye her naturally-brown hair black. The school insists it is because her hair is against its rule. Sadly, this kind of incident is not rare, and often,

the students end up following what their schools require without even reporting it. The school's rule excludes those, like her, who are different than others simply because they do not fit the category of "normal" which has been socially and culturally created. That plants in children the idea that being different is negative.

Although it is important to teach children to follow rules, I believe nobody should be denied the right to exist the way they are. By putting effort into making some changes to education, children will know the importance of being tolerant with diversity. For instance, in Japan, parents and teachers teach their children to do or be the same as others. Adults are often saying "Don't do this! Nobody does that./ That's not a normal thing to do! ", "You must do as everyone else does", or "You must be able to do this because everyone else is." That is why children tend to value being the same as other people or doing things "normally" based on the idea that "Same is good. Different is bad", which they get while growing up.

In order to educate the next generation, we, every individual should be aware of and take the issue seriously. That means all people, particularly those who belong to the majority group, must step in to stop discrimination when they see somebody harassed or hear microaggressions, or any of the stereotypical statements based on identity.