

Emily El-Shaer

12th grade

Kimberly Handrop

Caddo Magnet High School

Generalizations in Today's Society

Throughout history there has been a trend for people to generalize, or stereotype, other human beings based on their appearance, race, religion, and gender. During the Holocaust, most people thought of themselves as Dutch or German, but the Nazis only thought of some of them as Jews. Even now, in the twenty-first century, people continue to generalize and falsely label others based on stereotypes and appearances, yet there are many people who have found ways to avoid this and stand up to oppression.

Many people dropped everything and moved to America in order to strive for the American Dream; therefore, there is a wide range of racial and religious diversity in America. Although everyone is working towards the same goal of prosperity, some Americans believe they are superior to others, which leads to generalizations and stereotyping. For example, many Hispanics from different countries migrated to America for a better life, but they are continuously looked down upon because of their appearances. While many Hispanic-Americans came from countries such as Puerto Rico, Colombia, Venezuela, and other Latin countries, people wrongfully and in a demeaning way stereotype them as Mexicans (Gonzalez). Similarly, many Asian-Americans are unjustly labelled as Chinese or Japanese, but come from a variety of places such as Vietnam, Cambodia, Korea, Philippines, and many others (Rule). Generalizations such as these not only divide society, but also belittle people of different ethnic groups. Instead of considering everyone as equal Americans, those who believe they are superior to others continue to wrongfully label others as a way to assert their own fabricated dominance, which overall contributes to discrimination in America.

As an Arab-American, I have experienced stereotyping and discrimination firsthand. For example, people assume that I am not Saudi Arabian because of my relatively light skin tone, my brown hair, and the simple non-existence of a hijab. People assume based off of my appearance that I am what they consider purely Caucasian. This is an example of stereotyping because many people believe all Arabs have dark skin, dark hair, and practice Islam. While the U.S. Census considers Arab-Americans white, most Arab-Americans do not experience the same benefits of many white Americans, and instead experience labeling and discrimination (Wiltz). Since the September 11, 2001 attack, many Arab-Americans undergo heightened security at airports and other locations based off of their appearances. Many are looked down upon and nicknamed “towelhead,” “terrorist,” or even “Bin Laden,” clearly generalizing that all Arabs are inherently bad (Kabir). Arab-Americans are just as American as you are, yet they are discriminated against and demonized because of their religion, culture, and background.

Since generalizing and stereotyping is still a prominent issue, Americans have found new ways to fight labels along with minority oppression. For instance, one way to fight discrimination is to educate oneself. Learn to recognize false propaganda and false stereotypes to avoid contributing to discrimination. In addition, promote acceptance by respecting other people’s racial, ethnic, and religious diversity. Teach others and spread awareness of existing oppression. Finally, speak up about your own personal experiences with derogatory stereotypes. There is power in numbers and the more people who are aware of existing oppression then the more people there will be to fight against it (Ten).

Labels and generalizations are still evident in America today, and there are many people who are still discriminated against because of these stereotypes. During the Holocaust, the Jews were categorized and discriminated against in very similar ways, yet human history seems to be repeating itself from one generation to another. Oppression based on labels and stereotypes happens year after year, and it will not stop until we speak up against it and put a stop to it.

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