

My name is Hadeeqa Malik, a sixteen-year-old Pakistani-American girl. I am a sophomore at Half Hollow Hills, High School West and an active member of my community. I participate in Girl Scouts, Peer Ambassadors, Peer AIDS, and Women's Empowerment, in and outside of school. My reason for joining these clubs is the common theme where the ultimate goal is to communicate effectively with our community, and the betterment of our society's understanding of one another. I am also a member of the Junior Board on the Sophia Valsamos Foundation, a non-profit organization created to empower the youth to take a stand against bullying and embrace each other's differences. TSVF was established after the passing of Sophia Valsamos, a dear friend of mine who took her own life at the age of only thirteen. At the time I was a thirteen-year-old myself, and I had never felt such vivid grief, but in that duration of time I came to a self-realization; I had to be a better ally in my community. The TSVF has evolved so much since it's birth which settles well with me because a tragedy within ourselves has been able to blossom into a resource that helps others in need. I strongly believe that the best way to develop a truly liberating understanding of each other within ourselves is by acknowledging our differences. Furthermore, celebrating what makes us unique and diverse. Unfortunately, I know what it is like to not feel celebrated for who I am, or more so unaccepted, as I grew up in predominantly white neighborhoods. As a minority, I felt like an outcast, while I was already internally conflicted with my culture due to its patriarchal expression. I was able to identify my own morals as I gained an understanding of different family values through what I perceived as right or wrong. Ever since I found it in myself to always speak up against what I deem unethical, I take it into my own hands whenever I see any bigotry or hatred upon others. One of the many ways that I work to make a more inclusive community is by protesting against words of hate, most commonly in the African-American community that still take place today. In fact, once I was asked, "How can you feel bad about this word being said, you aren't even black?", my answer was simply, "I don't have to be black to understand the oppression and hurt in that word". The meaning behind these phrases are degrading and humiliating, they further drive us apart from each other and prevent unity. I will continue to feel empathy and compassion for my peers in the years to come, as we are all in this together.

Thank You for your consideration.