There is a graduation photo of my mother from the 90s. I play “spot the difference” and contrast my friends’ contemporary style- ripped jeans, tube tops and Apple watches- with her flowery dress and six-inch bangs, all manifesting the many “cringier” aspects of fashion in 1997. Yet, the most critical differences require closer examination of the photo’s imperfections: red-tinted eyes, my grandfather’s glance slightly askew, a patch of blurriness. In 2020 this photo would never have survived. It would have been one of hundred taken in succession, until the perfect photo could be curated for public consumption on social media. This disposable nature of images, the ability to weed out anything blemished or disagreeable is endemic of our current 21st century society in which we can selectively curate our communities to be a perfect match for our own beliefs, class, and values.

While people have always gravitated towards others with similar ideas or lifestyles, the more organic communities of the late 20th century encouraged people to engage with those from different backgrounds. The tragic loss of 168 (black, white, child, senior, military, civilian) individuals in Oklahoma reflected a diverse community of impacted people and a nation that overlooked these differences to grieve together. However, nowadays, the multiplicity of options in society and on the internet encourages people to live within bubbles of those with similar ideologies. This modern capacity to immerse ourselves within like-minded communities promotes and defends our values, rather than leaving us to question and explore the ideas of others. This was seen in the aftermath of the terrorist attack in Charlottesville, Virginia
where the two sides took to their own separate media to defend or attack the tragedy and loss of life.

In my own community of Chicago, gentrification is a manifestation of this. People wish to live among those of similar class and race, rather than in integrated communities; this is reflected in the ever expanding white hipster families in my neighborhood. When we surround ourselves with those who reflect our backgrounds and ideas, we limit not only diversity but an opportunity to engage and educate one another. Many who stay drawn to communities of their race or religion miss the opportunity to learn to empathize with those whose experiences differ-from the wall street businessman to the immigrant grocery store clerk. What we need is respectful conversations from which to build, understanding. Only then can we move forward from our divisive rhetoric.

However, I have had experiences that leave me hopeful. My high school cultivates communities built on racial and economic diversity. My global issues teacher hosts skype calls where we talk to kids our age from around the world. Among my Gen Z peers- a willingness to burst these bubbles and reach out to people with different experiences, viewpoints, and backgrounds is emerging. So despite the ever increasing presence of social media and perfectionism-focused technology, I have hope that my generation is learning to counteract one idea of perfection with a celebration of diversity.