

2022 International Essay Contest for Young People

[Youth Category – Honorable Mention]

## **Sense of value and societal expectations**

(Original)

*Kokone Kumazaki*

*(Age 17, Japan)*

*International Christian University High School, Tokyo*

Japan is not the most prejudice-free country in the world. It is a result of the persistently pervasive traditional conservativeness which prevents the nation from accepting paradigm shifts. This country has failed to welcome changes in conceptions and notions. The rampantly existent heterosexism, male chauvinism, xenophobia and countless other discriminations well demonstrates that. They tend to single out the minorities in every level of society.

Various people around me including my own parents have been constantly telling me that I am 'unique' or 'eccentric' in many ways. As I grew up into a teenager, I started to question what they meant by it.

By the time I entered junior high school, I became more self-conscious than before and started to look around how others looked and behaved. My school, like any other Japanese school, was full of Japanese kids and was hardly diversified. As I spent more time there, I started to notice the unspoken pressure of 'conformity' amongst the students and teachers. This gave me a particularly challenging time as I used to go to an international school where the regimes and environments were completely different. I struggled with meeting expectations they had of us, such as in the way we think. For example, they forcibly made us agree with the idea that short socks are 'inappropriate' or the color white gives off a more 'formal' impression than black. This sounded so ridiculous to me because I believed they're basically all dependent on your own senses of value, whether you feel like white is more formal looking than black, or yellow or pink.

This might sound trivial, but it's just a tip of an iceberg of 'common sense/ senses of value' that I struggled to agree with. I often had a difficult time understanding the 'normal' sense

of value across all topics. I asked my friends how exactly I was eccentric, as once I was trying to modify myself to look like what they considered normal people, not standing out by meeting all the standards of societal normality. They detailedly described how they thought my brain was wired in a different way from them and that I was fundamentally 'abnormal'. In high school, when I was discussing romantic relationships with my friends, we had a disagreement over one particular topic which led to a heated debate. While I believed coitus has nothing to do with the level of love between romantic partners, they believed it was. In my perspective, engaging in a physical relationship is completely unrelated to the amount of affection they had for each other. However, they stressed that relationships without sexual activity is 'broken'. It sounded preposterous to me. Some people might want that, others don't. However, it turned out that the majority was on their side. That's when I finally fully understood how my brain was in fact wired differently.

In this way, I have a unique sense of value that sometimes doesn't necessarily meet the common standards or norms. This sometimes gives me a tough time, as something I believe is normal is not to others. Not all people are open minded to different ideas and some of them can be judgmental. However, I realized that having this unique characteristic can actually be a huge advantage as I can notice things that others don't and share a new perspective to look at.

In conclusion, I believe that a sense of value varies depending on each person and is an indispensable element that forms us as one individual. Although we are prone to try to become normal as we think it is one of the ways to reassure our self-worth and existence, we should be entitled to express our own senses of value or feelings. Furthermore, I strongly believe that this country will be a better place if society becomes more accepting of different types of people and embraces new points of views. As globalization accelerates, this country too will eventually face a drastic change amongst the society. More people from other countries will start to reside in Japan like any other country across the globe. Therefore, I believe now is the time to widen our horizons and defy the obsolete standards of 'normality'.