

## Embracing yourself

Entering my first year of middle school, there were people I've never met before, it was a new environment, and it started a new chapter of my life. Going into a new school was already such a big change it made my 6th grade self want to fit in.

I can picture it now, as I walked into my science class I saw my seat partner scrolling through an app on her phone. The girl noticed me looking over then asking what my instagram username was. I was never the type of person to have many social media accounts so I had no idea what she was talking about. But since it was the new trendy thing to have, I was intrigued to see it for myself. Wanting to seem "cool" and not different from everyone else, of course I downloaded the app.

I'm not gonna lie, it was exciting at first, creating my own personal posts, being able to see other peoples posts, and even meeting new people. It was all fun and games until it wasn't. I would have never thought it would lead to obsession and even insecurities. I found myself looking at the number of likes, followers, and comments of each account I came across comparing them to mine. I couldn't control myself. I just had to keep scrolling, never putting an end to it even though it made me feel bad.

Constantly scrolling through the app with millions of other users we have all been conditioned to think that our worth is defined by the number of likes we get on a post. Social media has made society believe that something is only worthy if others approve of it by double tapping their screens. Not only that but it has also created standards which most of them aren't realistic. Everyone on the app only shows the good; the flawless skin, hair, nice trendy outfits, like it's a competition. It puts people into categories, dividing them.

However I also learned that the app could show beauty, coming across new profiles seeing how it can be used for good. Seeing posts about spreading awareness, people sharing their stories, even just expressing themselves for who they are. As I was doing my usual scrolling

through the gram I noticed on a certain account this woman had posted a picture of herself with a shirt that said, "I am unique. I am beautiful". It was empowering for me to see someone who looked different and was just being her, not being afraid to be herself. It's a way to bring people together creating a positive platform for other users. She looked as if she was so happy with herself not worrying about what others thought. I remember thinking that's how I want to feel, confident enough with myself.

The problem wasn't just social media it was also me, I allowed it to influence my thoughts ultimately being afraid to truly be me. This allowed me to realize first hand that everyone is different in their own ways and not everyone has to agree with what I believe in. Being a part of a diverse community is truly beautiful as we get to explore other cultures and learn more gaining more knowledge.