

Do not judge me by my stereotype

Cultural stereotypes from student perspectives

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Reporters

The people and environment around one can make a larger impact on the societal life of that person than commonly understood. Parents, or in some cases, grandparents, are usually the first teachers of young children. From them, they not only learn how to talk, behave towards and treat other people, but they also learn to take on certain viewpoints of people who are different from them — viewpoints that have the power to decide how they will interact with people for the rest of their lives.

It was the grandparents of University of South Carolina sophomore Claire Lewis who prompted her parents to put Lewis and her older brother into a Catholic school, despite her parents holding liberal values. And her being in the environment of a Catholic school as a child initially caused Lewis to not be as accepting of others who did not fit the “normal” family image.

“I remember this kid in my Catholic school who was in my grade, but his parents were lesbians. Me and the other kids would be like, ‘That’s so weird.’ We didn’t even understand the concept and I just remember thinking it was super weird, especially being in a Catholic school,” Lewis said. “Kids would pester him about it, [saying things like,] ‘That’s really weird. Why are your parents both girls?’ People were mind blown.”

After the fourth grade, Lewis left the Catholic school. A few years later, she became an atheist. Even then, although she was generally open-minded, her opinions on certain topics were still somewhat narrow. Now, years later as a person of agnostic beliefs, her perspective on those who are different from herself — including gay people — has shifted.

“I don’t really care what people do as long as it’s not hurting themselves or other people,” Lewis said. “That’s something I didn’t necessarily have when I was Catholic or atheist. I don’t think that it’s anybody’s right to just tell them that they’re wrong.”

Raised in the South, Lewis lived where the ways of the conservative reigned supreme. She has always been accustomed to the less accepting environment of the South. However, had she been raised in the North under the same circumstances, things might have been different.

“When I lived up North, I came from a wealthy area that was largely white and liberal. I began talking to my neighbors on a regular basis and began to enjoy my conversations with them. I thought they were really cool people,” high school junior Connor Griffin said. “When I moved down to South Carolina — obviously being a red state — there were a lot more conservatives. It was completely different for me, talking with all the new people with completely different viewpoints than what I had grown up with.”

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senior Mark Maddaloni

Griffin believed that people in the North were more accepting. When he relocated to the South, it seemed to him that people were more exclusive and reluctant to incorporate people from different walks of life. Maddaloni related in the sense that when he moved down to the South, he not only saw stereotypes going on, but he was associated with the perception that northern people were all Yankees.

“When I first moved here, I was honestly pretty fat. I thought [that] because of that, people here in South Carolina thought that I was not as friendly or as good of a person and that was pretty damaging to me at the time,” high school senior Mark Maddaloni said. “After I lost that weight, people started talking to me more and being more friendly.”

Maddaloni believes that people tend to ask questions regarding stereotypes in a mocking fashion. He yearns for this inquiry to be out of a genuine curiosity because otherwise the consequences could be damaging, especially in social situations such as public school. He believes that the causes of stereotyping need to be addressed and resolved in an attempt to heal its infectious divides.

“Stereotypes affect people negatively. There’s no other way to put it. I believe that stereotypes begin with a difference in people, but are continued because of parents and guardians [who] tell their kids that certain types of people are supposed to act certain ways,” Maddaloni said. “When those kids get out into the world and they look at people, they automatically assume that people are going to act those ways.”

According to Griffin, the primary issue is that small stereotypes are often taken and then magnified. It is often stretched to such a large extent that it ends up being far from what is actually fitting to a particular group of people.

“If people would stop setting up cultural normalities, then you could look at someone as an individual instead of a pre-created image,” Maddaloni said.



Personal insight on being more than label

Zane White
Reporter

From broad generalizations to punch lines of jokes, labels are the key to our description and views of other people. There always seems to be a description before someone’s name, whether that be a nationality, race or even religious ideology. People just seem to relish in categorizing others. Of course this is primarily done just to inform someone of another’s past or story, but all of these labels can very easily have a darker and much more derogatory side to them.

Negative stereotypes have always existed. That is simply a fact of life, and it is not hard to see why they seem to infect society so easily. It is much easier to feel good about oneself while degrading another and making them seem less than. This tends to take place when a negative or misleading falsehood is spread about a category of people. So many things shape the way we perceive people, and these days it seems that stereotypes are taking the place of actual truth. Stereotypes are beginning to be taken as reality and it is negatively impacting those stereotyped. Look at the recent immigration ban; our president said that it was to protect us from terrorism by stopping travel from Muslim-majority countries. However, if statistics are taken into account, we are more likely to be shot by a toddler than a terrorist. No one would ever think of a toddler as someone who would hurt another, but because of the hateful and unfactual rhetoric used about Islam and its followers such a ban would be passed. Hate crimes have taken a rise and at its base, stereotypes are to blame.

There are so many variables and events that can be blamed for the creation of stereotypes in our society but primarily it boils down to how people are portrayed in the media and what people are raised to believe. Our media is one of our most valuable assets in a world where something is always happening. However, coverage of events can mislead the public unintentionally. One problem the media faces is covering what their audience wants to see, and if a terrorist attack by a radicalized individual does take place, that will most likely be the topic for a few weeks. Negative news always conquers the spotlight and that seems to be all the public is witness to. Over covering a rare instance can lead people to believe that anyone in the category of people with the attacker may have the same malicious intentions. Even more, after people have come to their incorrect conclusions about an entire group of individuals, they share their views with those around them only furthering the spreading of misconceptions.

Labels, and more specifically stereotypes, do not define us. Everyone has a story and background all of which make him or her unique. Generalizing an entire sect of individuals based on one aspect of their lives is simply lazy and arrogant. Stereotypes need to die out, and it all starts with us. It starts with understanding that the actions of another are not the actions or views of all. It starts with us standing up for those who are being degraded by a label that had no part in making. In our society, individuality is everything and it is about time we started granting that advantage to everyone plagued by stereotypes.

IT IS ONLY UP FROM HERE:

How to avoid stereotyping

