Nothing Worth Having Comes Easily



By Mikayla Houseman

Mikayla Houseman, 15, was born in Port Charlotte, Florida and has lived there her whole life. She was born into a very open – minded English household where questions, suspicions and curiosity were encouraged. Most of Mikayla’s life has been influenced by her mother, grandmother, brothers, friends and step-father, as her father died when she was one-year old. Education is her priority, which was instilled into her from a little girl by her family. In her essay, Mikayla writes about how stereotyping and the work efforts of minorities have shaped her thoughts on her work effort.

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have always shown a keen interest in learning, even from a young age. I wanted answers to my questions; I wanted reasons for unexplainable things, and I continually tried to absorb more information into my brain. From the first few days of preschool, my mother was there, encouraging me to ask more questions and to fill my mind with powerful knowledge; she knew the greatness I could achieve if I continued with this passion for learning. Now, I am in my first year at Florida Southwestern Collegiate High School, and things have not really changed. I still push myself to achieve at the highest level, but the thing is, it is now mostly ME that is pushing – not only my mother. My mother supports me, but I am the driving force behind my success. Where did I get this urge to continue pushing myself to new heights? The answer: my family.

I have never had any issues or worries in regard to race, gender, or ethnicity. I focus my entire life on working, so I just thought that everyone else did, too. Over the years I have listened to the media, as well as my parents and friends express the idea that women and minorities do not work as hard as the dominant white male culture. “Research has further demonstrated that women, African Americans and Hispanics are seen as deficient in attributes critical to leadership success, when compared with men and Whites (Chung-Herrera & Lankau, 2005; Heilman, Block, Martell, & Simon, 1989; Tomkiewicz, Brenner, & Adeyemi Bello, 1998).” (Block, Koch, Liberman, Merriweather and Roberson, 2011). Discoveries, too, have been made on how there are negative stereotypes that affect women, African Americans and Hispanics when it comes to workforce success.

Society has stereotyped women and minority groups. They are viewed as weaker and incapable of handling the work that is given to white men. “There are many performance-related stereotypes that are relevant at work (e.g., women are not good at quantitative tasks, African Americans are not good at cognitive ability tasks).” (Block, Koch, Liberman, Merriweather and Roberson, 2011) Even though society “pretends” that they accept everyone, and that equality exists for all, in reality, it does not. Women have to work harder than men; minority men have to work harder than white men; and, minority women have to work the hardest of all for what they believe.

I felt the societal pressures of being a female from an early age and have tried to equal my male counterparts ever since. I always had to fight for my grades, work hard for my report cards and stand up for myself when someone told me that I could not do something because I was a girl. By middle school I understood my predicament; I would always have to work harder for what I wanted because of my sex. I accepted the challenge, and from then on have always strived to do what was asked of me, and more, to display my worthiness. I knew that some people would think, and tell me, I should not try to achieve my goals. “Evidence can be brought to bear that competent, achievement oriented, productive women are viewed as acting role inappropriately (Feather & Simon, 1975) or even devalued (Deaux & Emswiller, 1974).” (Kacerguis, Mary Ann, and Gerald R. Adams). Even though some people may not agree with my beliefs, I will continue to strive. What I did not realize at the time was how hard my minority friends had to work for their achievements. Because I am white, I now realize that I have it easy – racially – while others do not.

According to the College Times, “In virtually every field that women choose to enter, they can expect to earn less over their lifetime than their male counterparts. Over 47 years of full-time work, this gap amounts to an estimated loss in wages for women of $700,000 for high school graduates, $1.2 million for college grads, and $2 million for professional school grads.” (College Times 2010). This indicates that no matter how hard I try in life to succeed, and to equal my male counterparts, there is a 99% chance that I will never make as much money as them. The College Times cites, “African-American women earn 64 cents to every dollar earned by white men and Hispanic women just 52 cents per dollar,” (College Times 2010) while, “[white] women make only 77.5 cents for every dollar that men earn.” These two facts specify that, if these median wages are still in place for years to come, all girls and women, especially minority women, will continue to make less money than men.

Although I have grown up knowing that I will never be as successful as a male, I have never believed, even for a second, that I cannot achieve greatness. With the help of my mother, I have pushed through these boundaries of gender discrimination in the workforce. I have worked part-time at a local grocery store since I was fourteen-years-old, where I am treated like an equal to the other workers. Now, I do not think about how I might not be given the job I want because I am a woman, but how I will find a better job, and who knows how useful I can be in another industry. This, “I can do anything I strive to do” belief has propelled me to aim far above the line society created for me.

The *Labeling Theory* was introduced by Howard Becker in 1960. The basic idea of the *Labeling Theory* is that people are labeled as deviants for going against social norms. This theory describes my outlook on life, because I do not think that people should judge or label others before getting to know them. I feel like I, personally, have been labeled as inadequate, because I am a female. Because I am not a male, I have been set apart and labeled differently than my male complements. Even though I have this label of inadequacy looming over my head like a raincloud, I have managed to shake off the hurtful comments that fall from this cloud and come out on top. I feel that this theory is similar to stereotyping because both classify people based on their preceding work ethics. These acts are wrong, and should not be accepted in a society, yet, they still are. Everyone can change a personal attribute if they dedicate themselves to truly fixing what they wish would be fixed. Labeling someone based off the past may result in negative or socially unacceptable behaviors, especially if their behaviors have changed over time.

Through the media, the opinions of the elders that I grew up with and the racial and sexual jokes made by others, my opinion on the work ethic of minorities has changed. These forces tried to push me to believe that women will never succeed as much as men, that black and Hispanic men are lazier than white men when it comes to their education or work, and that minority women should not be given the rights that white women have managed to gain. What actually ended up occurring was near the opposite. I believe that society cannot, and should not, label someone as lazy or incapable of doing the same job just because they are a different gender, race, religion, or any other dividing factor. People should be able to obtain their job status through hard work and dedication. Meritocracy is a system where job status is determined by the effort and dedication. A worker labors hard at their job because they understand that a profession is not a birthright, but something that should be earned. If this system were placed in every country around the world, there would be no race or gender discrimination in the workforce, as everyone would be given an equal opportunity. This system would allow me, my daughters, sons, granddaughters, grandsons, nieces and nephews to be given the same chance as any black or Hispanic child. Equality, at work, with job opportunities would become inevitable.

But, for now, I will have to continue to work for everything that I want, and never give in to the steel jaws of society’s stereotypes. I will overcome my “disability,” and from the ashes of discrimination I will rise like a phoenix.

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