

Mackenzie Mauldin

If society was perfect we would have no discrimination, social anxiety, and unjustly caused deaths. But instead, every day we sit behind screens and allow such behavior to go on. We watch students go through waves of stereotypes as though it is a movie on our screen. We watch as years go by where innocent people are gunned down because of their race. Every day we watch as human beings are being labeled with names as though they are packages with a sticker on it. And although these are major flaws in this society, they all share a common factor that seems as minor as the people affected by it. This factor is the use of labels on people. Over the decades we have won the battle against trivial things like pay, test scores, and bullying, but we have yet to win the war against labeling and discrimination as a whole. Labels do more harm than now than any good it has done, is doing, and will do.

The term label can be defined as many different meanings. A label is “a classifying phrase or name applied to a person or thing, especially one that is inaccurate or restrictive,” according to Oxford Dictionaries. University of Arizona states, “Stereotype threat, a term coined by Stanford Professor Claude Steele, occurs when individuals whose group is targeted by negative stereotypes try to excel at tasks that are related to the stereotype. In these situations, simply knowing that there is a stereotype against them (a stereotype that says they should perform poorly on a particular task) can lead individuals to actually perform more poorly on the task than they otherwise would.” This indicates that when a label and, or a stereotype is used it has a massive impact on those affected by it. This can lead to fear, anxiety, mental issues, and depression. And this is the least of the problem. Constantly, people are faced with discrimination at places that should be free of any harm at all. National Public Radio writes, Fear of discrimination, possibly triggered by past encounters, plays out in different ways. We found that this fear significantly influences people's decisions whether to seek medical care, to call the

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police when in need, and even whether to drive or attend social events. Nearly one-third (32 percent) of African-Americans polled said they have personally experienced racial discrimination when going to the doctor or a health clinic, with 22 percent avoiding care out of fear of discrimination. ‘If someone is avoiding seeking medical care out of fear of discrimination, they’re at risk of going undiagnosed for serious conditions,’ says Dr. Richard Besser, president and CEO of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. ‘We know that repeated stress from discrimination and racism can actually make some of those conditions more likely in the first place and shorten lives.’” It is ethically incorrect and morally unjust for this type of treatment to be accepted. We are “the Land of the Free, Home of Brave,” but yet we are unaccepting of those in our habitat and cowardly brand them with names of the past. The word label means “to classify” but its true definition in society stands as, “being ignorant to those until they feel violated.” But the doctor’s office isn’t where the violation stops.

Labeling is incorrectly used everywhere. The Balance Careers names examples of Sexual Harassment in the workplace as things like making offensive comments about someone's sexual orientation or gender identity or making sexual comments about appearance, clothing, or body parts. And although these seem like a stretch, things like this happen every day. Now an online survey launched in January by a nonprofit called Stop Street Harassment found that 81 percent of women and 43 percent of men had experienced some form of sexual harassment during their lifetime. The workplace is essentially their second home and for this type behavior to be exhibited is wrong in every way. Stanford University states, “If you’ve been the target of sexual harassment, anger, fear, self-consciousness, embarrassment, difficulty sleeping, and loss of appetite can be exhibited.” How are people supposed to function, let alone work if they are stuck in the circumstances of awkwardness, sadness, confusion, and hurt? They can’t. And they

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shouldn't. But all of it could have been prevented had labels never been used all. But they were. And we can't change the past. But we can change the future.

Change must happen. Too many people ignorantly label and evidently it has resulted in various acts of hate. But there is only one way that effectively targets this disease. Education. The children are our future and if taught properly will know why it is wrong to recklessly label people. Kathryn Short, a doctoral student at the Harvard Graduate School of Education states, "We have to start asking kids, 'How do you hold true to what you have experienced while holding what other people have experienced as truth as well?'" Teaching children from a young age how to understand disparate perspectives can begin to repair today's widespread divisions. It can repair the injustice from present, like bullying, and inequality of the future, like racism, sexism, and discrimination of other types. And although there are times in class where they teach about things like bullying, it is not enough to change their entire view on labels. But if it's mentioned even a little bit in every subject, a change can be made. But this is purely the effort of people and time they are willing to take. But without it, we are left with the same world. The world of hatred. The world without compassion. The world without love. The world of the past.

In conclusion, labels are one of society's biggest threats. The number of people affected everyday goes to show how much pain is costed and how much compassion people show is lost. The probability of bad outcomes is not a risk people should be willing to take. It moral duty to acknowledge everything caused by labels and yet we don't. We don't change. We don't move forward. We move back. American civil rights leader, Martin Luther King Jr. stated, "Nothing in all the world is more dangerous than sincere ignorance and conscientious stupidity." The use of a label is the most dangerous and important epidemic in society and overall affects everyone in its

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path.