

Our Voices Need to Be Heard

In kindergarten, I became interested in art because of a friend from school. Not only did I influence my older siblings and mom into taking art classes, but I also got to participate in a Photoshopping class last summer. I learned how to put objects into a picture and change the lighting to make it look natural and convincing, and my teacher asked me to do it over two to three times to get it perfect. I had so much fun that I dreamed of a career in graphic design at one of my favorite companies—Disney. I watched interview clips with Disney’s graphic designers before movies at the theater, but I was curious why all of them were white. I wondered, “Does Disney choose their top designers based on race?”

This reminded me of my middle school elective class called Leadership, where we set up most of the school events, such as dances or Friday Rally Quads. Although 53% of our student body is Asian and 32% is White, our Leadership class is equally split in race. I noticed the older white students made most of the decisions and assigned our roles without asking for the opinions of the younger, Asian-American students. Even though I joined Leadership to help plan events and have fun, being ignored or not participating as an equal made me feel disengaged. I imagined working at Disney having these same issues, where I wouldn’t be able to get as many opportunities as others.

I learned about the Asian-American stereotype of the “model minority”, that we are seen as smart and hardworking, but socially awkward and submissive. Companies hire many Asians because of the positive half of this stereotype, but the promotion rate is lower because of the negative expectations. This discrimination is called the “bamboo ceiling”, where Asian-Americans reach for the higher positions, but we can only see it and not reach it. It is unfair to be treated differently because of stereotypes, and it is important that Asian-American opinions are valued.

Just like in Leadership class, I can be tempted to give up, but I still will not give up on my dream or participating in Leadership. We should not be discriminated against because of our race, but we should also be aware of the challenges in our community. Asian-Americans should fight hard and strive to live the way we want to. This means we should fight to be represented, to be leaders, and to have influence. People can dream big and work hard, and if things get too tough, we should not work alone. Asian-Americans should help one another, unify and raise our voices, and show our ideas are valuable.

I might have to work harder to be trusted with more responsibilities as a graphic designer because of Asian-American stereotypes. But seeing how *Parasite* was the first South Korean film to win an Oscar made me realize that people who look like me still have a chance in pursuing what we want in the future, and everyone can enjoy our art. It’s also not just getting into graphic designing or making films, but it’s about being able to reach the ceiling just like everyone else. Asian-American representation matters because we need a chance to influence others and challenge what others think about us.