

Jimmy Che

Youth Speak Essay

The Supreme Court ruled five years ago that racism in the United States was over in *Shelby County v. Holder*. The ruling invalidated Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which required states to get permission from the Attorney General before they tried to change their voting laws, as they stated such restrictions were no longer necessary. However, the US Supreme Court got it wrong. Racism in the United States never ended; it simply assumed a different form from the overt racism of our forefathers. Racism still walks among us, except now it is called *implicit bias* – which is a form of labeling and stereotyping that exists in a person’s subconscious thoughts, but influences all their human interactions and their daily life decisions.

When was the last time you considered the effect implicit bias and stereotyping have on society? According to the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, implicit bias specifically refers to the attitudes that affect our understanding and actions in an unconscious manner. Stereotypes have infiltrated our brain and they are enforced everyday by the news, the Internet, and the others around us. We frequently find implicit bias occurring in policing and our public schools. FBI data from 2018 shows that African Americans accounted for 31 % of deaths by police across the country, even though they were only 13% of the entire United States population. And in education, the *Washington Post*’s research found that minority students are more frequently disciplined and punished in school than whites. Black students make up for 16 % of public schools and yet, they account for 39 % of students suspended -- and this terrible trend starts in preschool! This is evidence of implicit bias and negative labelling in action.

Implicit bias does not only concern race, however. Our biases can be rise to the surface in a lot of other areas, including: sexual orientation, gender, age and religion. We label others without thinking, whether the words used are hurtful or not. Adjectives such as “fat”, “ugly”, and

Jimmy Che

“skinny”, can also be labels and are used on a daily basis to describe the people we live with, but what good do those words achieve? The answer is nothing, for they used solely to cause harm in our community. We also make unintentional assumptions everyday about people who are labeled by the color of their skin, by who they choose to love, or because they are an immigrants. Kids are being tainted by these labels during their time at school, but adults do not seem to understand. And on some occasions, the labels have even led to the death of innocent teens when they are subjected to hurtful name-calling online. One sad example of this occurring was the case of Megan Meier. Megan was relentlessly bullied in school, called terrible names, both in person and on social media. She met a user online named Josh Evans and for the next six months, they spoke with each other on Myspace. They truly became friends, or that’s what Megan thought. One day, Josh sent a hateful message to Megan and she became very upset. Then, a number of other students started saying horrible things about her online, as well. Megan collapsed mentally and was found hours later, hanged in her closet.

It has also been shown that labels can affect people mentally. An example of this is known as the “Stereotype Threat”. According to the National Institute of Health, the *Stereotype Threat* is a psychological effect that occurs when a person is in a situation or doing something where a negative stereotype can be applied to them. When that stereotype is directed at someone, that person inadvertently confirms it out of worry or fear of being judged. A study by psychologists proved this by running tests with social groups such as African Americans and women in two different situations, each with different outcomes. The first situation determined that when black students were told the stereotype that their social group was less intelligent than whites, they scored lower on their SAT scores than their white counterparts. The second situation, however, established that when black students were not told any stereotype about their

Jimmy Che

group, that their scores was actually higher, or at least equal to whites. A similar effect happened with girls, as well. The Stereotype Threat shows that when we use labels and stereotypes to describe others, we are actually lowering their self-esteem and lowering their self-confidence. It's truly sad in that person's worth can be diminished just by a few words that we carelessly say.

Fortunately, we can limit the damage cause by such labels. And although we can never completely eliminate implicit bias, it is better to try and improve lives, than not to try at all. If we want to end this cycle, we have to stop implicit bias and stereotyping, it's simple as that. We should never label others, matching their identity or physical appearance to a single word. We should never tell jokes based on race, for when we do, it prompts others to do the same. We need to stand up for ourselves and call out those who are spreading this disease, changing our attitudes and the way we think. We can check our personal biases by taking tests online such as the Implicit Association Test to see the severity of society's influence on our racial attitudes. We should make an effort to explore the unfamiliar -- meet new people and more importantly, understand their culture. We need to treat everyone with respect. If you are a minority, feel free to support organizations like the Race Matters Institute or Hispanics in Philanthropy.

If we want true peace, we must work for justice. But most of all, we must remember that before we are labeled Asian, before we are labeled Black, White, Hispanic, remember that at the start, we are all first labeled human beings.