Macy Weber

Logan Bearden

ENC 1145-04

18 October 2012

In our world today there are stereotypes that surround us and engulf our thoughts. People like to say that stereotypes do not exist and that all of the categories are in our heads, or that we are being judgmental. Sadly stereotypes only exist because as a society we constantly make them exist. If we did not perpetuate this cycle there would not be a cycle. Many adults like to believe that the categorizing that happens in high school, such as the stereotypical lunch tables, will end once they “grow up”. However, even as we grow older I am finding that we still cling to the stereotypes and categorize people into groups around the work place or just in general. It is engraved in our heads and we cannot escape it unless we make an extreme effort to stop this cycle. In Harry Potter there are stereotypes that haunt each house at Hogwarts: School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. We are introduced to them at the very beginning of Harry’s experience at Diagon Alley and are much more informed as the series continues on. In my essay, I argue that stereotypes plague our world and they are built into our brains from the moment we are born. We are brought up in a society that literally clings to the categories that we put people into even though stereotypes would not exist if we did not make them exist. If we were able to break out of this cycle we could see that the only reason these groups have meaning is because we give them meaning. Without stereotypes we would be able to broaden our minds and branch off with people we deem different than ourselves because without recognizing and making a difference, there is no difference.

Through my research I have found evidence that backs up my point that stereotypes are planted in our heads from the moment we learn there are differences in other people. We, as a society, are taught that there are differences between one person and another and that is why there are stereotypes and different groups throughout the world. I have found in numerous books, websites and journal articles that stereotypes could be said to be a perpetuated cycle and without the help of bystanders, there will always be differences. In one journal article I read, they say that the stereotypes about old people may or may not be true, but older people incorporate these “standards” so that these stereotypes become true. If we hear the description of a group, we automatically sort people into that group according to what we know about them. We do this to ourselves in the same way, once we figure ourselves out we put ourselves into a group and then we act accordingly (Believing What You Hear: The Impact of Aging Stereotypes upon the Old). In Cultural Theory and Popular Culture, Storey talks about the fact that “human biology does not divide people into different races, it is racism that insists on this division”. Although in my argument I am not discussing the differences between races in Harry Potter, the same principles apply. There are no differences between people in the world; it literally is the word differences that make the labels and groupings true. If we did not look for differences in other people, if we did not want there to be differences in other people, there honestly would not be.

All of the stereotypes that were in place at Hogwarts could be traced back to the fact that the founders were all very different too and decided to make four different houses. Godric Gryffindor, Salazar Slytherin, Rowena Ravenclaw, and Helga Hufflepuff decided when they started the school, Hogwarts, they would separate children under their watch. Eventually when they died the new students would be placed under the sorting hat to find out which house they would be in, Gryffindor, Slytherin, Hufflepuff, or Ravenclaw. The head of the houses were all very different, but just because they were different should not have meant that they could separate and divide the whole school. If there are no houses within Hogwarts there probably would not be half of the drama and tension within the school, but because there are divisions within the school, the children who were raised by wizards and witches already know which house they want to be in because they know of the stereotypes. The Gryffindor’s are known to be the bravest, the most daring, and they are relatively smart. The Slytherin’s are power hungry, mischievous, and very evil. The Hufflepuff’s are known for being very well respected and very loyal. The Ravenclaw’s are known for being extremely smart. The founders decided from very early on that they school must be separated into four houses which led to a competitive environment, but they did not realize how competitive it would be.

From the moment the reader is introduced to a fellow Hogwarts student we are told that according to Draco Malfoy, “…I know I’ll be in Slytherin, all our family have been—imagine being in Hufflepuff, I think I’d leave, wouldn’t you?” (p. 60). When we follow Harry to Hogwarts we see that he already does not want to be in Slytherin because Hagrid told him that, “There’s not a single witch or wizard who went bad who wasn’t in Slytherin. You-Know-Who was one.” (Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone, 61). During the Sorting ceremony, Harry is very adamant that he must not be in Slytherin even though he has qualities that would fit the Slytherin stereotype.

In the series Harry Potter there are outliers that do not line up with these stereotypical groups because they do what they want and do not let the world classify them. In Harry Potter there are definitely outliers in every house. In the beginning of the book when Harry and his new friends are being sorted into their new houses, we are introduced to a very strange boy who keeps losing his toad. On Neville’s way up to the stool where he would be sorted into his house he tripped, which does not sound very brave or noble. Once he was sitting down, the sorting hat was placed on his head and it is said that it took a very long time for the hat to choose which house Neville Longbottom would be in (Harry Potter and the Sorcerers Stone 87, ebook). The sorting hat eventually shouted “GRYFFINDOR”, probably much to people’s surprise, and he stumbled to the Gryffindor table with the sorting hat still on only to run back to Professor McGonagall. As time went on Neville truly did show that he had qualities of a true Gryffindor, even though there should be no specific qualifications for being a Gryffindor.