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CYES 2024

### Theory of Social Change

As I continue to build my understanding of oppression in conjunction with lasting social change, I reflect on the importance of unlearning harmful mindsets again and again. My positionality as a queer Black woman has put me on the journey of letting go of notions deeply embedded in my psyche, in turn, making me more aware of how biases of others shape their perceptions and treatments of themselves and those around them.

I find that this self-hurt and the infliction of pain towards others, however conscious or unconscious, could be mitigated significantly with properly navigated unlearning during our youth especially. To me, this looks like making school, an environment youth spend a significant amount of their lives in, as safe a space as possible. Teachers should be required to engage in emotional sensitivity training, as well as be given a curriculum that fosters positive cultural representation. It looks like teachers being held accountable for the quality of their classroom cultures, and evaluations that maintain that quality.

It also looks like students having safe spaces to explore their identities and build healthy understandings of themselves and others. They should be able to feel comfortable being themselves, engaging in their academics with confidence and curiosity, and reaching out for support.

I am passionate about limiting the amount of unlearning I have had to do as a young person for others. It is the work I am committed to doing in both my personal and professional

life. I understand how much self-esteem plays a role in someone's quality of life. For children with marginalized identities, it is vitally important to feel a sense of belonging and meaning in the world. I believe that improving the school system can be a major catalyst for fostering this sense of belonging.

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